

# DIOCESAN REVIEW BOARDS NEED RATIONAL CRITERIA

There has been much discussion about the role of diocesan review boards in assessing charges of priestly sexual misconduct. The Catholic League supports lay involvement on diocesan review boards that investigate cases of alleged sexual abuse by priests. But it cautions that such panels are not an elixir and must themselves abide by certain neutral criteria.

There have been many news reports lately on the tendency of parishioners to rally around a priest whom they know and respect once they learn of an accusation against him. This is not hard to understand sociologically but it is nonetheless problematic. These same lay men and women rarely know the face of the alleged victim, especially in cases that go back several years. Thus their perceptions may be skewed.

It is our position that all diocesan review boards should include former victims and/or their relatives. Any person selected to serve on such a review board should recuse himself if he knows either the accused or the alleged victim. Furthermore, because the accused in these situations often seeks to find out who is on the review panel—for the purpose of ingratiating himself with the members—it is necessary to establish institutional safeguards that minimize this from happening.

To show how faulty these boards can be, consider that as late as 1994 Rev. Paul Shanley was declared by the archdiocesan review board in Boston to be without “evidence of a diagnosable sexual disorder.” One wonders what kind of sexual depravity it would take to label the serial rape

of minors a sexual disorder. In short, there is no virtue in being “non-judgmental.” Reason, grounded in common sense, is needed.