

USA TODAY TRACKS FORMER PRIESTS

USA Today is on a tear against the Catholic Church. Last month it published a 3700-word-story on efforts by the bishops to fight discriminatory legislation. Now it has unloaded again, this time indicting the Church in a 6226-word-story for not tracking former priests accused of sexual abuse.

The newspaper must be vying for a Pulitzer. Why else would it invest a ton of money employing 39 reporters to investigate alleged wrongdoing by the Catholic Church over the last nine months, "wrongdoing" that is routine for every organization? What it found is hardly startling.

USA Today says that the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) does not track former priests accused of sexual abuse. That is correct. Neither does *USA Today* have a GPS tracking system to locate the whereabouts of former employees accused of sexual misconduct. That's because no employer is required to do so by law. So why is it so stunning to learn that the USCCB plays by the same rules as everyone else? Unless, of course, the name of the game is to shame the Church?

The reporters found a priest who was accused of sexual abuse in the 1970s, and was later named in a settlement with the Miami Archdiocese. He is now 85. Is there more to this story? Nope, that's it.

Philadelphia has a Child and Family Therapy Training Center which offers clinical programs, workshops and courses. One of the faculty members who worked there was a former priest accused of sexual abuse.

Now whose fault is it that the Center didn't know of accusations against him? Why did they employ him to give

lectures on sexual abuse? When his former boss was asked about him in 2015, she said he told her about the accusations, denied they were true, and she believed him. She said he was a “terrific teacher.” He is currently a licensed marriage and family therapist. Why didn’t the newspaper contact his employer for an interview? It had more than three dozen reporters on the story.

The news story opens with John Dagwell. He is a former Catholic brother who plead guilty in a criminal case in 1988 for molesting a student. “Despite his past,” the news article says, “Dagwell was never required to register as a sex offender.” With good reason—he didn’t have to. Later in the story it is reported that there was no federal law requiring sex offenders to register at that time. So why the early drama about him not registering? In fact it wasn’t until 2006 that the Congress passed such a law; it wasn’t upheld by the Supreme Court until this past June.

Here’s another gem. A layman at a Catholic high school entered into a settlement agreement in 2013 with former students claiming abuse. The reporters quote a real estate agent who lives near him saying she can’t believe his name doesn’t show up in Florida’s sex registry. Maybe that’s because he was never found guilty. Didn’t this occur to the reporters? Do they know what the law says?

According to FindLaw, a trusted legal online source, the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act makes it a federal crime “to knowingly fail to register with a state’s authorities, or to fail to update registration at specified times, in accordance with the law’s requirements.”

In other words, it is up to the convicted—*not the accused or the former employer*—to register. Knowing this to be true, why didn’t *USA Today* make this plain? Let me guess: To do so would have imploded its story.

The newspaper could have written a similar story on virtually any organization, but instead it chose only one. It needs to explain to Catholics why.