

From Boston to Los Angeles to Oakland, Catholic Church officials have sought to downplay explosive media reports about priests sexually abusing children.

Despite all evidence to the contrary, time and time again church officials claimed that these were isolated examples of deviant behavior.

Now, a MediaNews investigation has found that sexual abuse within the parishes and schools run by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Oakland was far more extensive than what church officials disclosed to the public.

After examining tens of thousands of pages of court documents, church records and police reports, MediaNews reporters made this shocking finding: Catholic clergy members accused of abusing children served in three-fourths of the parishes in the Diocese of Oakland, which covers Alameda and Contra Costa counties — and all seven Catholic high schools run by male clergy. Virtually no community escaped unscathed.

The MediaNews investigation paints a disturbing portrait of rogue clergy members allowed to run amok. The abuse was the worst in outlying smaller towns. Antioch, Byron, Dublin, Martinez, Newark, Piedmont, Pinole, San Leandro, Hayward, Fremont, Concord, Castro Valley and Union City all had priests and clergy members accused of molesting children either in the Oakland Diocese or elsewhere.

A number of those accused continued to serve in leadership positions and continued to abuse children over and over again.

The MediaNews investigation also showed how, despite the "apology services" of Bishop Allen Vigneron, who began visiting parishes to apologize for the behavior of deviant priests, the diocese has continued to hide the extent of the abuse. Vigneron has named 12 accused priests.

But in fact, according to the MediaNews investigation, at least 64 priests accused of abuse either in the Oakland Diocese or elsewhere have served in area parishes and schools.

More than a third of those were never named outside of court records or linked to the Catholic diocese until their identities were disclosed in the MediaNews investigation.

Catholic officials' standard operating practice was to order predatory clergy to get treatment, then shuffle them to other parishes, leaving them free to victimize other children. Church officials' went to great lengths to cover up for and protect rogue priests.

They almost never went to the authorities to report abuse. And the few times that parents and neighbors made complaints about molestation to the police, no one was ever prosecuted.

In a 2005 court deposition, John Cummins, then head of the Oakland Diocese, said that church officials had "good relations" with area district attorneys, "a kind of mutual collaboration, which I think was a very healthy relationship."

That preposterous statement illustrates the shocking disregard that many within the church hierarchy had for child victims.

Their failure to act is as criminal as the behavior of the priests who they tried to protect.