**Module M – Background and Responses to Sexual Abuse of Minors**

**by Catholic Priests in the United States**

**(Primarily for Dioceses)**

**Outline, Goals and Comments, Discussion Questions, References, and Sources**

**Outline**

1. Title Slides (M-1 to M-2)
2. Main sources of Data (M-3)
3. Timeframes and Historical Changes in Abuse (M-4 to M-10)
4. Seminary Formation (M-11)
5. Sexual Abuse and Civil Authorities (M-12 to M-13)
6. Reports and Response to Sexual Abuse (M-14 to M-15)
7. Development and Implementation of “The Five Principles” (M-16 to M-20)
8. Church and Seminary Responses (M-21)
9. Some Key Findings (M-22 to M-24)
10. Discussion Questions (M-25 to M-26)

**Goals and Comments**

The goal of Module M is to provide a brief introduction to understanding Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests in the United States for use in dioceses, for example, for diocesan officials and staff and for diocesan pastoral and financial councils. Designed primarily for dioceses, it begins with the methodology utilized by researchers as they gathered data for the studies authorized by the USCCB. It then considers the changes in abuse patterns, which show that more than 90 percent of abuse took place between 1960 and 1984, though most of it was reported in the year 2002 or later. A brief reference is made to seminary formation (a fuller explanation of the response of seminaries is provided in Module B). Here information is provided about when abuse was reported and by whom. Early along, in 1992, the bishops’ conference developed “The Five Principles” for dealing with abuse. These principles, designed to guide bishops in their handling of reports of clergy abuse, are listed. Module M also names some of the problems encountered in implementing the guidelines and in understanding the gravity and extent of abuse. It identifies as well church and seminary responses to sexual abuse. It concludes with a brief summary of key findings presented in the “Causes and Context” of abuse and then suggests some questions for discussion.

**Discussion Questions**

1. What reflections do you have about clerical sexual abuse in recent years?
2. What are some of the major concerns you have about understanding the implications of sexual abuse at the diocesan level?
3. How can dioceses improve implementation of “The Five Principles”?
4. How can the response by those who must be accountable for preventing sexual abuse be improved?
5. What more needs to be done to ensure continued progress in understanding and acting on the problem of clerical sexual abuse?
6. What lessons can be learned from the changes in patterns of abuse over time?
7. What precautions should be taken into account by dioceses when assessing possible “causes” or risk factors involved in sexual abuse?
8. What situational safeguards might be put in place to help prevent sexual abuse?
9. What other preventative measures are needed in the future?

**Titles of Slides and References**

M-1: Module M

M-2: Background and Responses to Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests in the United States

M-3: Main Sources of Data

M-4: Timeframes of First Abuse

M-5: Historical Changes in Abusers

M-6: The Rise and Fall of Abuse

Notes: For details, see Module “C,” especially slide C-26

M-7: National Patterns of Social Change

Notes: *Causes and Context*, p. 3

M-8: Distribution of Abuse – Incidence

M-9: Priests Who Have Allegations of Sexual Abuse against Them

Notes: Numbers represent severe offenses, e.g., those with penetration, multiple

incidents

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Year | Total Priests | Diocesan Priests | Religious Priests |
| 1950 | 42,970 |  |  |
| 1953 \* | 45,222 | 28,386 (62.8%) | 16,836 (37.2%) |
| 1960 | 53,796 | 32,569 (60.5%) | 21,227 (39.5%) |
| 1967 | 59,892 | 36,871 (61.6%) | 23,021 (38.4%) |
| 1970 | 59,192 | 37,272 (63.0%) | 21,920 (37.0%) |
| 1980 | 58,621 | 35,418 (60.4%) | 23,203 (39.6%) |
| 1985 | 57,317 | 35,052 (61.2%) | 22,265 (38.8%) |
| 1990 | 53,112 | 34,553 (65.1%) | 18,559 (34.9%) |
| 2000 | 46,405 | 30,940 (66.7%) | 15,465 (33.3%) |
| 2010 | 40,788 | 27,614 (67.7%) | 13,175 (32.3%) |

\* First year split is reported; *Nature and Scope*, p. 39

M-10: Decline in Incidence

M-11: Mainstream Seminary Training

Notes: *Causes and Context*, p. 46

M-12: Sexual Abuse and Civil Authorities

Notes: *Nature and Scope*, p. 39

M-13: National Patterns of Accusations: Extent of the Problem

Notes: *Causes and Context*, pp. 10, 27

Number of New Abuse Cases Occurring in the Designated Years

1985 – 1989 = 975

1990 – 2011 = 843\*

1,818 cases from 1985 to 2011

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Breakdown of data from 1990 to 2011 \*

1990 – 1994 = 399

1995 – 1999 = 221

2000 – 2004 = 111

2005 – 2009 = 82

2010 – 2011 = 30

843 cases from 1990 to 2011

Source: For years 1990 – 2009: Causes and Context, p. 10, Figure 1.3

For years 2010 – 2011: CARA 2011 Annual Survey of Allegations and Costs,

Appendices B and C

Data were not collected in 2003. A significant number of events was reported in 1993, and a notable increase took place in 2002.

M-14: Reports and Response, mid-1990s

Notes: *Causes and Context*, p. 78

M-15: Nature and Scope: Reports of Abuse, by Year Reported

Notes: *Causes and Context*, p. 9

M-16: Development of the Five Principles

Notes: *Causes and Context*, pp. 82, 84, 86

M-17: “Five Principles” Adopted by the Bishops’ Conference

Notes: *Causes and Context*, p. 4

M-18: Problems with the Implementation of the Five Principles, 1990-2002

Notes: *Causes and Context*, p. 4

M-19: Diocesan Practices Changed Slowly

M-20: Understanding of Sexual Abuse by Church Leaders

Note: The harm done by sexual abuse of even one person is not to be underestimated.

M-21: Church and Seminary Responses

M-22: Some Key Findings, 1

M-23: Some Key Findings, 2

M-24: Some Key Findings, 3

M-25: Discussion Questions, 1

M-26: Discussion Questions, 2

**Sources**

This module and others prepared for use in seminaries and schools of theology are based primarily on the two reports presented to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops by the John Jay College Research Team, The City University of New York: *The Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests in the United States*, 1950-2010, March, 2011 and *The Nature and Scope of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States, 1950-2002*, February 2004.

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