

## From the President

I write to express my gratitude to all of those who participated in this remarkable report.

I come to the presidency of Fordham after a long career advocating for the survivors of sexual abuse. Like the authors of this work, I have learned more than I can describe from those survivors and from the searing pain of their experiences. And I have worked and struggled to understand the causes of violence and abuse, of what makes a person capable of such cruelty.



But in all of my years of legal and political advocacy, what has frustrated me the most is the denial—the ways that too many turn away, refuse to help, or choose not to believe out of a very human desire not to see what they cannot imagine. They leave survivors with excruciating choices about whether to speak out, knowing they might not be believed by the rest of us, worried they might be punished for telling the truth.

We have learned with horror the consequences of that denial. I write with the depressing news of how common that denial remains across society. Too many are still determined to disbelieve reality—that child sexual abuse remains rampant in many institutions with trust over children—from churches to schools to youth groups to families.

I spent years representing the survivors of domestic violence in family court and discovered the frequent overlap between domestic violence and child sexual abuse (from batterers who felt they could do what they liked with every member of the family.) I also experienced the hostility of a legal system determined to disbelieve something so unpleasant. As I heard one family court judge announce, “litigants know not to bring claims like that into my court.”

We have a deep-seated desire to reject unimaginable horror, especially when people we have once trusted are accused. But the result is the failure to protect our children.

Now is not the time to turn away, nor to think that abuse occurs only where it has finally been uncovered. We have a moral obligation to pay attention to the lessons our Church learned in such a deservedly painful way. We have to apply those lessons and stop abuse everywhere, across institutions, and across society.

I ask you to read this report not just for the sake of accountability and justice, but also with the humility necessary to learn crucial lessons. Each of us has failed a moral lesson at some point; each of us has heard the cock crow three times. It is time to wake up and be vigilant.

For all of those who researched and wrote these pages, for all of those brave enough to speak up and push for better, we owe you our eternal gratitude. But we can never properly describe in words the gratitude we owe to the survivors with the courage to speak out.

Tania Tetlow  
President, Fordham University

## From the Project Director

This report introduces and summarizes the aims, participants, projects, and outcomes of Fordham's Taking Responsibility Initiative, a multi-year, multi-disciplinary, and multi-institutional effort during which collaborating scholars and practitioners at ten Jesuit colleges and universities across the country conducted original research focused on better understanding and addressing the causes and legacies of clergy and church-related sexual abuse.

Rather than trying to provide a unified theory for addressing this complex topic, we invited scholars from diverse fields of research at U.S. Jesuit colleges and universities to pursue topics meriting greater attention. Thanks to our research partners' work:



- The lives and stories of survivors of abuse remained at the center of these investigations.
- Individual perpetrators and patterns of corporate malfeasance were investigated in terms of institutional coverups, whistleblower practices, and new legal strategies of criminal accountability.
- Studies of sexual trauma and moral injury were explored as resources for individual survivors and for members of their interconnecting circles of relationships who also suffer from the consequences of abuse.
- Long-overlooked patterns of sexual abuse in Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and poor communities, suffering from compound infractions of colonialism and injustice, received heightened attention.
- New areas of research have also included not only studies of the abused and abuser, but also topics such as priests in formation, restorative justice efforts in communities, and the effects of the abuse crisis on “secondary victims” ranging from family members to Catholics as a whole.

Several decades of research and advocacy, to which the Taking Responsibility Initiative has aspired to contribute, have yielded a good working understanding of the ways that power in the church, as in other areas, operates to allow the powerful to act often with complete impunity, leaving their victims to suffer without much recourse and to bear much of the weight of advocacy. But for all of us engaged in the Initiative, it is crystal clear that the abuse scandal is in no way “over” or “old news.” On the contrary, we anticipate that the topic will continue to unfold in new directions: for example, we see the abuse of adults (especially women, but also male students, seminarians, and others) as a major emerging area in the study of clergy sexual abuse.

Finally, while we are gratified at ongoing efforts to break down patterns of clericalism, we remain concerned that after many decades of progress in the cooperation of the laity and the clergy on these sensitive matters, transparency and collaboration on colleges and universities between survivors, faculty and researchers, administrators and boards of trustees, as well as with Jesuit superiors, remains, at best, limited. We hope that the conversations we have initiated through this project will be able to contribute to the necessary work of breaking down these barriers.

Bradford E. Hinze  
Karl Rahner, SJ, Professor of Theology  
Fordham University