

PHILLY JUDGE SHOULD STEP DOWN

The presiding judge in the trial of two Catholic priests from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia recently expressed dissatisfaction with the following question for prospective jurors: "Do you believe child sex abuse is a widespread problem in the Catholic Church?" Common Pleas Court Judge M. Teresa Sarmina said, "Anybody that doesn't think there is widespread sexual abuse within the Catholic Church is living on another planet."

As soon as we caught wind of her statement we said that Judge Sarmina should step down immediately. Her remark, whether based on ignorance or bias, clearly demonstrated her inability to preside over any trial concerning allegations of priestly sexual abuse. After we called for her to step down, the defense attorneys for the archdiocese did the same, citing our press release. She refused to recuse herself.

Sarmina's use of the present tense showed she is unfit to rule. Between 2005 and 2010, the average number of new credible allegations made against over 40,000 priests in the United States was 8.3. How did this compare to other religions? Well, in one borough of New York City, Brooklyn, there have been 85 arrests of Orthodox Jews in the last two years (most of whom are rabbis) for sexually molesting minors. Perhaps she should acquaint herself with what is going on in the public schools: as the AP reported in a major investigation in 2007, sexual abuse is rampant.

Almost all the problems with priestly sexual abuse occurred between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s. In other words, the scandal ended a quarter century ago. Are there news stories of a more recent vintage? Yes, but they are not recent cases. The John Jay College of Criminal Justice report last year said, "The most common time period for allegations reported in 2010 was 1970-1974." Moreover, as Penn State professor Philip

Jenkins said in 2010, "Out of 100,000 priests active in the U.S. in this half-century, a cadre of just 149 individuals—one priest out of every 750—accounted for over a quarter of all the allegations of clergy abuse." In short, there is no widespread problem today.