

The movie *Spotlight*

Background and Suggested response to questions

The movie *Spotlight*, which tells the story of the *Boston Globe*'s coverage of child sexual abuse in the Archdiocese of Boston, will be released in theatres Nov. 6. This is a big-budget movie with a notable cast and is likely to gain broad public attention. The information contained in this backgrounder is intended to help priests and parish staff answer questions arising from the release of the movie. Although this movie presents us with a challenge, it also is an opportunity to raise awareness of what the church—nationally and locally—has done to protect vulnerable populations and prevent child sexual abuse in the church.

Key Points:

- Even though it is personally painful to acknowledge this chapter in our church's history, we welcome anything that raises awareness around the tragic issue of child sexual abuse.
- The movie ends in 2002, as the church confronted its past failures and began to take responsibility for its mistakes.
- Since 2002, the Catholic Church in the United States has put in place the strongest measures in the world for protecting children and young people, including safe environment training for children and adults, background checks and zero tolerance.
- The church is deeply grateful to victims of abuse who have come forward. Their courageous witness initiated our response to this tragedy and allowed the healing process to begin. Because of their courage, the church is safer for all families.

Questions and Answers

What do the bishops say about their role in the crimes against children and the cover-up portrayed in this movie?

The bishops have acknowledged the pain, anger and confusion of victims of child sexual abuse by members of the clergy, and have expressed their deep regret for the ways in which these crimes and sins were addressed in the past. On behalf of all who exercise ministry within the church, the bishops have acknowledged their own mistakes and their role in the suffering of victims. They have apologized both personally and as a group, and have taken responsibility for failing victims and Catholic people in the past.

What does the church say to victims of clergy sexual abuse?

The church acknowledges the pain and suffering endured by victims at the hands of Catholic clergy, someone they had every right to trust. We all deeply regret the grave harm inflicted on victims and have committed ourselves to actions that will help them find healing and prevent future abuse. Over the past 12 years the arch/dioceses of the United States have submitted to independent audits to assure that our actions match our words. These actions have been published in public annual reports.

What are some of the steps the church has taken to promote healing and protect children?

The bishops approved the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* in 2002. The charter created a nationwide network of victim assistance and safe environment training. The effects of the effort are:

- A clear, transparent procedure for addressing allegations of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy, including creation of sexual abuse hotlines for abuse reporting.
- Strict guidelines for reconciliation, healing, accountability and prevention of future acts of abuse.
- Requirements for prompt response to allegations.
- Mandates for cooperation with law enforcement.
- Discipline, including removal from ministry, of offenders.

What are the results of these efforts?

Since 2003 an Annual Report has been published on the implementation of the charter. Those reports, based on annual independent audits, provide the following results:

- More than 17,000 people abused by a member of the clergy have come forward.
- More than 5,800 clergy have been identified and removed from ministry.
- Thousands of victims have received pastoral care to promote healing.
- More than 2.5 million adults working or volunteering in parishes and schools have received prevention training and had criminal background checks.
- 4.4 million children have been trained to recognize abuse and how to tell someone.

After what happened in the past, why should people trust the church to responsibly address child sexual abuse?

We do not expect anyone to simply take us at our word. We ask rather that we be judged by our actions. When the crime and sin of clergy child sexual abuse was made public in 2002, the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* was approved. Compliance with the charter will continue to be audited by an independent, third-party auditor. Within the past decade alone, new reporting guidelines and other mandates have been established to set higher standards of compassionate, pastoral care for victims and zero tolerance for offenders. We encourage anyone who may have experienced abuse in the past to come forward, and if anyone is currently

being abused, we urge them to contact law enforcement or other civil authorities and call the archdiocesan hotline at 1-800-446-7762.

What has the Archdiocese of Seattle done to prevent sexual abuse and protect children?

The Archdiocese of Seattle first established pastoral resources and guidelines for reporting child abuse in 1984. In 1988, the archdiocese created a “Special Cases Committee” — a precursor to the Case Review Board mandated in the 2002 *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* — to investigate allegations of child sexual abuse by members of the clergy. The following year, criminal background checks were required of all employees and volunteers with unsupervised contact with children and young people. The first national audit in 2003 identified the Archdiocese of Seattle as “a national leader” for its Safe Environment efforts.

Since 2007, following an expansion of the archdiocese’s safe environment efforts, 22,000 clergy, religious, staff and volunteers have been trained in the identification and prevention of sexual abuse of vulnerable populations. Research-based, age-appropriate training also has been completed by approximately 21,000 Catholic school students. Also in 2007 a revised *Policy for the Prevention of and Response to Sexual Abuse, Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment* was promulgated. All clergy, seminarians, employees and any volunteers with ongoing unsupervised contact with minors or vulnerable adults have signed these policies which include a comprehensive *Code of Professional Conduct for Church Personnel and Reporting Suspected Abuse and Neglect of Minors or Vulnerable Adults*.

What should I do if I become aware of sexual abuse?

Anyone who has knowledge of sexual abuse or misconduct by a member of the clergy, an employee or volunteer of the Archdiocese of Seattle is urged to contact law enforcement or other civil authorities and call the archdiocesan hotline at 1-800-446-7762.

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If you want additional information or have questions, please contact Greg Magnoni, Director of Communications, at 206-382-4862.