

Reforming Informal and Formal Norms Colt Anderson, Fordham University

TO DISCERN how important written and unwritten rules, norms, and practices of the Society of Jesus might shape the response to clergy sexual abuse I interviewed a variety of Jesuits and lay administrators at Jesuit universities. These recommendations stem from the “pain points” this group identified.

1) Reconsider the relationship of pastoral care and disciplinary processes

My study found that in the Society of Jesus pastoral care principles often influence disciplinary processes, which seems appropriate until we consider the effect on victims. The emphasis on charitable discretion, patience, and mercy can allow for inferior performance and outright misbehavior.

Two examples of material from The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complimentary Norms that should be reconsidered in light of the sexual abuse scandal:

- The statement that matters that might endanger another should be reported to the superior so “he can secretly and prudently provide for both the good of the subject involved and for religious life in general.” (Norms 235:3, p. 263)
- The norms related to fraternal correction direct superiors to “not lightly give credence” to a member reporting another member and instruct the superiors to listen in particular to the one reported. If the subject of the report is found innocent, the one who reported “is to be reprehended or punished.” (Norms 235:5, p. 263)

2) Reconsider ‘confidentiality’ as a higher value and minimize the ‘black box’ of reporting

Jesuit schools, colleges, and universities tend to keep personnel issues related to disciplinary matters confidential to avoid embarrassing people. **But research demonstrates such practices discourage reporting.**

Jesuit educational organizations must implement and widely advertise clear procedures for reporting abusive behavior, which should include a description of how an investigation will proceed and examples of how previous reports were resolved.

- Clear and simple policies and processes should be established to share the results of disciplinary matters involving sexual abuse with all involved in the incident as well as with the broader school, college, or university.

3) Align disciplinary processes for Jesuits, faculty, and staff at Jesuit universities

In Jesuit schools and universities, Jesuits, faculty, and staff are often disciplined differently. **The inconsistency creates power differentials that are a disincentive to reporting.**

- Jesuit Provincials should direct their members to abstain from inquiring into issues related to performance or disciplinary matters pertaining to Jesuits because it reinforces the unwritten rule that Jesuits are to be treated differently and deferentially.
- Administrators, faculty, and staff should be instructed to disregard and report such inquiries from the Jesuit community to bodies such as a faculty senate and/or the governing board.

4) Help Jesuits who have oversight of other Jesuits balance the rules governing community life with policies at schools, colleges, and universities

Jesuits with such oversight roles, unsurprisingly, reported emotional stress and difficulty. Policies should be established prohibiting Jesuits from having supervisory roles over other Jesuits in schools, colleges, and universities. If such a policy cannot be implemented immediately, Jesuits should be required to recuse themselves from disciplinary matters and performance evaluations involving other members of the Society.