

July 17, 2007 - Statement by Barbara Dorris of St. Louis, Outreach Director of SNAP  
SNAP Press Statement, Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests

Statement by Barbara Dorris of St. Louis, Outreach Director of SNAP, the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (314 862 7688 home, 314 503 0003 cell) in response to remarks by a papal spokesman in an Associated Press story

Vatican spokesman Fr. Frederico Lombardi, apparently following a well-rehearsed script used by many American Catholic bishops, insensitively tried to divert attention away from the church sex abuse and cover up scandal. In doing so, he displayed the same defensive, arrogant, and insensitive attitude which helped caused this crisis in the first place.

The papal spokesman left many US Catholics and victims shaking their heads in dismay when he claimed that nameless "other institutions" should take nameless "measures" to protect kids. The AP quoted him as stressing that pedophilia was not specific to the Catholic church.

Everyone knows that most child molesters aren't clergy, almost every organization can do more to stop abuse, and many decision-makers try to hide wrong-doing in their organizations.

But everyone also knows that

- the most long-standing, far-reaching devastating, and widely documented cover up of thousands of child sex crimes has and is taking place within Catholic circles. Instead of admitting this, Lombardi pointed fingers elsewhere and suggested other institutions also hide abuse.

- in other institutions, cover up crimes, they are usually fired or disciplined. In Catholic circles, consequences for serious wrong-doing are virtually never meted out. Instead of admitting this, Lombardi

Everyone knows that many decision-makers try to conceal crimes within their organizations. Everyone knows that almost every organization can and should do more. Just yesterday, three Michigan university officials lost their jobs for deceiving the public about a murder on their campus.

But it's always disappointing and unseemly to watch a spiritual leader dodge blame and point fingers instead of taking responsibility. It's especially discouraging to see such disillusioning remarks on the very day 508 clergy sex abuse victims finally achieved a small measure of justice.

When clergy sex abuse cases get resolved - either through jury verdicts or settlements - many church officials seem incapable of responding in a truly pastoral way. Instead, they often rub salt into already deep and still fresh wounds of many victims and their loved ones:

- Just yesterday, Cardinal Roger Mahony's spokesman tried to diminish the horror of clergy abuse in LA by telling a radio host "with many of these claims, we don't know whether the abuse happened or not."

- Earlier this month, when a pedophile priest in Chicago was sentenced to prison for molesting boys on an almost daily basis in 2005 and 2006, an archdiocesan spokesperson claimed his crimes "were exaggerated."

- When dozens of clergy sex cases settled in St. Louis, the archdiocesan lawyer growled to a newspaper reporter "We can beat these people in court and they know it."

- When a jury convicted a Dallas priest of molesting 17 boys, a high ranking diocesan official publicly questioned "where the boys' parents were" and suggested they had a role in the crimes.

Blame shifting and finger pointing, especially with such unspeakable crimes and cover ups, are unbecoming of any religious figure, most especially a papal spokesman.

We are also skeptical of Lombardi's claim that the church will "participate as a leader in the fight against pedophilia." We hope but doubt this promise will be kept. Nearly every day in the US, and we suspect elsewhere, cardinals and bishops are fighting to protect the accused over the accusers and to preserve secrecy instead of creating transparency. In legislatures across America, highly paid church lobbyists fight tooth and nail to derail victim-friendly laws that would help expose predators.

The same AP story implied that Pope Benedict has taken a 'harder line' against clergy sex crimes than his predecessor. We disagree. He has made strong but oblique public comment about clergy abuse (calling it 'filth'). He has issued a slight disciplining of one notorious predator (Fr. Maciel). But given the magnitude of this ongoing crisis, this alone doesn't constitute a 'harder line' on abuse.

To his credit, the Pope has said "It is important to establish the truth of what has happened." But he has yet to take a single effective step to help the truth emerge. Indeed, he has remained silent in the face of backsliding by US bishops on the weak, vague reform promises they made just five years ago.

(SNAP, the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, is the nation's oldest and largest support group for clergy abuse victims. We've been around for 17 years and have more than 7,000 members across the country. Despite the word "priest" in our title, we have members who were molested by religious figures of all denominations, including nuns, rabbis, bishops, and Protestant ministers. Our website is [SNAPnetwork.org](http://SNAPnetwork.org))

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