

Cardinal Maida says incidents are 'tragic'

from The Michigan Catholic Newspaper
March 1, 2002

[Newsweek](#) made it their cover story. ABC's "[Nightline](#)" devoted an entire broadcast to the story. [WJR Radio](#) came calling on the Archdiocese of Detroit.

The Boston Archdiocese's handling of a high-profile, emotionally charged sexual abuse of minors case, and revelations about other cases, have dominated the news. Half a world away, similar media attention is being paid to a misconduct allegation against a Polish bishop. (See [The Catholic News Service](#))

Cardinal Adam Maida says the incidents are "... tragic, no matter when or where they occur." Speaking as the chief pastor of the archdiocese, he adds, "... in the name of the Church, I apologize for any person who has been abused. All members of the Church and, most especially its leaders, have a sacred trust to act always as people of the highest respect for the dignity of others, especially for those who are most vulnerable, such as children."

The Detroit Archdiocese implemented a policy concerning the reporting of sexual abuse of minors by clergy 14 years ago. Archdiocesan Communications Director Ned McGrath says the question he gets most often now from reporters is: "How many cases have there been in the Archdiocese of Detroit?" Declining to give a "scorecard," he notes he issues a statement for publication when the archdiocesan policy requires action against a priest.

Additionally, Cardinal Maida notes that if a priest is found to be clinically unfit for ministry, he is not reassigned to a pastoral position within the archdiocese. "Perhaps the most important component of the archdiocesan policy," says the cardinal, is the offer of pastoral care to the victim and family. In addition, "We pray for the healing of those who seek to rebuild their lives after some experience of abuse," says the cardinal.

But with no decline of media scrutiny of these cases and the Catholic Church expected soon, Cardinal Maida has revised and reissued an op-ed piece he wrote for the *Detroit Free Press* 10 years ago. (See below.)

Media allegations of abuse: Breaking down the false impressions

By Cardinal Adam Maida
Archbishop of Detroit

Over the past several months, hardly a week has gone by without some published or broadcast report on Catholic priests and sexuality, often on priests and sexual abuse of minors. Some of this coverage may have created false impressions regarding the Catholic priesthood. As archbishop of Detroit, I feel compelled to offer the following commentary in hopes of adding some balance and perspective to this topic.

First of all, we all recognize that priests are human beings with the same limitations and temptations as everyone else. As religious leaders, however, we are expected to be models of virtuous conduct. Such expectations are entirely justified and I would acknowledge that the 800-plus priests in the Archdiocese of Detroit do their very best to live according to their commitment to celibacy.

There are regrettable times when individual priests may fail in one-way or another. But as the Lord Jesus reminds us, while we cannot condone the sin, we must always love the sinner, showing him God's mercy and compassion.

Sexual misbehavior of various kinds cuts across all classes of people in our society today; misconduct by clergy of all denominations mirrors that of the general populace. I do not say this to condone mistakes or faults of our Catholic priests but simply to help put such problems in perspective.

The Church's discipline of celibacy is not the root of sexual misconduct by individual priests. Such behavior flows from deep-seated psychological problems. As psychology and sociology tell us, sexual abuse of minors is unaffected by sexual orientation or gender, or whether the person is married or celibate. It is equally tragic to learn that the most frequent offenders are parents and stepparents.

Since 1988, the archdiocese has had a policy on reporting the sexual abuse of minors, which applies equally to all priests and employees working in Archdiocesan institutions (hospitals, schools, etc.). It is a policy with integrity. Since my arrival in Detroit, I have seen it tested and it works well. As the document states, the primary purpose of the archdiocesan policy on sexual abuse of minors is the safety of children, the well being of the community, and the integrity of the Church.

Any and all allegations of abuse are immediately investigated by a skilled assessment team. If the accusation is determined to be "well founded," several things happen. The alleged offender is promptly relieved of ministerial duties and we fully comply with the obligations of civil law with regard to reporting the incident.

As we reach out to the victim and the family offering spiritual care and support, we also refer the accused to appropriate medical evaluation and psychological intervention. Within the confines of respect for the rights of the individuals involved, we are as open as possible with the people of the parish or institution where the priest or employee had been serving.

Proportionately, relatively few priests out of the 53,000 in our country have been involved in the sexual abuse of minors. But even one case of a priest sexually abusing a child is one too many — a real tragedy because of the harm inflicted on an innocent and vulnerable person. For that reason, we try to do everything we can to ensure that our priests are healthy and balanced, worthy of the responsibility and respect confided in them.

The priesthood is a great gift and a wonderful way of life. It is possible to live as a celibate person and truly be fulfilled and joyful. As Catholics and people of various faiths see cases of priests guilty of the sexual misconduct of minors portrayed in the media, I

hope that they are not led to believe that this problem exists only in religious circles. Alone, we cannot solve a problem, which runs across society. But we can play a part in the solution, and we shall.

In closing, I pray that people will not misjudge the Catholic priesthood or dismiss the value of priestly celibacy. When properly lived, celibate priestly ministry is not only a benefit to society and to the Church, but a blessing for the individual as well.

*In the Archdiocese of Detroit, complaints may be made, in writing or by telephone, to:
The [Archbishop's Policy Delegate](#), 1234 Washington Blvd., C-1, Detroit 48226.
Telephone (313)237-5848*