

Study wastes parishioners' money

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BALTIMORE -

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops voted unanimously this week at a meeting in Baltimore to support research into why priests molest children. Bishops approved spending \$335,000 of parishioners' donations to explore the "causes and context" of clergy abuse.

"By approving the proposal, bishops are saying we are serious about this; we haven't retreated from our original position, and we'll stay on this until we can find the causes that prevent these terrible things from happening," said Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, archbishop emeritus of Washington.

How ridiculous. First and foremost, these "terrible things" happen to be felonies. Are the bishops members of Congress or men of the cloth? The need to understand the situations in which clergy abuse children speaks to a need to justify their crimes and those who aided, abetted and covered up, not root out the criminals.

If the bishops really cared about Catholics, the second thing they should do to priests caught abusing children is kick them out of the church. The first thing they should do is call police.

They should turn criminal priests over to secular authorities instead of abusing the cloak of confidentiality. These crimes are not mere sins that can be absolved by confession. And church authorities learn of the crimes outside the confessional process anyway.

Parishioners do not need to spend more money finding "causes." Their leaders have wasted enough over the years moving criminals from parish to parish to commit more crimes while paying legal fees and victim lawsuit settlements.

According to an earlier study from John Jay College of Criminal Justice — a division of the City University of New York and the same institution that will conduct the new study — Catholic parishioners and the insurance companies for the dioceses paid nearly \$573 million in legal fees, compensation for victims and treatment for both victims and priests from 1950-2002. The church itself has estimated total cost may eventually exceed \$1 billion.

It's hard to understand how this study will help anyone but the church elite. The results will be confidential, meaning that those priests who admit to wrongdoing will be shielded from both their parishioners and legal action. Besides, the earlier John Jay study found that nearly 5,000 priests and deacons abused more than 12,500 minors since 1950. It also provided detailed descriptions on the age and behavioral problems of abusers. What more does the church need to know?

If there is one thing Catholics should have learned by now, it is to go straight to police with any sexual abuse charges if they want justice.

The bishops' pronouncements this week about the "disordered" sexuality of gays and criticism of United States foreign policy hold no moral authority in light of their tolerance for criminal activity among their ranks.

To regain it they must state publicly their plans to cleanse from the church all molesters and those who shielded them over the years.

What better time than now. The recent reopening of the Basilica of the Assumption — the nation's first Roman Catholic cathedral — on its 200th anniversary gives them a prime opportunity to show that they care for both the church's structures and the faithful who fill the pews.