



Letter
to a
Suffering
Church

A BISHOP SPEAKS ON THE
SEXUAL ABUSE CRISIS

SEXUAL ABUSE FAQs FOR PARISH LEADERS

When you pass out this book, *Letter to a Suffering Church*, it's likely your parishioners will ask questions related to the sexual abuse crisis. We put together this **Sexual Abuse FAQ Guide** to help you answer the most common ones.

Don't think you need to memorize these answers, or share them verbatim. What's important is that you familiarize yourself with these questions so you won't be caught off guard when they're posed to you.



FAQS ABOUT SEXUAL ABUSE CRISIS

QUESTION: "Is this still a massive problem today?"

Generally, no. While even a single case of abuse is one too many, by and large, the rate of clerical sexual abuse has dwindled to a trickle since the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops established the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* (e.g., the "Dallas Charter") in 2002.

As Bishop Barron writes in *Letter to a Suffering Church*:

"Numerous careful studies have revealed that instances of clergy sex abuse peaked in the 1960s and 1970s, declining steadily thereafter, and precipitously after 2002, so that now the reporting of new cases is down to a trickle. I wouldn't dream of denying or underplaying the horrors reported in the Pennsylvania Attorney General report already cited, but I would say that it is regrettable in the extreme that even churchgoing Catholics tended to believe that the terrible instances mentioned in that study were recent cases. In point of fact, of the four hundred or so crimes reported, precisely two occurred after 2002."

This is why many people, including many non-Catholics, now consider the Catholic Church to be among the safest places for children in the world and a leader in preventing their sexual abuse.

QUESTION: "If the Church let priests marry, would this have happened?"

Marriage is not a solution to the problem of sexual abuse. Countless children have been sexually abused by family members, married and unmarried. In fact, according to a [2010 Newsweek](#)

[article](#), rates of sexual abuse among Catholic clergy were similar to those of the male population as a whole. This confirms that celibacy does not markedly increase the incidence of abuse.

All people, even married people, experienced periods of celibacy (e.g., after childbirth or major injury), but those periods do not immediately turn people toward the abuse of children or others.

QUESTION: "If the Church ordained women to the priesthood, wouldn't that solve the problem?"

Unfortunately, sexual abuse occurs not only among men but also among female religious orders, as well as within public schools, where female teachers are increasingly being arrested and charged with the crime of sexual exploitation of students or others.

The disordered desire to control or wield power over others is not exclusive to males; it is a disorder of the human mind, heart, and soul, rooted in more than biological sex.

QUESTION: "Isn't this mainly a homosexual problem? If only all same-sex attracted priests were ousted . . ."

There is certainly a homosexual component to most clerical abuse cases. Studies have shown that roughly 80% of clerical sexual abuse occurred between priests and boys or young men.

And a 2005 Vatican document from the Congregation for Catholic Education specifies that, "If a candidate [for the priesthood] practises homosexuality or presents deep-seated homosexual tendencies, his spiritual director as well as his confessor have the duty to dissuade him in conscience from proceeding towards ordination."

However, it's important to distinguish between homosexuality (a chosen behavior) and same-sex attraction (an often undesired predilection). The Catholic Church teaches in the *Catechism* (2357-2359) that same-sex attraction is not, in and of itself, sinful. The *Catechism* urges respect for all people and dissuades against scapegoating and presuming to know the state of anyone's soul.

Consider that, for all the terrible stories we hear, we do not hear about the faithful and pastoral priests whose same-sex orientation is known to God alone, and who strive to minister to the Body of Christ while enduring thorns in the side about which none of us may guess.

QUESTION: “Is Pope Francis complicit in this? What about the accusations made in Archbishop Vigano’s letter?”

Over the past months, some Church leaders have accused others of covering up, lying about, or facilitating cases of sexual abuse. Without all the relevant facts and supporting evidence, though, it’s nearly impossible to separate fact from fiction.

What these cases demand are thorough, predominantly lay-led investigations into many of these questions. As Bishop Barron says in *Letter to a Suffering Church*:

“I believe that another essential move, if the Church is serious about preventing McCarrick-like situations going forward, is to launch a formal investigation, both on this side of the Atlantic and in Rome, to determine how someone like Theodore McCarrick, whose serious misbehavior was well known, could possibly have risen so high in the government of the Church.”



FAQS ABOUT THE BOOK

QUESTION: Why did Bishop Barron write this book?

A recent Gallup poll has revealed that 37% of Catholics are considering leaving the Church due to the sexual abuse crisis. That’s disheartening, but this new book can help.

As Bishop Barron writes in the preface, “I have written this book for my fellow Catholics who feel, understandably, demoralized, scandalized, angry beyond words, and ready to quit. What I finally urge my brothers and sisters in the Church to do is to stay and fight—and to do so on behalf of themselves and their families, but especially on behalf of those who have suffered so grievously at the hands of wicked men. Of course, I’m also happy if those outside the Church find some illumination in these chapters as well. . . . My prayer is that these reflections might encourage Catholics who are attempting to navigate today in very choppy waters.”

QUESTION: Is this book an official Catholic Church text?

No. Bishop Barron is not speaking in the name of his brother bishops, or the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, or the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, or the Vatican. He has no authority to do so. He is speaking in his own name, as a Catholic, a priest, and a bishop.

QUESTION: What's the goal with this book?

Bishop Barron wrote this book to encourage Catholics in the pew who are demoralized about the sexual abuse crisis to not leave the Church, but to stay and fight for reform, especially on behalf of the victims.

We hope to distribute copies to as many Catholics as possible, mainly through parishes, which is why we're offering the book for just one dollar per copy.

QUESTION: Who is publishing the book?

The book is published by Word on Fire Catholic Ministries, Bishop Barron's 501(c)(3) non-profit ministry.

QUESTION: Is Bishop Barron or Word on Fire trying to profit from the sexual abuse crisis? Where is my money going?

No. This is not a money-making initiative. Any and all profits from the sale of this book will go to trusted charities that support the victims of sexual abuse.