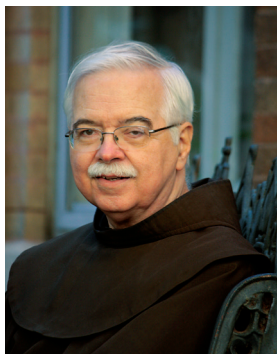


By Pat McCloskey, OFM



Pat McCloskey, OFM

Father Pat welcomes your questions!

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Pedophile Priests Protected

My wife and I do not feel comfortable discussing this with our parish priest and hope you can provide some guidance. As cradle Catholics, we find it very difficult to continue in our Catholic faith because of repeated reports of abuse of children by pedophile priests.

Despite these reports, there is no definitive action—mostly lip service. Pope Francis should declare these behaviors unacceptable and inconsistent with Christ’s teachings. Civil authorities should be allowed to prosecute these offenders. Any bishop or cardinal who covers up these crimes should be defrocked.

We are seriously considering leaving the Catholic Church due to this horrible stain. I have resigned as a lector at our parish because I no longer feel comfortable in a leadership position within a Church that by its actions tolerates these behaviors.

Yes, the Catholic Church has often failed to treat such abuse and crimes with the seriousness they require. For many years, such abuse was regarded by Church authorities as a sin but was not also acknowledged and treated as a civil crime.

Since your e-mail was sent, one US cardinal has been laicized/defrocked (McCarrick); one Australian cardinal has been convicted of sexual abuse and imprisoned (Pell); the worldwide Church now holds bishops, archbishops, and cardinals to the same standards as those applied to priests; several canonical inquiries have been initiated; and bishops can open canonical cases against retired or even deceased bishops or major superiors. Bishops continue to alert civil authorities when new reports are made. Also, the Catholic Church can prosecute abuses that are beyond civil law’s statute of limitations.

Several years ago, the state of California opened a one-year window for prosecution of child sexual abuse, no matter how long ago it occurred. The state of New York has done the same recently, and other states are considering such a legal change.

Especially since 2002, when the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* was adopted by the US bishops, my colleagues and I have written articles, editorials, and columns about this abuse. My October 2018 editorial (available online) has chronicled those efforts. Most recently, our June 2019 issue included four articles and another editorial on this subject. The US bishops later extended their 2002 charter to cover vulnerable adults.

Have all of these wiped out the scourge and crime of clerical sexual abuse? No. Nothing done now can erase a past act of abuse, but the Catholic Church is no longer treating reports of clergy sexual abuse as it once did. This scourge seems so enormous and pervasive because clerical sexual abuse was not admitted or addressed effectively for many years.

This is also a scourge that is being taken more seriously by other sectors of US and world society.

Believe me, I understand your temptation to leave the Catholic Church over this abuse and crime. But can you guarantee that in your new group this is absolutely unknown?

“Poor people, poor God,” the late Father Leonard Foley, OFM, an editor and longtime contributor to this publication, used to say. Our task now is to admit the truth and take the effective action needed.

