

CHURCH REFORMS ARE WORKING

No entity in America today, private or public, has more institutionalized mechanisms in place to check for the sexual abuse of minors than the Catholic Church.

That is why in the last two years for which we have data, only .005 percent of the clergy have had a credible accusation made against them (see the Annual Reports on this subject, July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017, and July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016; they are posted on the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops).

Yet the media continue to advance the invidious stereotype that the Church has an on-going problem.

The institutionalized mechanisms that account for the progress are the reforms made by the USCCB and the dioceses.

The USCCB issued its first guidelines for reporting alleged offenses in 2002. Titled the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People," it was revised in 2005, 2011, and 2018. Once a diocese learns of an accusation, it notifies the local law enforcement officials.

Many dioceses have also implemented their own strictures. To cite one example, the Archdiocese of New York instituted an Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Program. It is aimed at uncovering abuse allegations and making compensation once the cases have been authenticated.

These reforms were responsible for the proceedings against Theodore McCarrick (formerly a cardinal). It wasn't law enforcement that exposed the allegations against the former New Yorker, it was Cardinal Timothy Dolan, the Archbishop of New York.

Recently it was reported that Father Kevin Lonergan of the

Diocese of Allentown (Pennsylvania) groped a 17-year-old girl and sent nude photos of himself to her. How did his case come to light? It wasn't law enforcement—it was Allentown Bishop Alfred Schlert who notified the authorities in early June, right after he learned about it.

This case proves once again that the system works. But the media are not reporting it fairly.

The headline posted by USA Today Network about an Associated Press story on Father Lonergan reads, "Pennsylvania Priest Faces Charges As Sex Abuse Fallout Grows." This is indefensible. It suggests that this one case comes right on the heels of similar cases, when, in fact, the grand jury report was about old cases dating to World War II.

The Daily Beast, a far left-wing media outlet, ran a story on Father Lonergan without ever mentioning that it was the Diocese of Allentown that reported this case to the authorities.

Reuters, the British news agency, was worse: it falsely reported that "The Allentown Diocese removed Lonergan from his duties after prosecutors alerted them to the case." The *New York Post* picked up this bogus story, thus leading readers to think that the diocese acted after it was notified by law enforcement, when it was just the opposite.

The Catholic Church should be subjected to the same degree of scrutiny that is afforded all other institutions in society. But the corollary is also true: it should be treated just as fairly. It isn't, and that is the problem.