

NESSSEL'S CATHOLIC FIXATION

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel's continued targeting of the Catholic Church:

Since well before her election as Michigan's attorney general last November, Dana Nessel has rarely missed an opportunity to demonstrate her animus toward Catholics and the Church. She dismissed Catholics and others who disagreed with her on same-sex marriage or on faith-based foster care and adoption services as "a radical fringe" and "hate mongers."

Upon taking office, Nessel launched a state investigation into the sexual abuse of minors—by Catholic clergy. She has continued on that narrow course, despite our bringing to her attention Michigan's demonstrably poor record of combating sexual abuse of students in the state's public schools. Under a list of "Initiatives" on her website, the first item is "Catholic Church Clergy Abuse." There is no listing of public school sexual abuse. Nessel snidely urged residents, when contacted by abuse investigators, to "ask to see their badge and not their rosary."

In recent months, Nessel has announced charges of sexual abuse against six priests. Not widely reported was that all but one are very old cases, dating to the last century—two from more than 20 years ago, two from more than 30 years ago, and one from the 1970s—more than 40 years ago. And the only case that is more current did not involve the abuse of a minor.

Contrast this with the much more current, and ongoing, problem in Michigan's public schools. In 2016 *USA Today*, in a 50-state analysis, gave Michigan a grade of "F" for its failure to adequately address the crisis of sexual abuse in its public schools. Last February, we helpfully provided a list of recent sexual abuse cases. They included these, just in 2019:

- In February, the male coach of the girls' basketball team at New Haven High School was charged with engaging in sexual relations with a 17-year-old girl. The incidents allegedly occurred in January and February of this year.
- In January, it was revealed that a male teacher at Whittemore-Prescott Area Schools admitted to sexually abusing 15 boys. He then committed suicide.
- A former female Rochester High School teacher was charged in January on six counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct. She is accused of engaging in sexual acts with two male students under the age of 18.
- A male teacher at K.E.C. Oakleigh, a Grand Rapids Public School, was charged in January with possession of child pornography and using a computer to commit a crime. He sought to have sex with a 13-year-old girl.
- A female special education teacher at Thunder Bay Junior High, an Alpena Public School, was charged in January in connection with numerous sexual assaults against one of her students. She allegedly assaulted the boy more than 100 times, beginning when he was 11-years-old.
- In January, the principal at Kingsley Middle School was arraigned on two counts of second degree criminal sexual conduct. He is accused of groping the genitals of an 8 or 9 year old boy; he is also accused of inappropriately touching another boy of the same age; and two older boys were told to "whip out" their genitals so he could judge whose was bigger.

Since then, several new cases have made the news:

- In April, a parent of a student at Ann Arbor Community High School filed a Title IX complaint, alleging that Ann Arbor Public Schools mishandled at least a dozen cases of sexual misconduct. While the mother subsequently retracted that complaint, acknowledging inaccuracies, she said she planned to rewrite it and

submit it to the Office of Civil Rights. And she said several families had reached out to her, asking to testify before the Office of Civil Rights regarding the handling of their own daughters' cases.

- In April, a teacher and former football coach at Davison High School in Genesee County, was arrested on accusations of filming a naked 14-year-old girl, without her knowledge, at a tanning salon.
- The Hanover-Horton school district faced criticism for allowing a football coach to continue coaching and teaching while an investigation into allegations of sexual abuse was ongoing. In June, a woman came forward to accuse the coach of having abused her two decades earlier when she was a student and he was a teacher at Hanover-Horton High School.

Yet still, Attorney General Nessel's investigative instincts are not aroused by the ongoing problem of sexual abuse in Michigan's public schools. Only when the alleged victimizers are Catholic priests—even if the cases are decades old—does Nessel spring into action.

Clearly, this is not about protecting children. It's about vilifying the Catholic Church.

Contact communications director Kelly Rossman-McKinney: rossmanmckinney@mi.gov