



EPISODE 2: HOW'S YOUR CELIBATE LIFE GOING?

Summary:

In this episode, we're trying to answer a big question: Why does abuse seem so prevalent in the Catholic church? Is there something about the church—or about priests—that causes abuse?

While this episode acknowledges the alarming rates at which abuse happens in secular society as well as in the church, we focus on two factors which are often blamed for the sex abuse crisis in the Catholic church: celibacy and gay priests.

Psychologist Thomas Plante has worked in the area of clerical sexual abuse for 30 years, and he describes the behaviors and traits that are common among abuser priests. Margaret Smith of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice gives us a deep dive on the data. She says that the statistics do not support theories that celibacy and gay priests caused the abuse crisis.

After looking at the data, Maggi asks three men a more personal question: How's your celibate life going? These men had different experiences of celibacy in the Catholic church, and help us to understand how the church can better help priests to live healthy, celibate lives.

Group Discussion Questions:

Does knowing that the sexual abuse of children happens at a similar rate in secular institutions and other religious denominations effect the way you think about abuse in the Catholic church?

Thomas Plante introduces the term situational generalist and argues that this is a much more accurate representation of abusers than the oft-cited "pedophile." Unlike pedophiles, who have an exclusive and recurring attraction to prepubescent children, situational generalists exploit their positions of power over vulnerable persons, including adults. Many have glossed over this distinction. How do you think the scientific diagnosis of situational generalists effects the way we approach the problem of sexual abuse?

What were your thoughts about celibacy before listening to this podcast? And then how did the personal reflections of Patrick Gothman, Father Fred Daley and Father Paddy Gilger, S.J. affect the way you think about celibacy and community?

One insight that emerged from the research was that neither celibacy nor homosexuality were to blame for abuse. And yet, the personal narratives revealed how limited our conversations have been around sexuality, loneliness and community. How might a culture of secrecy contribute to an environment where abuse happens?

RESOURCES FROM THE EPISODE

["No, homosexuality is not a risk factor for the sexual abuse of children"](#) by Thomas Plante in *America*

["What caused the crisis? Key findings of the John Jay College study on clergy sexual abuse"](#) by Kathleen McChesney in *America*

Patrick Gothman's ministry to queer Catholics:
vineandfig.co

[The Nature and Scope of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States, 1950-2002](#) by the John Jay College Research Team

[The Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests in the United States, 1950-2010](#) by the John Jay College Research Team