

Is the worst behind us? Study records continuing decline in abuse reports

The bad news on the church's sexual abuse crisis seems endless, but a Catholic researcher finds cause for hope in a continuing decline in the number of contemporary cases being recorded. Mark Gray, a researcher at the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, recently reported in the blog "1964" that alleged sexual abuse of minors by clergy in the United States seems to have been highest in the early 1970s, with a significant fall afterward. The data can change, but Mr. Gray reports that the peak years of reported incidents are the same as when the revelations of abuse began in the Boston area in 2002. (In other words, the time distribution has not moved forward.)

To produce the chart below, CARA analyzed 8,694 allegations of sexual abuse made between 2004 and 2017. The results are similar to those of a study of the sexual abuse crisis by researchers at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in 2004.

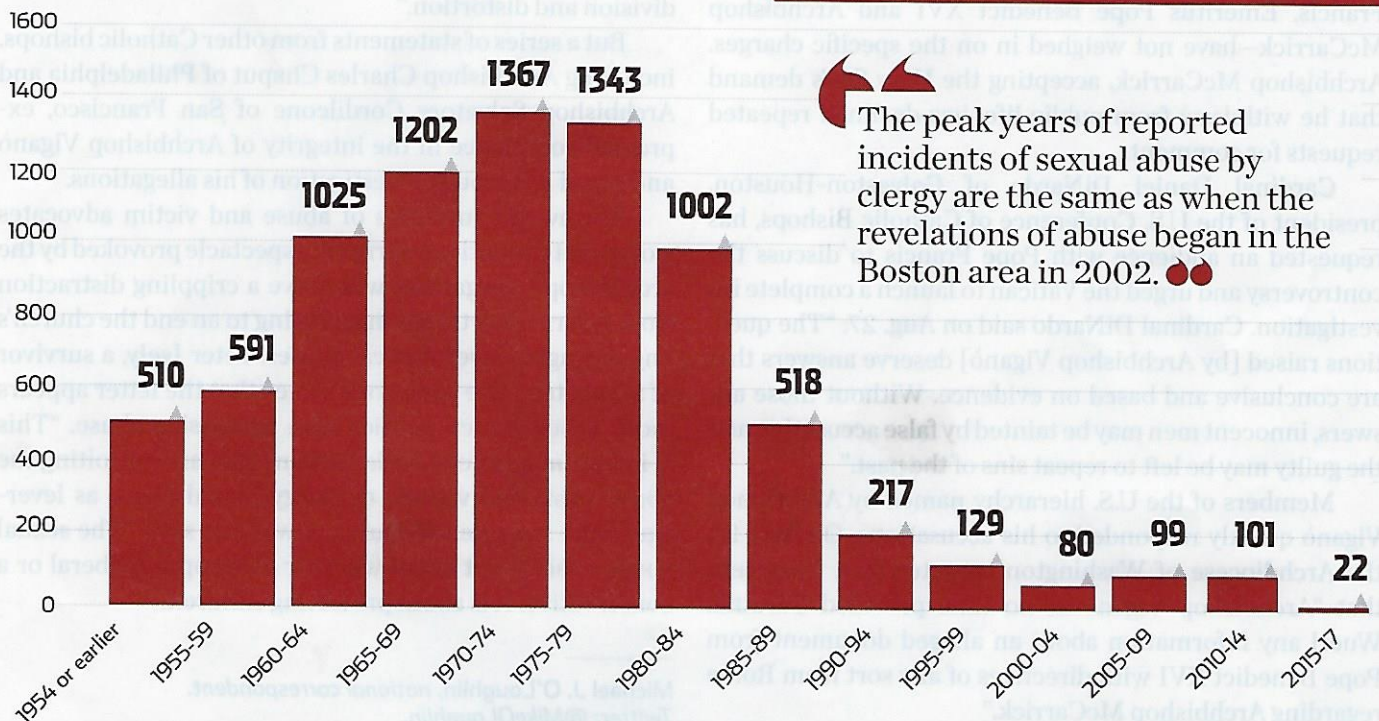
The CARA data does not include the recent report by a grand jury in Pennsylvania, but most of the incidents

of sexual abuse in that report occurred before the early 2000s. Mr. Gray notes that the priests accused of abuse in the Pennsylvania report, on average, were born in 1933 and ordained in 1961. (Former cardinal Theodore McCarrick was born in 1930 and ordained in 1958.) Similarly, the John Jay report found that of the accused abusers in that study, "the majority...were born between 1920 and 1950" and that the most common decade of ordination was the 1960s.

Mr. Gray notes that many Catholics remain unaware that "abuse cases were more common before 1985 than since." He writes: "The fact that any abuse occurred at all, regardless of when, is horrifying.... Yet, this detail is important in understanding the causes of the scandal, what legal actions are possible, and the steps that can be taken to prevent any future abuse."

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NUMBER OF ALLEGED OFFENSES REPORTED SINCE 2004 "OCCURRING OR BEGINNING" DURING EACH FIVE-YEAR PERIOD



Source: "Pain Never Disappears from Unhealed Wounds," Aug. 28, 2018, on the blog "1968," published by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Washington, D.C.