

NBC SURVEY OF CHURCH EMPLOYEES IS REVEALING

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a survey of Catholic workers by NBC:

There have been many polls of Catholics, but until now there has not been a survey of those who work for the Catholic Church. NBC has filled that void.

Those who work for the Church are listed in the *Official Catholic Directory*. NBC Owned Television stations around the nation distributed the survey to more than 32,000 employees listed in the volume, 2,700 of whom responded. It included nearly 500 priests and deacons, more than 280 religious sisters and brothers, along with nearly 1,900 lay employees, the majority of whom were women.

NBC was honest enough to admit that self-select surveys carry a bias that scientific sampling avoids. The latter allows for everyone in the population, or the universe which the sample generalizes about, to have an equal chance of being selected. However, in surveys of the kind NBC undertook, it is entirely acceptable to proceed this way, as long as the limitations are acknowledged.

The survey covers several issues: the sexual abuse scandal; married priests, ordaining women, same-sex marriage, and birth control; fidelity to core Church teachings; and an assessment of Pope Francis' positions on current issues. Of special interest to the Catholic League is the first issue.

Respondents were asked if sexual abuse is "still a major problem." Almost 4 in 10 (39%) said it is; 14% said it "is no longer a major problem"; and 46% said this was never more of a problem for the Catholic Church than it has been for other institutions involved in the care of minors. Nuns were the

most alarmed, with 56% reporting that sexual abuse is still a major problem today.

NBC interviewed me for this survey on November 8. The reporter, Chris Glorioso, was very professional. There were no "gotcha" type questions or highly tendentious remarks.

I was asked to comment on all of the issues mentioned, but the one NBC chose to report was my reaction to the response of Church employees to the sexual abuse scandal. Here is my answer as quoted in the transcript.

"This is a result of the poisoning of the public mind. Most of the bad guys, most of the priests who molested, are either dead or they're out of ministry. That's not an opinion, that's a fact."

The basis for my comment are the annual reports on this issue published by the National Review Board of the bishops' conference. Over the past decade, the average number of credible accusations made against the clergy in the year in which the data were gathered averaged in the single digits. In the last report, of the 50,648 members of the clergy, .006 percent (three of them) had a substantiated accusation made against them. No institution in the nation where adults interact with minors can beat that number.

Why, then, are four in ten Catholics who work for the Church under the impression that the scandal is still ongoing? And why are nuns the most uninformed?

The "poisoning of the public mind" that I refer to is a function of negative perceptions about the Church as promoted by grand jury and attorney general reports, the media, and the entertainment industry.

The government reports, particularly the Pennsylvania grand jury report, give the impression that the scandal is still ongoing even though most of the alleged offenses mentioned in

those documents happened long ago; most of the molesters are in fact either dead or out of ministry. And remember, since no cross examination was allowed, these cases represent alleged crimes: they do not represent convictions.

The media have given much coverage to these reports, and while most stories usually have a line or two about these being old cases, the impression given is that not much has changed. Adding to the misperceptions are late-night talk show hosts who constantly ridicule priests as if they are all molesters. This is bigotry, plain and simple. Why are nuns the most gullible? Some might say they are more sensitive to the victims than others are. Even if this were true, the problem remains: nuns are the most likely to accept the contrived government reports (e.g., the public schools are never investigated for sexual abuse, even though that is where much of it occurs today), never mind the biased reporting and the skewed commentary that are attendant to them.

Half of all the Church respondents were 60 years of age or over, and it is no secret that many of them lean liberal-left (this is especially true of nuns), making them the most likely to be critical of the way the Church has handled the scandal. It appears they are less persuaded by the evidence, or are unaware of it, than others. Either way, this is troubling.

When asked about feeling comfortable allowing a child to go on an overnight retreat supervised by a member of the clergy or a person of trust in their parish or organization, roughly half of the Church employees said there was at least one chaperone with whom they would not feel comfortable. Yet 81 percent believe their parish or organization has handled the issue of abuse properly.

This is not surprising, nor is it problematic. Most Catholics have not had any personal experience dealing with a molesting priest, yet may be wary of allowing a young person to go on an overnight retreat. If this question were asked of non-

Catholics in a slightly different way—"Would you feel comfortable allowing young people to go on an overnight camping trip with adult men from your community?"—it is likely that many would not feel comfortable, at least not with all of them.

When respondents were asked if they think media coverage of the scandal has been mostly fair, 64% said no. Diocesan priests were the most critical of the media.

This is neither surprising nor troubling. From tracking media coverage of the scandal at the Catholic League, we have found far too many instances of bias not to be critical of the reporting. If diocesan priests are the most critical it is likely that they see themselves as being the most vulnerable to false accusations. Everyone agrees that victims must be treated fairly, but what is much less emphasized, if at all, are demands that accused priests be treated fairly. The scales are tipped against them, and they know it.

The entire report is available [online](#) and is certainly worth reading.