

The archdiocese of Boston has turned over to authorities the names of about 80 Roman Catholic priests accused of abusing children over the past 40 years. Since the 1980s such allegations have been made in staggering numbers against priests all across the country. In recent years, it appeared that all the cases had come to light. In our own diocese, for example, Bishop Boland states in this weekend's *Catholic Key*, "we presently have no priest, teacher or youth minister in a parish or school who has ever been accused of any form of child sexual abuse." The Boston cases have made news because church leaders there only recently released the names.

The deplorable actions of some priests have tarnished the work of the Roman Catholic Church. Sexual abuse is wrong in all its forms. Taking advantage of a date, offensive behavior at work, rape – it's all wrong. The sexual abuse of children has shown up in churches, in youth groups, in Boy Scouts, schools and sports. It shows up most in families. When a priest abuses a child, he commits a sexual crime all the more monstrous because he betrays the trust children place in him. He hurts the victim, he hurts the victim's family, and he hurts the community.

We don't know much about pedophilia. Twenty years ago if a bishop learned that one of his priests was abusing children he did what everybody thought was the best thing: he moved that priest to another parish. It was, of course, the wrong thing to do. The bishop should have sent the priest for treatment, but very few people understood that. Even so, those who treat pedophiles today say they do not know a cure. They only hope to prevent a relapse.

If it's any comfort, they say the real question is not "Why do some priests abuse children?" but rather "Why do some people who abuse children become priests?" Pedophilia was probably a pre-existing condition in some men who saw priesthood as a way they could have access to children, a commitment to celibacy and a belief that they were doing some good, in spite of the evil within them.

Today seminarians endure extended psychological analysis before any of them is ordained a priest. We have

probably seen the worst of this scandal for now – at least as far as priests are concerned.

But the real worst of this scandal is the way it has hurt the children victimized by the crimes. They live in anxiety thrust upon them by someone they were supposed to be able to trust.

I want to encourage anyone who has suffered sexual abuse to report it. Too many victims remain silent for too long. If you are uncomfortable talking to a priest, talk to a counselor, but get some help.

When the disciples returned from the market and discovered Jesus by the well in Samaria, they were amazed he was talking with a woman. But none of them asked, “Why are you talking with her?” They probably should have. It would have cleared the air. We owe it to society to take care of one another.

As a leader in the Catholic Church, I want to apologize to you for the actions of some of my brother priests. I thank those brave victims who brought this horrible issue to light. I promise you that we priests will work hard to deserve your trust and to serve your needs.