

THE IMPORTANCE OF DOCUMENTS IN FIGHTING CHILD ABUSE

- 1.) Recent history has demonstrated in a dramatic fashion that publication of documents about the actual pattern and practice of child abuse is the single most effective and efficient mode of education for the prevention of assaults on minors.
- 2.) The publication of documents about clergy sexual abuse by the Boston Globe beginning on January 6, 2002 marked the beginning of a worldwide movement toward awareness and prevention of child abuse. Previously, individual cases gained attention, but they remained matters of curiosity and were dismissed without penetrating public awareness to the point of action.
- 3.) Sexual abuse of minors is a horrific problem across all socio-economic, ethnic and religious divides. The Roman Catholic Church is neither the only nor primary offender against minors; however, its homogeneity and structure make it a model for learning/teaching about the nature of abuse and its patterns, practice, and danger signals. Anson Shupe sociologist of religion at Indiana/Purdue is an expert on the malfeasance of clergy. He has pointed out that hierarchical churches can deal more effectively with problems than less authoritarian religions if they engage the misconduct and therefore can be a model for reform.¹
- 4.) Other groups of coaches, scoutmasters, and teachers in addition to clergy that interact with minors can learn from the

¹ 1995. *In The Name of All That's Holy*. 2007. *Spoils of the Kingdom*.

knowledge in documents from the Catholic clergy abuse cases. There is a great deal of resistance to believing that men and organizations that do so much good can also be dangerous to children. Actual documentation of how evil and danger can exist together is an important lesson for parents to learn in order to protect their children.

- 5.) Every child even in the 1930s was cautioned, "Don't take candy from strangers. Don't get into a car with strangers". That is still good advice, but parents must face the fact that men familiar to the family often pose a danger for abuse. Clergy often use their trust and familiarity with families as a way to access children.
- 6.) Abusers are often affable and engaging; clergy and other youth leaders are men who can deliver valuable services to the community. This combination of qualities becomes lethal when combined with superficiality, poor behavior control, grandiosity, ability to manipulate, disavowal of responsibility, and when their often-remarkable powers of empathy are exercised for their own aggrandizement.² These personality elements have been found to be characteristic of priests who sexually abuse. These men can lie with abandon; and they fool a lot of people. Alcohol is often a factor in these priests' behavior. They often gain access and prey on vulnerable and poor families under the guise of charity, giving gifts or special attention.
- 7.) Minors should know that men who offer them alcohol, pot, cigarettes, show them pornography, want to shower together or

² Psychiatric News. January 02, 2004. Volume 39 Number 1 Page 25.

allow them to drive their cars without a license pose a danger. What seems only “fun” is a gateway to other forbidden activity.

- 8.) Priests who are overly friendly, ‘huggy’, or involve in kids’ horse play, tickling, or wrestling with minors may really be irresponsible and can be dangerous because of their immaturity, lack of control and disrespect for personal boundaries. Adults who are excessively engaged with adolescent interests and seem “good with kids”, may have ulterior motives and be psychosexually underdeveloped.
- 9.) Caution should be registered if a cleric, coach, scoutmaster or other supposedly trusted adult focuses unduly on one minor, demonstrating special interest and concern. Unchaperoned trips, overnight sleepovers, or excessive association between an adult and minor should be questioned as danger signals.

The documents of priest abusers in the Joliet, IL Diocese provide a handbook for parents and educators about how abusers operate in the open and are often defended despite monumental evidence of their destructive behavior. Between six and nine percent (6—9%) of Catholic priests get involved sexually with minors. This problem is not yet solved in this institution.³

The physical, psychological, economic and spiritual effects of early abuse and trauma are dire and long lasting.⁴ Prevention is the most effective way to counter abuse and protect our children.

³ Cf. John-Jay Report on Clergy Crisis. February 27, 2004. P.30. Doyle, Sipe, Wall. 2008.

⁴ CDC & Vincent Felitti, MD et al. *Adverse Childhood Experience STUDY* Feb. 2011.

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