

From a young age, many children are told they can trust religious leaders. It is implicitly believed among society that children are safe in religious institutions and among the people who work there. Perhaps that is why, in the age of MeToo and Time's Up movements, the Catholic Church's sexual abuse scandals have shocked both the Catholic Church and the world. Sexual assault is a heinous crime, and the exploitation of a job designated for the people and a higher power is despicable. This was a violation of trust, both in a moral and religious sense.

Gilbert Gauthe was the first priest to garner nationwide attention to a case of a series of sexual abuse in 1985. Though he admitted to the abuse of 37 boys, he was only sentenced to 20 years in prison and released just 10 years later. A Pennsylvania Grand Jury released a report to the public over the summer of 2018 detailing how 300 priests from six Pennsylvanian dioceses abused more than 1,000 children. The report goes on to state that the priests used distorted religious reasoning to convince the children that the priests' actions were sanctified. In addition, there is evidence that other clergy knew about the incidents but never reported it. This report was released in the wake of Theodore McCarrick, now a former Vatican official and the former archbishop of Washington D.C., resigning from cardinalship after sexual abuse allegations surfaced.

From this, we can see how a pattern of cover-ups have tried to protect the accused priests rather than the victims. It goes without saying that innocent Catholics and their beliefs are not to blame. Rather, the church needs to guarantee proper investigations, preferably carried out by a third party source, in order to discover those who have hidden behind the holiness of religion to conduct their crimes and to set a clear statement of condemnation. In addition, efforts to reach out to long-ignored survivors of sexual abuse need to be taken by both churches and communities. Only by doing this can the Catholic Church start to take the steps to ensure that these crimes are not only avenged, but never happen again.