

# BEHIND THE DIOCESE OF HARRISBURG BANKRUPTCY

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the decision of the Diocese of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania to declare bankruptcy:

In 2018, Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro unethically released a grand jury report on Catholic priests and lay people who were accused of sexually abusing minors decades ago—most were never found guilty and some successfully contested the public release of their name (the Catholic League filed an amicus brief in this victory in the Pennsylvania Supreme Court)—the result of which was to spur a debate over suspending the statute of limitations.

The debate has been just as political as the cherry picking of the Catholic Church in seeking a grand jury probe. Last year a state appeals court allowed a case to go forward against the Altoona-Johnstown diocese despite the fact that it was time barred by the statute of limitations. The case is currently being appealed but in the meantime similar cases are being filed.

Similar cases against which institutions? Pennsylvania Rep. Mark Rozzi, who is leading the charge to suspend the statute of limitations, is quoted in the *Washington Post* as saying it is not just priests who have victimized minors. He mentions “Amish and Mennonite abusers, schoolteachers, pediatricians, Boy Scout leaders, Penn State’s Jerry Sandusky, Bill Cosby.”

Rozzi’s list is incomplete. He left out many other secular and religious institutions, and he never mentioned the fact that most sexual abuse occurs in the home. And what exactly has he done about it? For example, why has he not lobbied to remove the obscene protections afforded the public schools in

Pennsylvania? They are shielded by the doctrine of sovereign immunity: a student has to make a claim within 90 days of the alleged abuse, otherwise the clock runs out.

There are discussions now to include the public schools, but why didn't Rozzi demand they be included years ago? Just as important, where are the claims being made against the public schools now that an appeals court is saying that students who were victimized decades ago can proceed in court?

Shapiro is quoted in the *Washington Post* as saying the Catholic Church "has refused to reform." That is a bald face lie: no institution has undertaken more reforms, with more positive results, than the Church.

When Shapiro released his grand jury report, we found that in the Diocese of Harrisburg, 71 persons were named: 42 were dead and four were missing. Most of those who were still alive were no longer in ministry. In August, the diocese paid 106 people \$12 million in compensation; five more settlements have since been reached.

There is a reason the Diocese of Harrisburg filed for bankruptcy the day after the Boy Scouts of America did: both have been targeted by lawyers who have a profound hatred of institutions that promote traditional moral values. It is incontestable that no religious organization is known for doing this more than the Catholic Church, and no secular organization can rival the Boy Scouts on this score.

Beginning in the mid-1960s, both the Catholic Church and the Boy Scouts dropped their guard and succumbed to a more secular vision of sexuality; it lasted roughly until the early-1980s. They both paid a big price for it. But other religious entities were just as guilty, to say nothing of the public schools. Why are they not filing for bankruptcy? This has nothing to do with kids not being raped by teachers: it has to do with politics. There is no comparable animus against these

organizations.

The hypocrisy is serious but not as serious as the injustice: to single out the Catholic Church and the Boy Scouts is moral profiling. This is no less invidious than racial profiling.