

VATICAN FINALLY DOES RIGHT BY ACCUSED PRIESTS

[Bill Donohue](#)

Six years after Pope Francis rejected the practice of publishing the names of accused priests, the Vatican has finally codified his plea. Henceforth, dioceses are discouraged from publishing such a list. Among the reasons cited was the inability of deceased accused priests to defend themselves.

This should never have been an issue in the first place. But in the panic that ensued following the 2002 series in the *Boston Globe* detailing clergy sexual abuse, the bishops convened in Dallas in 2004 to adopt a charter that listed comprehensive reforms, some of which substantially weakened the rights of the accused.

At the time, I was highly critical of the way some bishops allowed a gay subculture to flourish, one that resulted in a massive cover-up of the sexual abuse of minors (homosexual priests—not pedophiles—were responsible for 8-in-10 cases of abuse). But I also said of the Dallas reforms, “there is a problem regarding the rights of the accused. It appears that the charter may short-circuit some due process rights.”

One of the problems was the desire to publish the names of accused priests. Egging the bishops on was Judge Anne Burke, the first person to head the National Review Board commissioned by the bishops to deal with this problem.

She made it clear that priests—and only priests—should be denied their constitutionally prescribed right to due process. “We understand that it is a violation of the priest’s due process—you’re innocent until proven guilty—but we’re talking about the most vulnerable people in our society and those are

children.” Such thinking allowed the bishops to make public the names of accused priests.

In an interview I had in my office with a female reporter from CNN, she became quite critical of the Church for not posting the names of accused priests on its diocesan websites. I picked up the phone and, holding it in my hand, asked her for the name and phone number of her boss. When she asked why, I said I was going to accuse her of sexual harassment. I added that I wanted to see if CNN would post her name on its website. She said, “I get it.” I put the phone down. (For more on this see my book, [*The Truth about Clergy Sexual Abuse*](#)).

No organization in the United States, religious or secular, publishes the names of accused employees. That there should be an exception for priests is obscene.

The rights of accused priests need to be safeguarded, and the penalties for those found guilty need to be severe. The Church failed on the latter, which is why the scandal took place, and it failed on the former, which is why Pope Francis, and now the entire Church, had to act.

The sexual abuse of minors in the Church in America has long been checked—almost all the cases in the media are about old cases, and most of the bad guys are dead or out of ministry. Now that the rights of the accused have been given a much needed shot in the arm, we can say with confidence that this problem has also been ameliorated.