Clergy sexual abuse in 6 Catholic Dioceses in Pennsylvania, as documented in the August 2018 Grand Jury Report¹ (called “the Report” below), peaked strongly about 1980, after a gradually accelerating rate starting in the early 1940s. The number of credible abuses went from a few per year in the 1940s to about 15 per year in the 1960s, to close to 30 in the 1970s and peaked at 58 in 1980.

The Report documents the vilest cases of sexual abuse with children, mostly boys, mostly between the ages of 10 and 15. The abuse was made worse by the abuse of priestly trust, using their social authority to demand secrecy or enhance guilt in the victims. Also, church officials and civil authorities were slow to respond to the allegations and covered some of them up in various ways.

The Report contains detailed information, organized by victim/abuser incident but without identification of the victim. For many of the victims, the Report gives their birth year, sex, the calendar year of the first known abuse incident, and the identification of the abuser.

The Report gives much more information, when known, about the abusers: birth year, ordination year, death year, full names, diocese, their role in the victim’s life,
the number of victims, types of abuse, aggravating factors of the abuse, locations of the abuse incidents and any legal consequences.

Previous Grand Jury reports about Philadelphia and Altoona-Johnstown did not contain such detail, so the August 2018 Report is an opportunity to study many previously unavailable details about the abusers and the timing of their abuses over their careers.

The Report does not analyze the data but focuses on egregious abuses and institutional responses to them over the years. In this paper, I want to explore the data that the Report provided, many aspects of which are not apparent in the narrative of the Report itself. If there are lessons to be learned from this information, it seems important to uncover them and try to understand as much as possible about the patterns of the abuses, and about the effectiveness of the policy changes and educational efforts made in the 1990s and later.

**SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS**

1. Clergy sexual abuse incidents rose gradually from the 1940s, then rapidly from 1960 to the peak year 1980, then fell rapidly by the early 1990s.

2. The abusers were mostly born before 1950.

3. Those who abused during the peak years 1978-1982 had been ordained years before; some of the worst perpetrators had been ordained in the 1950s and 1960s.

4. Many of those who abused in 1980 and surrounding years had abused for years before then, and some afterward; the peak comprising the overlapping histories of those abuse patterns.

5. The percentage of all priests ordained after 1922 who ever abused or had credible allegations was 6% in Pittsburgh (consistent with the 2004 John Jay Report for other US Dioceses\(^2(2)\)), but a maximum of 1.1% abused in any year, and in most years the rates were half of that. Put positively, 99% of priests did not abuse in any given year, and 94% had never done so (never
had any allegations against them) during their career. About 1/3 of abusers had one allegation only.

6. The Grand Jury Report doesn’t provide denominators for the information it contains, so it lacks any statistical perspective. The Pittsburgh Diocese provided such information for this article.

7. Abusers were age 30-60 when they first abused, their ages quite evenly distributed.

8. Few men who were eventually abusers have been ordained since 1990: (11 in 6 Dioceses / total unknown, 0/112 in Pittsburgh)

9. Many eventual abusers started doing so in the first years after ordination. The Report has no information about their behavior before seminary, since they were not under Church supervision.

10. The rapid decline in new abuse incidents after 1990 has persisted through 2018. Few recent incidents have been alleged since then, though many new allegations about the peak period continue to be made. Allegations of abuse for more recent events have been made more promptly, so unreported recent abuses seem unlikely.

11. The historical causes of the rapid increase, and then the rapid decline, in clergy sexual abuse of minors, are probably many. I propose that those who were close to those events should write their memoirs for future historians to ponder. My observations and hypotheses are drawn out at the end of this article.
Data from the Report was extracted by Paul Sullins and his associates into a spreadsheet which he kindly made available to me and others in November 2018.\(^3\)

Since victims are identified in the Report only by the abuser identity and a sequence number assigned for multiple victims, if a victim is abused by more than one abuser, there is no link between them; they are therefore counted as separate victims, so the number of victims might be slightly over-counted.

Some figures label “incidents” instead of “victims”; effectively, they are the same, referring to one record (row) in the database, which is defined as above by the abuser and sequence number. If a unique identifier had been assigned to each victim by the Report, abuses of one victim by multiple abusers would be separate incidents, as would multiple abuses by the same abuser.

Victims and abusers for whom important dates are not known cannot be used in the analyses below, which accounts for small differences in the totals; for example, only 70 of 79 Pittsburgh abusers could be analyzed numerically.

### THE NUMBERS OF ABUSE INCIDENTS, VICTIMS AND ABUSERS

The data in Table 1 are important to give some idea of the magnitude of the abuses, but they do not say anything about the time course of the problem. There are no denominators offered, so one cannot say what proportion of clergy were involved. But incident dates, abuser birth years and ordination dates are available in the Report, and denominator information can be obtained from the dioceses or other
sources (this paper has denominator information for Pittsburgh only, so I will consider that diocese in more detail; it is also where I live).

Controversy has clouded the process of the Grand Jury\textsuperscript{4,5,6,7}, which solicited responses from the dioceses investigated, but seemed not to take their feedback into account. But for the purpose of this paper, only because the Report did not provide adequate basis to separate the guilty from the accused or possibly wrongfully accused, I will assume that those named have done that which they are accused to have done. But, I stress, this paper operates on such an assumption and is not intended to be used for passing judgment on any individual.

Those who abused many times might have done so before and after the reported incidents, but that cannot be known from the Report. Similarly, those abusers whom the Report claims abused only one time (97 of 268 for all 6 Dioceses, 24 of 79 for Pittsburgh) could have been mistakenly so judged, but that again is not knowable from the Report. Responses from the dioceses affirm that some allegations were poorly documented and not able to be investigated (the identity of the alleged abuser was not verifiable at times, or the dates were unclear, or the allegations were based on second-hand information, etc.)

**Abuse Incidents by Calendar Year**

Figure 1 shows the number of victims for each year since 1934 (the dotted line is a 5-year running average, in this and other figures below). The peak year was 1980, when 58 victims were abused by 28 abusers; the Report gives the year of the first incident for each victim; but for some victims, multiple abuses by the same abuser, sometimes extended over several years, were documented. The dates of the subsequent incidents are not documented, however, so the graphs show the minimal number of incidents.

The peak year was 1980, but the buildup to that year began gradually, accelerating in the late 1960s, then falling rapidly in the late 1980s and 1990s. Each of those phases is important to the current analysis and will be explored in more detail below.
Figure 1. Abuse Incidents by Calendar Year (6 Dioceses)
The Pittsburgh data are similar, with a peak of 19 incidents in 1975, again showing the gradual increase before 1975, then an accelerated rate in the late 1970s, peaking in 1979, and declining rapidly in the late 1980s.

Figure 2. Abuse Incidents by Calendar Years (Pittsburgh)

**FURTHER DETAILS ABOUT THE VICTIMS**

Looking at the Report data in this numerical mode should not detract from the deep damage done to many of the victims, some of which are documented in the Report, but that is not the focus of this paper. I am a psychiatrist with 43 years’ experience; I have treated many abuse victims over the years, so I know the severity of the damage that can be done. Each case is different, however. The suffering endured and the damage to the emotional growth of the victim depend on many factors, such as their age when the abuse started, the frequency and duration of the abuse, the relationship if any to the abuser (family, other socially-related adult or older child, clergy or teacher or other socially endorsed adult, or stranger), manipulation of the victim by threats or guilt-inducing statements, physical violence or threats of it to
the victim or their family, and the real moral threat that the victim will be shamed or treated badly if they should try to tell responsible adults. The possibility of family breakup, when the abuse is by family members, looms large for most children or adolescents, which adds to their guilt and fear of telling.

Sometimes the future abuser has “groomed” both the parents and the child for months or years before any sign of abuse happens. He may be “best friend” of the father, idealized by the whole family because of his prestige as priest or coach or teacher or another respected figure. And he can be genuinely charming both to parents and children. Victims can be selected by the abuser because of their good qualities or attractive appearance, or because they are already vulnerable: lonely or socially isolated for any number of reasons; troubled at home by absent or unavailable or sick parents; or unusually trusting and affectionate to the abuser because of their authority or social endorsement.

**The Age of the Victims**

Little is known about the individual victims of abuse from the Report, for reasons of privacy of those individuals. But the birth year is part of the information given for 596 of the 1057 records (another 334 were listed as “child”). For 999 of the victims, the year of first abuse is known, so for those for whom both years are known, one can calculate their age at the time of the abuse. The 5-year running average peaks about 13 years old, but the number of victims between 12 and 17 are all in the same range; victims 6-9 years old total 73 over the years, and 5 victims were 3-5 years old.
Figure 3. Victims by Age (6 Dioceses)

The data from Pittsburgh are similar:

Figure 4. Victims by Age (Pittsburgh)
The Age and Sex of the Victims
The victims were 797 male and 179 female (22.5% female) and 81 were not documented.

![6 PA Dioceses: # of Victims at each Age and Sex](image)

Figure 5. Victims by Sex and Age (6 Dioceses)

The Birth Years of the Victims
The Report doesn’t give the birth year of the victims, but for 516 of 1057 it can be calculated from the incident year and the victim age at that time. The other 541 lack either the age at the abuse (some are listed as “child” or “adult” or “elderly” or unknown, which shows that the data are not complete, even though it is better than any I know for similar populations). The riskiest years to be born fell between 1956-1974, totaling 344 of the 516 (67%), and then the risk fell off sharply.
FURTHER DETAILS ABOUT THE ABUSERS

The Report has much richer information about the abusers than the victims: their full name, date of birth and diocese, their ordination year, year of death, legal convictions (if any), and information about victims at their first abuse by him.

Abuse Incidents and Abusers by Calendar Year

The graphs below show total abuse victims for each calendar year (those abused the first time in that year). The same information given previously focused on the total numbers of victims (Figures 1 & 2), but here each abuser is represented by a different color on a bar, the length of which represents his or her contribution to the total bar height (number of abuse incidents). Some bars are dominated by one abuser’s color, or several. The 268 colors are too hard to distinguish reliably, but the
color bands give a picture of the complexity of the totals, such as the number of abusers in each year, and the relative numbers of victims attributable to each.

Figure 7. Abuse Incidents and Abusers by Calendar Year (6 Dioceses)

Figure 7 does not give a clear history of abuses by individual abusers over time. Figure 8, however, shows a condensed view of all abusers over many decades. The peak years 1960 – 1990 are clearly seen as a horizontal “cloud” that rapidly fades after 1990. The individual abusers, shown in one column, are not well traced here because of the compression of the image, but will be clear in subsequent graphs, and can be individually identified in the underlying data if there is a reason to do so. The February 2004 report of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, entitled *The Nature and Scope of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States 1950-2002*, documents the same general trends in abuse, but for most of the dioceses in the country; their report is carefully anonymized, so that nothing can be known about the individual diocese or religious order involved, about the individual abusers or their seminary history, or about the victims. Their data do include
information about the total number of clergy from the various dioceses, so they are able to calculate rates of abuse (the PA Grand Jury Report does not have any such information, and so it lacks statistical perspective; there are no denominators for their numerators, which is akin to statistical malpractice; such information could have been had for the asking since it is public information).

The John Jay Report showed that, already in 2002, a decline in abuse rates was clear, but now 16 years later that trend has continued and stabilized.

Figure 8. Abuser Histories 1940-2017 (6 Dioceses)

The abuse history of the 6 Dioceses is shown in a “heatmap” that shows the calendar years on the vertical axis. Each column represents one abuser, which is hard to see here, except for a few abusers who abused each year and make a long vertical bar. The colors represent the number of abuse victims in a given year, if any, for that abuser. Clear is none, dark blue is 1, and higher numbers go from yellow to orange to red. The numbers in the squares, if enlarged to be visible, are the actual abuse incidents credibly alleged for that abuser by the Report.

The Pittsburgh data are similar, though at a lower peak of 19 incidents, in 1975, again with abusers identified by color:
Figure 9. Abuse Incidents and Abusers by Calendar Year (Pittsburgh)

Figure 10. Abuser Histories 1934-2016 (Pittsburgh)
Birth Year of the Abusers

The graphs by calendar year (Figures 7-10) show the number of victims of each abuser and which year they happened. But the Report also has other information such as birth year and ordination year that might help understand the history of clergy sexual abuse between 1960 and 1990.

The birth years of the abusers for 6-dioceses show considerable scatter (Figure 11), with perhaps more births in the 1930-1944 range, but with other scattered years also high. I conclude that no single birth cohort explains much of the future abuse incidents. A period 1915-1921, after World War I, had low frequencies; another low period occurred during the Great Depression 1929-1933; and another seemingly sustained lower rate after 1950.

Most of the eventual abusers were born before 1950 as is seen in Table 2, and graphically in Figure 11. The drop after 1950 is curious because these boys grew up during times of much turmoil in the Church and in society, as discussed below. A link to the sharp decline in abuse incidents in the 1980s and 1990s is possible.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>total unique abusers</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>abuser born 1985</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>abusers born 1986-2018</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Birth Years of Future Abusers
A similar graph showing only Pittsburgh birth years (Figure 12) shows some similarity to the 6-diocese graph (which includes the Pittsburgh data), except that 4 specific birth years have much higher abuse totals: 1934, 1938, 1944 and 1948. One could speculate that the 1938, 1944 and 1948 bars were World War II related, but how that might have occurred could only be known if extensive details about those abusers were known.

The abuser colors show that 2 or 3 individuals contributed most of the eventual abuses in each of those years. Further detail about them might shed some light: were they fatherless from the war during their youngest years, either by absence or injury or death? Did their families break up during that time? Was the high anxiety of war somehow a contributor to their eventual behavior? But, of course, most of the to-be-clergy born during those years were not apparently so affected, so to study the issue one would need to get down to individual biographies (a difficult task, to be sure).
Figure 12. Birth Year of Future Abusers (Pittsburgh)
Abuser Age at the First Known Abuse

I calculated the abuser’s age when they made a first abuse, as far as the Report data show. Since most priests are ordained in their late 20s or early 30s, one would not expect the data about future abuse to be different from that shown for ordination year. But the following graph (Figure 13) of abuser age at the time of abuse is a reminder that no specific age is typical of abusers. The average age is about 40 years, but since the distribution is so broad, the average is not so relevant itself. The pattern in Pittsburgh is similar; the age of 59 abusers is known, 20 not known (Figure 14).

![6-Dioceses: by Age of Abuser at Incident](image)

Figure 13. Abuse Incidents by Age of the Abuser at First Known Abuse (6 Dioceses)
Figure 14. Abuse Incidents by Age of the Abuser at First Known Abuse in Pittsburgh

**Abuser Ordination Year Correlations**

Another plausible hypothesis about the pattern of abuser history is that the year of ordination might determine the abuse potential. Could a certain range of ordination years have included a disproportionate number of eventual abusers, either because of selection criteria of seminary applicants, or due to specific influence by the staff of the seminary in those years? If the ordination years show strong correlations with future abuse incidents or with the number of abusers, specific issues might be studied, such as which seminaries they attended, what criteria were used to assess applicants, which individuals were responsible for selection of applicants, and which teachers or mentors were influential during those years.
Abuse Incidents by Year of Ordination

The 6-dioceses graph shows higher incident totals for those ordained between 1963-1976, but there were several ordination years during that time with low future abuse rates, so whatever caused the overall increase during those years wasn’t totally consistent. Several other ordination years in the more distant past also had higher rates: 1937 notably and in the postwar period 1949-1954. The 1937 peak was dominated by two abusers, responsible for 23 and 10 future incidents, respectively. Some other peak years were also due to a few abusers from that ordination year.

As seen in Table 3, which counts individuals by decades or ordination, shows that the 50s, 60s and 70s were the major contributors to the abusers of minors, but the 40s also had increased numbers over previous decades. The number of eventual abusers ordained after 1980 dropped sharply.
The same information viewed with colored bands for each abuser (Figure 16) shows great variations from year to year, some years dominated by one or a few abusers.

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
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<td>total unique abusers</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unknown Ordination year</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total known ordination year</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>abuser ordained 1898-1939</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>41 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>abuser ordained 1940-1949</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>abuser ordained 1950-1959</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>abuser ordained 1960-1969</td>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>abuser ordained 1970-1979</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>abusers ordained 1980-1989</td>
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<td>abusers ordained 1990-1999</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>13 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>235</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Abusers by Ordination Decade (6 Dioceses)
Similar graphs from Pittsburgh (Figure 17) show 5 peak ordination years of future abuse incidents: 1963, 1964, 1970, 1974 and 1975. Several of those peaks were due to one or two individuals who abused many times in future years. Those specific ordination years might be suitable for further study by diocesan officials in order to learn why those years stood out.
Ordination Years of Future Abusers

The ordination years of clergy who later began to abuse children and youth are shown in this graph; the vertical axis is a count of those who were ordained that year. The numbers peak in the 1960s and 1970s, but the increase is gradual from the 1940s. After 1978 the numbers drop more rapidly than they rose before that, so that by 1986 just one eventual abuser per year is ordained, two in 1991 and 2002.
Figure 18. Ordination years of Future Abusers (6 Dioceses)
Figure 19. Ordination years of Future Abusers (Pittsburgh)

The Pittsburgh graph (Figure 19) is like the 6 Dioceses graph, with 4 ordination years producing 4 or more eventual abusers: 1963, 1964, 1970, 1974.

The ordination years of those men who would in time abuse children or youth show overall similarity to the graphs of abuse incidents (Figures 1 & 2) for those same decades but shifted a few years earlier. There are, however, large variations from year to year.

*Abuse Incidents in the Post-Ordination Years*

Several reasonable hypotheses about how the year of ordination might correlated with eventual abuse by a priest: he might start abusing soon after ordination if he has had an active sexual life before or during the seminary years; he might begin during the first few years as a new priest, enjoying the relative freedom from seminary life, but perhaps also being supervised by an older pastor; or he might begin to abuse after he is established as a pastor himself, being more confident with
experience, but also unsupervised, and having fewer constraints on his time and money.

Figures 20 & 21, however, show a great range of abuse incidents after ordination. The individual abusers are identified only by their color in these graphs. If a given clergyman was active in several years, he would affect the totals over that span. Despite that limitation, the graphs show no narrow band of post-ordination abuse frequency. For some, abuse incidents started during the same year of ordination, a few even before that, and many abuse incidents were begun during the first years after ordination; other men started to abuse 10 or 20 or more years after ordination.

Figure 20. Abuse Incidents Before and After Ordination (6 Dioceses)
Data from individual abusers can be seen on Figure 21, in which the “heat map” shows years from ordination on the vertical axis, and each abuser is represented by one column; the colors are described with Figure 8. Note that most of the abuse incidents occur in the first 15 years but continue many years after for some abusers. The graph shows that the abuse pattern of individuals varies highly after ordination. In a few cases abuses were documented before ordination as well.

The data from Pittsburgh (Figures 22 & 23) are like that from all 6 dioceses.
Figure 22. Abuse Incidents After ordination (Pittsburgh)

Figure 23. Individual Abuser Histories After Ordination (Pittsburgh)
**First Abuses after Ordination**

If the count of abusers after ordination is restricted to their first abuse incidents, the picture is somewhat clearer. The first abuses peak in the early years after ordination. The subsequent abuses are commingled with those who began to abuse later in their ministry, which would explain that graphs of all abuse incidents show a gradual decline after ordination. A few abuses were done before ordination according to the Report.

![Graph showing first abuses in the years after ordination](image)

**Figure 24. First Abuses in the Years after Ordination (6 Dioceses)**
Figure 25. First Abuses in the Years after Ordination (Pittsburgh)

Figures 24 & 25 show a pattern of higher first-abuse incidents in the first 10 years after ordination, with gradual reduction over the following 20 years.

That younger men might abuse more frequently is not surprising, but it is surprising to me that the onset was so soon after ordination. I doubt that men who were sexually naïve, not previously active with adults or youth or children, would suddenly start behaving that way soon after ordination. My best guess is that those recently ordained men had been sexually active before they entered seminary or had started to be so during their seminary years. The eventual abuser may have been sexually active with adults of either or both sexes before, during or after the abuse documented in the Report.

The Report doesn’t address the possibility of previous sexual activity, since the role of the Grand Jury was restricted by design to abuse of children and youth while under supervision of the Church\(^8\).
Detailed Pittsburgh Ordination Data

Numbers need denominators so that the true scope of an issue can be seen. There were 54 murders in Pittsburgh in 2018, a terrible thing, yet the 300 thousand population of the city (the denominator) puts some perspective on the number 54 (the numerator). The official rate for Pittsburgh was 18.4 per 100,000 population, which ranked 48th of 63 metropolitan areas for that year. The only acceptable number is zero, as it should be for sexual abuse of children or youth.

The Pittsburgh Numbers

The Diocese of Pittsburgh provided a table with the numbers of active priests back to 1900, the number of men ordained to the priesthood since 1922, the number of parishes and parishioners also for each year. Those numbers serve as denominators for other data from the Report. I don't know of any other study so far that has such denominators for specific dioceses (the John Jay Report has grouped its data by size of diocese only, with individual ones not named).

Therefore, the Pittsburgh information is much more complete than the Report itself makes available.

Table 4. Pittsburgh Data Organized by Ordination Year Decades

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>abusers</th>
<th>total</th>
<th>% abusers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1922-1940</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940-1949</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>4.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>1950-1959</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>7.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>1960-1969</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-1979</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-1989</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-1999</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2018</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>totals</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>1217</td>
<td>6.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows that a much higher percent of men ordained in the decades from 1950 to 1979 became abusers compared with the decades before and after.
Since 63 of the 70 total Pittsburgh abusers were ordained from 1940-1980, Figures 27 is limited for simplicity to those years. Only 4 eventual abusers have been ordained in Pittsburgh since 1980, in scattered years, and none since 1990, so those are the critical years (one man listed in the Pittsburgh files was ordained in another country in 2002, and was visiting on a fund raising trip for only a few days when he abused a young woman in the Pittsburgh Diocese, so I did not count him).

Figure 26. Future Abusers (in Red) ordained 1940-1980 (Pittsburgh)

The figure clarifies that the 20 ordination years starting in 1957 had the highest numbers of future abusers, but the numbers varied much from year to year.

**Peak Pittsburgh Abuser Ordination Years**

The abusers from the peak years, 1963, 1964, 1970 and 1974, committed 122 abuse incidents. Figures 27 & 28 show incidents from those 4 peak years and how the abuses continued in following years.
The same data can be shown in a “heat map” that shows the ordination years more clearly. The graph shows each of the 4 peak years in a row; the colors represent the number of abuse victims in a given year, if any, for that ordination year group. Clear is none, dark blue is 1, and higher numbers go from yellow to orange to red. The numbers in the squares are the actual abuse incidents credibly alleged for that ordination group in that year in the Report.

For example, the 1964 ordination year had no abuses from its group until 1970, the 1974 group has abuses already in 1975.
**Pittsburgh Abuser Percentages**

The Diocese of Pittsburgh provided data on the number of active priests since 1900, as well as number of parishes and total registered parishioners since 1934. The number of active priests has varied much over the years. The numbers swelled during World War II, which means that more men entered the seminary a few years before, during the build-up to it.

![Graph of Active Priests in Pittsburgh](image)

Figure 29. Active Priests in Pittsburgh Since 1900

I also culled from the Report the number of unique abusers for each year, not just the number of abuse incidents, so that the numerator would be more meaningful. That number peaked at 11 in Pittsburgh, also in 1980 (Figure 30); the shape of this graph is like those above that show total abuse incidents over the same period (Figures 9 & 10).
Then, considering the number of active priests in the diocese in each year (the denominator), calculation of the percent of those who did any abuse that year is easy. My conclusion is that for several years around 1980 about 1% of the Pittsburgh clergy abused at least once. An abuser may have been counted in the other years as well. The positive news is that 99% of active priests didn’t do so each year, and for most years the percentage of abusers was even lower (Figure 31). Those percentages fell sharply in the later 1980s just as the abuse incidents did in Pittsburgh and in all the 6 dioceses studied in the Report.
Figure 31. Percent of Priests Who Abused Per Year (Pittsburgh)

ABUSERS IN THE PEAK YEARS 1978-1982

Peak Abuse Year 1980

The temporal patterns of abuse by individual abusers can be studied, one by one, but it is easier to see them in graphic form. The graph is simpler if one abuse year is chosen, or a few of them, so I chose the peak year of 1980 for special attention (Figures 32 & 33), and then the range 1978-1982 to be sure those 5 years were like 1980 (Figures 34 & 35).
A total of 58 abuse incidents were reported in 1980 for the 6 Dioceses. Of the 28 men who abused in 1980 (Figure 32), 13 had no allegations before that year, but the others had abused in previous years, some even decades before. One abuser, shown in the yellow column, abused two victims every year from the 1968 to 1984. Four men abused 5-8 times in 1980 (red cells); only one of them had abused previously.

The peak year of 1980, then, was not due only to several new abusers, but was the sum of those whose histories of abuse overlapped that year. Another conclusion is that the number of 1980 abusers who continued to abuse from 1981-1990 was much fewer, a total of 32 incidents, 19 by 4 abusers.

The Diocese of Pittsburgh data show a similar pattern (Figure 33).
Figure 33. Abusers in 1980 and the Abuse History of Each (Pittsburgh)

The Pittsburgh graph represents 11 abusers, only 2 of whom hadn’t abused previously. Five abused after 1980, once each for 4 of them, 5 incidents for the other, none after 1990.
Peak Abuse Years 1978-1982

In order to be sure that 1980 was not unusual in its patterns, I also made similar graphs of the years 1978-1982.

Figure 34. Histories of Those Who Abused in 1978-1982 (Peak 1980) (6 Dioceses)

The graph in Figure 34 shows that many of the 79 who abused 1978-1982 had abused in previous years or decades. They abused less in future years, some intermittently for another 20 years. Those who abused more victims (orange and red squares) were more active during those peak years.
The Pittsburgh graph in Figure 35 shows that 15 of the 25 men who abused 1978-1982 had also abused in previous years, and 12 abused also in the years after 1982, but only one after 2000.

Figure 35. Histories of Those Who Abused In 1978-1982 (Peak 1980) (Pittsburgh)

**Ordination Years of 1978-1982 Abusers**

Those abusers who did so during 1978-1982 peak years, as seen above, often abused before and after those years. Another way to view their profiles is to map their ordination years (Figure 36). Perhaps not surprisingly, the ordination years were scattered in the years before 1978. The heat map numbers represent the total abuses alleged during the career of the abuser, not just in the 1978-1980 period (the totals are slightly higher than in other graphs because some incidents that were not dated were included).
Birth Years of 1978-1982 Abusers

The 1978-82 abusers were all born before 1953. The heatmap shows that many were born long before 1950, and that some of the worst life-time offenders were born from 1935-1948.

Figures 36 & 37 for 1978-1982 abuse years reinforce those of Figures 11-14 for all abuse years, showing that the abusers were diverse in their ordination years and birth years, not a narrow cohort, and yet they come to their peak of abuse in the same years and then mostly stopped in the following few years. Later sections of
this paper will explore possible explanations for both the rise and decline of the abuse during the 1960-1990 time frame.

**ABUSERS WHO ABUSED MULTIPLE VICTIMS**

Some abusers did so only once (24/79 in Pittsburgh, 97/259 for 6 Dioceses). Others went on to abuse many times, sometimes multiple different victims, other times abusing the same victim many times, sometimes over a period of months or years. Figures 38 & 39 display the complexity of those patterns. The higher bars represent abusers who abused the same victim multiple times. The rows coming out to the right represent individual victims of that color-coded abuser. In Figure 38, only 5 Dioceses (without Pittsburgh) are shown in order to simplify the view.
Figure 38. Various Abuse Patterns in 5 Dioceses, Not Pittsburgh

Figure 39. Various Abuse Patterns (Pittsburgh)
WHY DID ABUSE INCIDENTS RISE BEFORE 1980?

Summary: What the Data Say About the Abuse Rise

The graphs show that indeed there was a peak of abusers ordained between 1962 and 1975 (Figures 15, 16 & 17), but in some years few eventual abusers were ordained. The graph for Pittsburgh shows peak years 1963, 1964, 1970 & 1974. But most years before and after that range had 1 or 2 eventual abusers ordained.

The eventual abusers were ordained in increasing numbers from the late 1940s until the early 1980s. So, the hypothesis that seminaries ordained eventual abusers only shortly before the 1980 peak seems untrue. The abusers averaged 40 years at the time of the incidents, but the range was wide, 30-60 years old, not a clear cohort (see Figures 13 & 14).

Were certain seminaries seedbeds of future abusers, or did certain classes in those seminaries foster abuse? The Report has no information about which seminaries young men attended. Moreover, different dioceses often send young men to several different seminaries, or to several universities in Rome, for part of their training, and their education is not lockstep, so those ordained in a given year may not have had much time together. The John Jay Report also did not provide that information, though they may have gathered it. Individual dioceses could study that issue for their own ordained men.

Selection for seminaries may have been affected by other secular events. For example, young men in the early 1950s faced the draft for the Korean War, and in the 1960s again they had that risk. In 1971, amendments to the Military Selective Service Act ended student deferments except for “divinity students.” Perhaps some men who didn’t have constant college and graduate school deferments, or other reasons to be exempt from the draft, might have seen seminary as an attractive option, since taking that path would not have real commitments for several years.

I can speak from personal experience that being in college and medical school from 1958 to 1966 made me draft exempt, as did internship until 1968. At that point I
might have been drafted, but I chose to accept a research position at the National Institutes of Health, as an officer in the Public Health Service. I have heard that NIH never had so many qualified M.D. applicants as during those draft years!

After ordination, the eventual abusers started doing so, in most cases, in the first 10 years of priesthood (Figures 20-25). I speculate above that they were sexually active before or during seminary years, not necessarily with children or youth; their abuse pattern became visible to the Report only after they were in seminary or ordained, under supervision of the dioceses.

At the peak abuse year 1980, many of the abusers of that year had also been abusers in previous years, often decades before (Figures 32 & 33), but they abused much less after 1980. Similar patterns are seen in proximate years 1978-1982 (Figures 34 & 35).

**Historical Speculations on the Rise of Abuses in the Decades before 1980**

No doubt many cultural changes after World War II, especially after the economic recovery in the 1950’s, affected the men who eventually became priests, some of whom became abusers of children and youth. Each of us who lived through those times will have his or her own recollections and experiences. Someone who was in seminary during those years will have a much richer picture of that life than someone like myself who was immersed in medical studies and training for much of that period. Historians will want to know many such sets of thoughts and observations. Here are some of my observations which might illuminate the data of the Report.

In the study of history, everything correlates with everything else. We are surfers riding the giant wave of time, but backwards on our surfboards, seeing through a light fog what happens behind us but not what is coming. To pick a relevant example, if something changed around 1968, most of us who were there can generate a list of major events to try to understand it: the assassination of Martin Luther King and the urban riots that followed; the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy two months later; the ramp-up of the Vietnam War and opposition to it after the Tet Offensive by the Viet Cong; the protests that disrupted the Democratic Convention; Richard M. Nixon elected President; Pope Paul VI published *Humanae*
Vitae (which forbade artificial birth control, including the new chemical methods, and argued for the natural law reasons for doing so, despite many having already adopted that use); and the Detroit Tigers won the World Series in 7 games over the defending St. Louis Cardinals.

It is a matter of judgment for the historian, or for us citizens, to try to understand the causality and the links of these events to others. The sharpest increase of abuse incidents occurred in the 1970s, but probably was not due to the outcome of the 1968 World Series, to take a trivial example.

The 1950s and 1960s saw increasing availability of pornography, such as Playboy and other “men’s” magazines (each newer one being more openly pornographic), accompanied by open advocacy of non-marital sexual activity (the “Playboy philosophy” advocated by Hugh Hefner) linked to a “sophisticated” and consumerist lifestyle, fueled by advertising in magazines and sponsored chains of bars and nightclubs. The “objectification” of women and their bodies, so regretted now, was popular then, at least in the media and entertainment fields.

Under the banner of “freedom of the press,” all legal restraint of sexually explicit material was forgone, even when it depicted “man-boy love” and other forms of child abuse; novels that celebrated open sexuality of all forms received adulation by critics; societies were formed to promote such behaviors. The general culture became saturated with sexual images and ideas and behaviors, usually depicted as being sophisticated and liberated or liberating.

Yet, in the 1950s and 1960s, Catholics enjoyed a brief honeymoon from the many decades, even centuries, of vigorous persecution, sometimes by other Christians, often by non-religious writers, sometimes by rulers caught up in the religious struggles of the 1600s and later, and then by ideologically driven nation-states and secular religions (communism is the best example). Because of the large and competent Catholic school system, and large Catholic families, many lay Catholics advanced into the upper middle classes and into real prosperity as the century went on. The election of John F. Kennedy in 1960, with the brief interlude of “Camelot” joy that came with it, was one example of that change of mood. The President of Notre Dame, Theodore Hesburgh, was named “Person of the Year” by Time Magazine (a
major news outlet in those years) February 9, 1962 (the year I graduated from Notre Dame).

The start of Vatican Council II in October 1962 drew much attention to the Church, both for Catholics and others who hoped for radical changes, and for those who were leery of the confusion that had followed councils in the past. The attention the Church and churchmen received because of Vatican Council II, starting with the announcement in 1959 by Pope John XXIII, seemed to perpetuate the heady feeling of acceptance in general society, so for a time it seemed almost fashionable to be Catholic, at least to Catholics.

A Catholic intellectual flourishing in the earlier part of the century, in Europe especially, but also spreading to America, gave substance to that sense of “coming of age” and of being able to explain and justify it. I think that self-selection of young men entering the seminary was deeply affected by these cultural trends, so that going to seminary could be seen not so much as a self-sacrifice for God and the Church, for the “salvation of souls,” but as an intellectually stimulating and “trendy” thing to do.

The assassination of President Kennedy November 22, 1963 was a major setback but didn’t kill the optimism entirely. His family and friends were popular and wealthy, and his and their charms set a tone that endured for some years, despite the less romantic characters of his presidential successors.

Much confusion about the teaching and practice of the Catholic faith was occasioned by Vatican Council II. Both before and during the council, open dissent of some clergy and other “observers” made daily “breaking news” for TV and newspapers. The more daring the dissent, the better the news coverage. The Council bishops and appointed experts mostly refrained from public discussions of that sort, as they were obliged, so those voices of traditional teaching were muted. Any priest or bishop or Catholic journalist who advocated for changes was lauded in the press and became the “go-to” person for daily television news interviews.

After the council ended, it seemed that few had enough residual energy or interest to study the actual documents it promulgated. Many seemed worn out by the
incessant media coverage, and some were convinced that they understood “the Spirit of the Council” to be the major result—even the governing basis, “the hermeneutic,” for interpreting the documents. The result was enduring doubt about the teachings of the Church on many issues, perhaps especially on sexual and reproductive matters.

The doubts and ideas popularized before and during the Council were popular among seminary professors and other Catholic intellectuals; their tenured positions in Catholic universities provided a haven for teaching those doubts and ideas that lasted for decades.

Those years also happened to be a time of great growth in university size and wealth. I recall joking with friends that the greatest thing about being a new medical student at Harvard was that I didn’t need to hear any more that “we want Notre Dame to be the Catholic Harvard”; nobody at Harvard said that they wanted to be “the secular Notre Dame.” The ambition for Catholic universities to be among the best was strong even in the late 1950s. The Land-o-Lakes Conference of 1967 sealed the desire of the major Catholic Universities to compete with the famous research universities by rejecting control by the Church even in theological and disciplinary matters.

Then came 1968, as sketched out before. By then, Notre Dame and most other Catholic institutions had ended curfews, left the lights on all night, allowed men to invite women to their dormitory rooms, etc. One heard of priests and nuns partying together. Others left their convents and religious houses to be “more secular” by living in apartments with a few others, and many left religious life and priestly life in the 1970s.

I noticed even in the 1960s that many priests and religious had an exaggerated respect for psychiatric and psychological theories, the more “mystical” the better (Carl Jung), but also those that promised “scientific psychology” (Sigmund Freud, B.F. Skinner). Conferences of psychoanalysts and religious leaders were organized and published widely, even in the early 1950s. Many religious orders, especially of women, invited psychologists to give them retreats about the latest trends. The result was often the almost immediate collapse of many convents, the sisters
seeking “freedom from repression” hoping for “affirmation” and other ideals; perhaps some were indeed immature or complicated personalities, but that is another story. In any case, their formation and maturity were not up to the task of countering the cultural trends.

Contraception was openly advocated by many of the dissenters around Vatican II, so that many Catholics who previously would not have considered that option were convinced that the laws of former years were going to be abandoned; the prohibitions had, after all, been lifted by most Protestant groups for decades before. Some Catholic scientists had been pioneers in developing the contraceptive “pill.” So, by 1968, when *Humanae Vitae* was published by Pope Paul VI—clearly affirming the ancient teaching against contraception of any kind (except periodic abstinence from sexual intercourse in hardship situations)—open rebellion was in the air; many priests refused to preach on the topic, or were frightened by now-entitled users, or feared for collection-box reductions that supported the school systems and expensive properties that most parishes had developed. Many dissenting theologians and writers lobbied openly against the encyclical, causing further confusion.

The changes in general culture had their impact on Catholics as well. The gradual increase in abuse of children and youth, documented in the Report in the case of Catholic clergy, during the 1960-1980 period (see Figures 1 & 2 above) seems to me largely explained by these cultural changes; they were in direct opposition to traditional Christian and Catholic norms of purity and chastity, and when combined with the doctrinal and moral confusion described above, caused the collapse of many religious institutions and the flight of many priests from their ministry into marriage or other relationships.

As mentioned in the Summary #11 above, I suggest that those who were close to those events should write detailed notes for future historians to ponder; each person who lived through those times will have their own observations and thoughts, both about causes and possible remedies. In April 2019, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI did just that, assessing the history of the abuses and making his recommendations for future prevention. 9 His assessment adds his understanding of
the role of defective teaching of moral theology, and verifies that trends and changes during the years around Vatican II caused confusion and doubt among many Catholics, both laity and clerics.

**WHY DID ABUSE INCIDENCE FALL AFTER 1980?**

Why did the number of abuse incidents and the percent of clergy who were abusing fall off in the early 1980s? The peak abuse year in the Report was 1980. But in the next years the numbers of abuses for all 6 dioceses declined to below 10 per year in the 1990s, and fewer than 5 per year since 2000.

**Evidence That the Decline Is Real**

One cannot be sure that other more recent cases will not appear, since in the past allegations have often come forth decades after the abuse occurred. But Figure 40 shows that the delay from abuse to report has steadily shortened in the past 60 or more years.
Figure 40. Trends in Delay of Allegations Being Reported

The shortening of the delay to reporting of abuse incidents most likely is due to the great publicity about child abuse in the past 25 years, which has enabled more victims to be willing to testify about long-past abuse incidents, but also sooner after more recent abuse incidents.

Some victims will never come forward, for understandable reasons: they fear disruption of their lives, which could happen in so many ways, since privacy may not be guaranteed; they may know that others have reported the same abuser, so their additional report may not be so urgent.

We can see that with each public discussion of abuses, such as the 2002 Boston abuse revelations, and this Grand Jury Report, a wave of new allegations comes from those who were emboldened by the witness of other victims. I think, therefore, that the sharp decline in abuse cases is real, unlikely to be explained by delay in reporting of abuses done in the past few years.

The 2018 report from the external consultants of the USCCB\(^{10} \, ^{11}\) states “The peak of the curve is not moving forward or broadening as time goes on”, meaning that new allegations of past abuse fall into the same time period documented in the John Jay report in 2004 and in the USCCB report of 2012.

For the year ending June 30, 2018 for all the 194 participating dioceses and 126 religious institutes, 26 new allegations of abuse or boundary violations of "current minors" were made, of which 3 were substantiated, 6 still under investigation, 2 referred to religious orders, 10 unsubstantiated or unable to be proven (insufficient information), and 5 unknown clerics or not sexual abuse\(^ {12}\).

**Probable Causes of the Decline of Abuse Cases**

*Educational Efforts with Clergy and Laity May Have Worked*

The Church has expended much effort and cost, especially since the early 1990s, to require everyone who works with children, under sponsorship of the dioceses, to undergo education about child abuse.
Study programs were made mandatory, not only for clergy, but for any volunteer who wanted to take part in programs that dealt with children in any way. Modifications were made to physical plants to avoid isolated contact with children, and policies were instituted that adults should not be isolated with a child, both to avoid actual abuse, but also to prevent even the appearance of evil or the risk of false allegations. The evidence suggests that heightened awareness has worked to prevent future abuse cases by early reporting, and by putting potential abusers on notice that they will be discovered and prosecuted, and that allegations will be taken seriously.

**Legal Changes and Clarifications**

State laws were changed to broaden the mandated reporting scope, so not only physicians and teachers, but almost anyone who deals with children is now required to report suspicious behavior, then to be investigated by county youth services or by the police, or both. Those civil bodies have investigative power and have developed teams of qualified professionals to carry out the evaluation of the situation, within families or other cases. They can seek court order to remove children from abusive situations, or charge abusers if such crimes are found.

**Abusers May Have Voluntarily Left the Clergy**

The peak abuse year was 1980, and soon followed significant publications on clergy sexual abuse of children and youth. Jason Berry’s book *Lead Us Not into Temptation* was published in 1994, but documented abuse cases from previous years. Abusers may have realized, at this point, that the future was grim for them if they stayed in ministry. Already in the 1970s, many priests and nuns had left their vocations for greener pastures, so it was easy for the abusers to leave in similar ways. But I don’t know of studies of that possibility, which would require exit interviews and follow-up information about those who left from whatever source, which would be difficult and expensive to do. Abusers who had not yet had allegations against them would be afraid to indicate why they had left.
**Fear of Prosecution**

In the 1990s, perhaps earlier in some dioceses, more comprehensive policies were instituted which made clear that credible abuse allegations would be promptly referred to the police for investigation. Previously, in my experience, neither the hierarchy nor the police were eager to be involved; the dioceses were afraid of public scandal, and perhaps their lawyers warned of lawsuits, and they lacked real investigatory power beyond interviewing the alleged abuser and sometimes the one who had made the allegations; the police sometimes acted in deference to the clergy, and themselves had not yet developed a cadre of experts to do such investigation. But once such policies and coordination were in place, the likelihood of criminal prosecution became more threatening to abuser or would-be abusers.

**Pressure from the Bishop and Other Officials to Leave the Ministry**

Gradually during the 1990s and early 2000s, previous trust in psychiatric and psychological evaluation and treatment was found to be unwarranted. Even 6-month residential treatments, which were designed to treat clergy for addictions and sexual abuse, often didn’t prevent repeat offenses once the abuser return to active ministry. The realization of the limited efficacy of such treatment led bishops to push for severe restriction of the activities of the abusers, or to their expulsion from ministry, not soon enough in many cases.

**Historical Speculations on the Rapid Decline of Clergy Abuse Since the Early 1980s**

Such a strong pattern of decline in abuse frequency demands an effort to find a cause just as the sharp increase in abuse incidents before 1980 does. Numerous hypotheses will no doubt appear, some more plausible than others, for both the rise and the fall of those numbers.

I think that the election of Pope John Paul II caused a deep reorientation of clerical culture, though one still split in many ways by the aftermath of Vatican II. His pontificate was long (1978 to 2005); he was known as a fine philosopher as well as a strong bishop in his native Poland and has been given much credit for the breakup of the Soviet Union; he was popular for his great communication skills and deep writings, and he had been an active and influential participant in Vatican II. He
related well to young people and wrote cogently on marital and sexual issues, and he seemed to understand the needs of the laity living in a secularized society. I think he inspired many young men to consider the priesthood. After the troubles for Catholics in the late 1960s and 1970s, his election was felt by many as a new beginning.

His successor, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, as Pope Benedict XVI, had been John Paul’s close collaborator, so his accession continued the influence of John Paul. Effectively, little room was left for seminary applicants who might eventually become abusers of youth.

Seminary staff also became savvier about screening applicants, at least in Pittsburgh, for any character features that might predict sexual-abuse or other inappropriate behaviors. Professional psychologists frequently were recruited to help in that task.

The decline of seminary applicants in recent decades, which must have complex causes, resulted in smaller seminary classes, and probably fostered closer knowledge of the individual students. Any tendency toward addictions or sexual acting-out may have been harder to hide. Dioceses might be able to study such trends, but no public information is available about these private matters (such as the reasons men were not accepted for seminary, or why they left before ordination).

Besides being discouraging to Catholics, the abuse scandals will probably make recruitment for the seminary more difficult in the future. Despite the low percentage of child-abusing priests, approaching zero in the past 20 years as documented here for Pittsburgh, all priests must feel stigmatized by the acts of the few. Also, the increased workload of young priests, given the aging population of current priests, will be daunting to young men considering that vocation. Only the brave and the clean of heart need apply.
EVALUATION OF THE GRAND JURY REPORT

The 2018 Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report, for all the benefit of gathering detailed data that this paper addresses, lacked denominators for the abuses and abusers. So, putting it all in perspective is difficult. The emphasis on the most egregious cases, in anatomical detail, makes for disturbing reading, but fails to emphasize that most of these cases date back decades. The rapid decline in cases since the mid-1980s is also ignored in the narratives given.

These criticisms are extensively documented in a long article by Peter Steinfels in Commonweal 1/14/2019.

CHANGELOG

20190314 First Published on DrJohnPNelson.com
20190316 Added to Study of the 1978-1982 Peak Years: sections on the Ordination Years of the abusers, and on their Birth Years.
20190325 Update figure numbers, reconcile with website version
20190329 Correct x-axis labels Figures 21 and 23.
20190413 Add two tables: new numbers 2 & 3, summarizing birth years and ordination years of eventual abusers.
20190718 Edit of a phrase in the “Evaluation…” section to clarify it.
20190903 Added reference 9 to Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI letter; update Internet version with popup figure and table references, other details.
20191019 Added reference 12 to the 2018 USCCB report

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4 Peter Steinfels 1/14/2019: https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/pa-grand-jury-report-not-what-it-seems
8 Paul Sullins 11/1/18 http://www.ruthinstitute.org/clergy-sex-abuse-statistical-analysis