

*These are responses to four of the questions that were asked at our parish Listening Sessions on September 21 & 22. Many of the questions do not have simple answers. However, we hope that the responses do provide some basic information about a very sad and complicated situation. The writer is attributed at the bottom of the response.*

## **How do the abuse statistics in the Church today compare with 50 years ago?**

Numbers in the Church are hugely down since this scandal was first broadly exposed in 2002. This is because starting that year at a historic meeting of bishops in Dallas, the Church adopted the *Charter for Protection of Children & Young People* which mandated five new initiatives:

- (1) Zero Tolerance for any clergy of Church representative who was credibly accused of abuse
- (2) Background checks were now required for all clergy and all laity who work with youth
- (3) Safe Environment Training was required for all clergy and all laity who work with youth
- (4) Every diocese needed to establish a Lay Abuse Review Board  
(*The Albany preceded that requirement by 10 years, establishing a Review Board in 1992*)
- (5) The establishment of a National Review Board.

As a result of all these policies, since 2002 the Church has become a leading organization in creating safe environments for children. The following statistic can bring us some context and perspective: in the 15 years after the new Church policies went into place (2002-2015), the number of credible Catholic clergy abuse cases nationwide was **25**. For comparison, in 2017 alone at a public school district in Los Angeles there were 65 cases. In that same year at a public school district in Pittsburgh there were 87 cases.

*Bob Desrosiers, Safe Environment Trainer,  
with input from Letter to a Suffering Church by Bishop Robert Barron*

## **How do we ever know what is really true? So much info and no real 'end' or resolution after the stories break. How do we find out the final outcome of these cases?**

The actual facts of a case are considered confidential. Thus, only those who are involved in the case have the right to know its content and the public is not part of the jury. Nonetheless, the outcome of a case is usually announced, at least, in the diocesan newspaper. However, the communication may be abbreviated with no specific facts revealed. If the cleric is found guilty, it may be announced that he has been removed permanently from ministry. If a cleric is exonerated, few dioceses are effective in publicizing a cleric's return to ministry. Too often, the media that was eager to make an accusation the lead headline is not nearly as eager to report the final outcome if the cleric is exonerated.

*Michael Ritty, Canon Lawyer [expert in Church law] & Trustee of St. Patrick's, Ravena*

## **What do I tell my kids? Older kids and younger kids?**

Assure your younger children that these incidents were done by a tiny minority of people, but do not mislead them about the fact that there is indeed evil in this world. Let them know that although there are not many people who have done these inappropriate acts, even one is wrong and should be reported. Remind them that when someone does something inappropriate it is not the survivor's fault. Use this situation as a teachable moment about safe boundaries – what is appropriate and inappropriate as well as how to determine who a safe adult is and how to let them know about fears or discomforts about adults.

Be cautious about what your children are exposed to in your conversations as well as in the news and editorials regarding this. Also be careful to always speak about the importance of survivors communicating with trusted adults; this will encourage children to share their concerns about themselves and others.

As far as their faith and the Church, remind them that people who belong to our Church who have hurt others, do not define what our Church is. Remind them of the many supportive and loving people and leaders in your parish family. Help them name some of the people that they interact with or see at Mass that you feel, as their parent, are safe. Ask them who and discuss why.

As with anything that is important, open communication with teens and older children around this topic is key. Your older kids may not want to open the conversation. Make sure if they don't, you at least offer to discuss. Let them share how they feel without getting defensive. *Respond* to what they say instead of simply reacting. Stress the same things to them as with younger children, but use their age and abilities to expand on the topic. Perhaps you can even research questions that arise during the discussion together.

*Christa Desrosiers, Faith Formation Coordinator and mother of four*

## **Why do we not know who the accusers are? Do those accused get to actually 'face their accusers' and address the accusations?**

Although many people feel that complete and open transparency in cases of abuse are warranted, there are times that privacy and confidentiality supersede the public's desire to know everything. At the same time, there is a sense of unfairness when only the accused's name is made public.

However, during the investigation and any subsequent penal process, the person accused is apprised of the name of the accuser and the facts of the case. He or she is given the opportunity to contradict those accusations and to have the accuser questioned under oath. In the canonical process, the right of defense is very important. The accused does have rights that must be protected—even if they are guilty of an offense.

*Michael Ritty, Canon Lawyer [expert in Church law] & Trustee of St. Patrick's, Ravena*