

WCPO CHURCH PROBE SMACKS OF BIAS

The ABC affiliate in Cincinnati, WCPO, recently launched a three-month investigation into Ohio's Catholic dioceses and religious orders seeking to learn how they track priests and brothers who have been accused of sexually abusing minors.

The "I-team" did not investigate any other religious body in the state, nor did it launch a probe of any secular institutions. Yet it is precisely in the public sector where most of the sexual abuse is taking place.

What did it find? It compiled a list of 92 priests and religious brothers who were accused of sexual abuse by one source or another. From the interactive report online, we learned that 60 (65%) are dead.

In its four-part series, it offers a short anecdote of 16 priests and one brother. We did our own tally and here is what we found.

- 7 priests are dead
- 4 have been laicized
- 1 has been removed from ministry
- 1 is awaiting trial
- 1 has been permanently suspended
- 1 is on administrative leave
- 1 has an unknown status
- The one brother is dead

In other words, they are either dead or are inactive. If this were the conclusion of a probe of the public schools, it would be the end of the story. But because it is the Catholic Church that has been selectively put under the microscope, it isn't.

In fact, in the Overview, the report even admits that an

indictment of a priest in August was the first time in nearly a decade—in the *Tri-State area*—that a member of the clergy has had an accusation made against him. It would be helpful to know how many public school teachers in the Tri-State area have been accused of sexual abuse in the last decade. But apparently the WCPO I-Team has little interest in finding out.

The report correctly notes that the Catholic Church isn't required by law to supervise priests who are no longer in ministry. What it should have said, to be more accurate, is that *no institution* is required by law to track, *never mind supervise*, any former employee who was terminated because of sexual misconduct. Not even at WCPO.

So what's the big deal? Shaming. Shaming the Catholic Church—that's what this contrived story is all about. Take, for example, how the report handles the case of Rev. Daniel Pater.

Pater was bounced five years ago by the Vatican for sexually abusing a teenager. But a month after he was fired, he took a job as the director of music for a small Episcopal Church in Lincoln Heights. WCPO finds this scandalous. Guess who it blames? The Catholic Church. Why didn't the Protestant church ask Pater about his background? Isn't it up to the prospective employer to do some digging? Since when does the burden fall on the organization that kicked the guy out? This is bunk.

What is driving this report is the desire to suspend the statute of limitations for these crimes, allowing alleged victims to sue even if the offense occurred in the 1940s. And as we have seen in other states where this game is played, the law either does not apply to the public schools, or if it does the steeple-chasing attorneys have no interest in fighting the bureaucracy: they prefer to squeeze the Catholic Church, for reasons both financial and ideological.

It is the family where most sexual abuse of children takes

place. Yet no one—not a single attorney—will publicly state that he is available to represent those women whose live-in boyfriend, or the stepfather, has raped their son or daughter. That's because the rapacious lawyers go after the big bucks, hoping to sink the Catholic Church.

"Some may accuse us of revisiting accusations from decades ago that were painful to Catholics," WCPO says. "But our motives are simple: to ensure that the public has more complete information on priests who have been credibly accused of child sexual abuse than local Catholic Church leaders had been willing to provide."

This is wholly unpersuasive. The predicate is false: The sexual abuse of minors is taking place right now in the public schools and universities, yet the reporters are not providing the public with "more complete information" on teachers and professors.

In December 2016, *USA Today* released a study of all 50 states grading them on how they handle sexual abuse in the public schools. On the measure of "Sharing misconduct information," the Ohio public schools received an "F." In 2017, AP studied the same issue and found that in Ohio, "The state education department did not collect information on sex assaults in schools."

In other words, the public schools in Ohio are an utter disgrace in handling this issue. If they don't collect information, and don't share whatever they know about their molesting teachers, it stands to reason that they don't track, much less *supervise*, them.

Ohio's problem with sexual misconduct extends to the university level.

In 2018, it was reported that "Ohio University has more rapes and sexual assaults in general than similar schools in Ohio." This was the finding of Clery Act reports.

In 2019, AP noted that “An Ohio State team doctor [Dr. Richard Strauss] sexually abused at least 177 male students over nearly two decades, and numerous university officials got wind of what was going on but did little to stop him.” The report, which was issued by the university, said that “Ohio State personnel knew of complaints and concerns about Strauss’s conduct as early as 1979 but failed for years to investigate or take meaningful action.”

There is plenty of rich material on sexual abuse in Ohio’s public schools and public universities, never mind what is going on in the Tri-State area. The only thing lacking is the will, and the courage, to launch a probe.