



## **The Greater Bay Area Child Abuse Prevention Council Coalition**

[www.bayareapreventchildabuse.org](http://www.bayareapreventchildabuse.org)

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### **WE AGREE WITH THE GRAND JURY**

The recent report by the Attorney General of Pennsylvania Josh Shapiro tells us that the Catholic church systematically looked the other way at child sexual abuse by its own clergy and they did it for decades. It says priests gave the children gold crosses as necklaces to mark them as being “groomed” for abuse.

The report describes the church operating behind what is called a “circle of secrecy”, relying on euphemisms such as “inappropriate contact” rather than the word rape. Most flagrantly, the church has relied on a pattern of non-disclosure and non-cooperation: not making police reports, withholding evidence, and delaying required reports.

This scandal reminds us of the hard fact that sex offenders can be found in any profession, in any faith, in any organization. We must be wary of our children’s environment and the adults they interact with. Child abuse prevention agencies, social workers and psychologists know the strategies and policies that keep our kids safe. As parents and concerned citizens it is our responsibility to seek those answers and put them into practice to prevent the abuse of children.

We must rely on the laws of our states and our country to attack this problem. We cannot accept a blatant disregard for laws in favor of canon law. By sweeping this under the rug, the church has in fact perpetuated and encouraged the sexual abuse of children.

The first recommendation of the Pennsylvania grand jury is to eliminate all criminal statutes of limitation on child sexual abuse. We agree with the grand jury. Clearly, sex offenders who avoid criminal prosecution by statutes of limitation have literally gamed the system and gotten away with it.

Mr. Shapiro and the Pennsylvania grand jury have dealt a body blow to parents and well-meaning Catholics everywhere. It is time to step up and do what we can to end this thoroughly preventable problem. The Child Abuse Prevention Councils that make up the Greater Bay Area Coalition provide proven strategies, programs and services that work to protect children from maltreatment at home, at school and on the playing fields. The Pennsylvania report imparts a great lesson - we must do more. It is time to make the necessary changes in our legal system to protect children and ensure them justice in our courts. We need to end the criminal statutes of limitation for child sexual abuse and we need to do it now.

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