

The Boston Globe

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To the judges of the Pulitzer Prize:

Late in the spring of 2001, Cardinal Bernard F. Law of Boston made a startling admission. In an otherwise routine court filing, he acknowledged receiving a warning that Rev. John J. Geoghan had molested children before he reassigned the priest to a job as parochial vicar at St. Julia's Catholic Church in Weston, Mass.

Reporters and editors at the Boston Globe decided to investigate whether the Geoghan case represented a pattern within the Boston archdiocese. Had Boston's bishops allowed other priests to remain in the ministry even though they had been credibly accused of abusing minors? How many?

The Globe decided as well that a court's confidentiality order covering church documents in the Geoghan case needed to be challenged. Serious, inquisitive reporting on the case to date had left the most important questions about Cardinal Law and the archdiocese unresolved, and the Globe was determined to get conclusive answers.

Citing an "intense and legitimate public interest" in the case and Cardinal Law's "indisputable status as a public figure," the Globe filed a motion to unseal papers that would shed light on what church officials knew about molestation accusations against Geoghan, when they knew about them, and how they responded.

The Globe's reporting and court challenge broke through a wall of secrecy that had shielded the church in the Geoghan case and during similar clergy sex abuse cases since the mid-1980s. Bishops and cardinals had long insisted the incidents were isolated acts by a tiny number of aberrant priests.

The Globe documented instead that the abuse was widespread, as was the cover-up, touching off the biggest scandal in the history of American religion. These reports led to a new movement among laity, a new state law requiring clergy to report sexual abuse, grand jury investigations, a revolt among Boston priests against their leadership, a national child-protection policy in the Catholic Church, and ultimately the resignation of Cardinal Law, once the nation's most influential Catholic prelate. By year's end, the scandal had forced the removal of 450 accused priests nationwide.

"Every detail of this sordid story has had to be dragged from the reluctant archdiocese, mostly by the dogged investigative reporting of the Boston Globe," observed columnist Bill Keller in the New York Times.

Even as it embarked on a solitary, months-long court battle to make documents public, the Globe called upon other tools to pry open what the church wanted to keep secret.

Using a computer database that drew upon the church's own directories of priests, the Globe tracked suspicious reassignments of priests over the course of decades. The Globe examined court cases throughout the archdiocese and conducted extensive interviews. So worried was the Boston archdiocese about the Globe's reporting efforts that its lawyer threatened in a formal letter to seek court sanctions against the Globe if it published any confidential documents or so much as interviewed a priest about them.

The first Globe stories, describing the Boston archdiocese's handling of Rev. Geoghan, were published January 6 and 7, and the public was infuriated at what it learned. Over a period of 34 years, the

Archdiocese of Boston and most recently Cardinal Law had thorough knowledge of Geoghan's pattern of sexual abuse but concealed it and returned him to parish positions that allowed him access to children.

Within days, Cardinal Law delivered the first in a series of extraordinary apologies. Later, under escalating criticism, the Cardinal announced a new zero-tolerance policy, vowing to oust any priest against whom a credible accusation of sexual abuse was made. And, under pressure, he agreed to turn over to civil authorities the names of all priests, past and present, who had been accused of abusing minors, even though such reporting was not then required under state law.

Still, the story got bigger. The Globe, succeeding in its court motion to unseal documents, was the first to publish their contents. They revealed how the Archdiocese showed deep concern for Geoghan's welfare even as it treated his victims and their families dismissively.

At the end of January, the Globe produced evidence of the full scope of the problem within the Boston archdiocese: Over the past decade, the archdiocese had secretly settled claims of sexual abuse against at least 70 priests. The Globe followed up with reports that detailed instance after instance in which the church had knowingly allowed abusive priests to stay on the job.

The Globe also sought to offer perspective, placing this scandal in the context of long-simmering issues within the Catholic Church.

Months of stories by the Globe and other newspapers revealed a nationwide pattern within the Catholic Church of concealing abuse by priests and a practice of shuffling abusive priests from parish to parish. The crisis in the church prompted an emergency meeting of American cardinals at the Vatican, and it dominated the agenda when U.S. bishops gathered for their annual conference in Dallas in mid-June. At year's end the Vatican authorized a new, far tougher policy on how American bishops should deal with clergy sex abuse.

When a newly formed and rapidly expanding lay group, Voice of the Faithful, called upon Cardinal Law to resign in December, it lamented that "the spiritual suffering has continued unabated for nearly one year, since January 6, 2002." Starting with our first story on that date, we at the Globe have recognized the special sensitivity of the subject matter and our overwhelming obligation to be accurate, fair and thoughtful. We also felt a duty to be persistent.

Father Andrew M. Greeley, the sociologist and novelist, wrote in the Chicago Sun-Times that "if the Boston Globe had not told the story of the church's horrific failures in Boston, the abuse would have gone right on. There would have been no crisis, no demand from the laity that the church cut out this cancer of irresponsibility, corruption and sin, and no charter for the protection of children. The Globe did the church an enormous favor."

The Globe is proud to nominate its coverage for recognition by its peers.

Sincerely,



Martin Baron
Editor
The Boston Globe