

The Leadership Roundtable’s “Profiles in Leadership” highlight leaders who are committed to best practices for the betterment of the Church’s temporal affairs. These profiles are intended to inspire hope for and confidence in the best that the Church has to offer.

Profiles in Leadership: Kathleen McChesney, Ph.D.

Dr. McChesney is an expert in leadership and career development, personal security, and prevention and investigation of workplace violence and child abuse and is currently President of Kinsale Management Consulting. Dr. McChesney has a 32- year career in law enforcement, including 24 years as a Special Agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. She rose to the third highest position in the Bureau as Executive Assistant Director for Law Enforcement Services. In 2002, Dr. McChesney joined the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops as the first Executive Director of the Office of Child and Youth Protection. She directed the efforts of church personnel throughout the United States in implementing training and compliance programs to prevent child abuse in church environments. She is the co-author of Pick Up Your Own Brass: Leadership the FBI Way and co-editor of Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church.



When the Boston Globe published its now infamous first article on sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in the U.S., Dr. Kathleen McChesney had a unique perspective on the revelations. She says she was “surprised, as was the rest of the country,” but the surprise was coupled with the empathy for sexual abuse survivors that came from her years working on sex crimes in law enforcement. “I knew how devastating [sexual abuse] could be on communities and families,” McChesney recalls.

In the months and years that followed, McChesney played a critical role in the Church’s response to the abuse that continued to be reported. Under her leadership, the newly formed Office of Child and Youth Protection conducted two studies in partnership with John Jay College: one on the nature and scope of sexual abuse, and one on the causes and context of abuse. The studies helped to inform the steps the Church would take to prevent future sexual abuse moving forward, a vital part of the Church’s response to the crisis.

From her work on sex crimes as a law enforcement officer, McChesney knew there was another vital piece to the Church’s response: ensuring that survivors were responded to pastorally and compassionately by the Church. The Church had to make certain that “[survivors] realized they were believed and that they were respected for coming forward,” says McChesney. To this end, the Charter for the Protection of Youth and Young People was developed and approved by the U.S. bishops. The Charter lays out procedures for addressing allegations of sexual abuse of children and young people to be followed by all dioceses in the U.S.

In addition to the Charter, there was a huge need to address what McChesney calls the temporal facets of the crisis: the financial and human resource implications of the crisis then facing many diocese and parishes. This, says McChesney, is where the Leadership Roundtable had an immense role to play. During these tumultuous years, the Leadership Roundtable began lifting up the talents of lay groups and individuals, and urging that their gifts be brought to the table to help heal the Church. Looking back, McChesney realizes the many roles lay people had in the aftermath of the crisis. “[The] people doing instruction in abuse-awareness training, human resource management, background checks [for staff], people working in communications to help the church be more transparent, the people who do the compliance work, the people who did the studies...a lot of these were lay people,” she says.

When asked the most important leadership lesson she has learned during her long and varied career, McChesney chuckles. The list is long enough to write a book on, she says. And write a book she has. In *Pick Up Your Own Brass: Leadership the FBI Way*, McChesney details many challenges leaders face in their day-to-day work, offering suggestions from her own career. The biggest one, she says, is working with a team. “A leader needs to work with the team, select the team, [and] make sure there is a vision for the team,” she says, adding, “no one gets anything done by themselves.”

Interview and profile by Christina Ferguson.