

ONE YEAR AFTER DALLAS CONFERENCE: LESSONS LEARNED

The week before the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops met in St. Louis to hold its semiannual meeting, the Catholic League prepared a news release challenging the conventional wisdom on the subject of the sex abuse scandal. A copy was sent to all the cardinals and many of the bishops. It is reprinted below:

“The first lesson learned is that the conventional wisdom regarding the scale of the scandal is wrong. To be specific, although about 1,000 new people have come forward in the past year with accusations against priests, *dead and alive*, less than one percent of the 46,000 priests in the U.S. have been accused; this fraction would be lower if we did not count the deceased. It would also be lower if some states did not suspend the statute of limitations. The conventional wisdom is further flawed when we consider the fact that the *majority of reported cases* involve alleged incidents more than 20 years ago. Now contrast this with what the Catholic League found regarding reported instances of sex abuse committed by teachers: from news accounts of the past year, we were able to determine that 83 percent of these cases involve incidents committed within the past three years; 2 percent of the cases go back further than 1980. In short, the problem in the Church is significantly exaggerated and is unfairly compared to other professions.

“The second lesson learned is that the conventional wisdom regarding the nature of the abuses is also wrong. Most people think of sex abuse as rape, but what passes as sex abuse charges against priests includes everything from rape to inappropriate touching to an unwelcome kiss to ‘ignoring warnings about suspicious behavior.’

"The third lesson learned is that the conventional wisdom regarding the veracity of the charges is wrong. Most people tend to believe alleged victims. While many are sincere, it is also true that many are not: there is a game being played by greedy lawyers (some of whom have made tens of millions off the scandal) and their 'repressed memory' clients. Add to this the fact that hundreds of claims are being made by persons who previously settled with the Church, and the game gets bigger."