

Abuse Crisis 'Is Not Over': When will bishops take responsibility?

EDITORIAL

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What a difference a river makes. On the north side of the Rio Grande, Catholic bishops like Brownsville's Raymundo Peña are pledged to remove credibly accused sex abusers from active ministry under the terms of the 2002 Dallas charter. That's why Monsignor Ivan Rovira lost his job running Brownsville's seminary that year after admitting to abusing Ruben Rocha, who says the priest raped him when Mr. Rocha was a teen.

Turns out that Monsignor Rovira ambled down the road, crossed the border to Matamoros and landed a job teaching at a Catholic university. He has been celebrating public Masses – and did so once in the presence of Bishop Peña. The Brownsville bishop maintains that he told his Matamoros counterpart "everything" about Monsignor Rovira. The Matamoros bishop denies it. One of them is lying.

Meanwhile, who's looking after the safety of Matamoros' children? Does Bishop Peña's moral responsibility to them stop at the river? The indifference is galling and calls to mind Kathleen McChesney's words as she left her post recently as head of the U.S. bishops' child protection office: "The crisis of sexual abuse of minors within the Catholic Church is not over."

If some Catholic bishops still don't get it, at least prosecutors like District Attorney Bill Hill do. His probe into the Dallas diocese's handling of sex abuse allegations is heating up.

One of Bishop Charles Grahmann's allies, cathedral rector the Rev. Ramon Alvarez, testified on Tuesday before a grand jury, reportedly over the child pornography arrest of his friend, the Rev. Matthew Bagert, who is also a staunch supporter of the bishop. Bishop Grahmann and former Dallas coadjutor Bishop Joseph Galante clashed over Bishop Grahmann's refusal to suspend Father Alvarez after the rector admitted to inappropriate contact with a man.

Such pursuit of truth is important. But there are critical questions that no grand jury can answer, such as: When will the American bishops grasp the damage they are doing to the Church's moral authority? When will the Vatican?