

Fr. John J. Powell, S.J.



Figure 1 - John J. Powell, taken from <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/accused/powell-john-j-1956/>

John J. Powell was affiliated with Loyola University Chicago from 1960 until his retirement in 1996. He began teaching at Baden Springs College, a Jesuit seminary that was at the time part of Loyola. He then taught at Loyola University Chicago's Bellarmine School for Theology and later at the university's department of theology from 1965 to 1996 as an instructor. During this time he also wrote numerous best-selling self-help books on marriage and relationships.

Powell has been accused of sexual abuse of 7 girls over two decades, beginning in 1963. The first accusation against him was made in 2003, the most recent one dates to 2020.

The Jesuits and the administration of Loyola University Chicago were aware of Powell's history of sexual abuse at least as early as 1983, when one of Powell's earlier victims contacted the university's administration about him. Yet, they chose to ignore the accusations and to forward the letters sent to the administration accusing Powell of sexual abuse to the priest himself.

John Powell and the Jesuit order were charged in two lawsuits, both settled in 2005.

John Powell passed away in 2009.

John Joseph Powell was born in Chicago in the year 1925. As a child, he attended John B. Murphy Elementary School in the Irving Park neighborhood on the North Side of the city. For secondary school his parents enrolled him at Loyola Academy, which at the time was still occupying Dumbach Hall, located on Loyola University Chicago's Lakeshore Campus. Powell graduated from Loyola Academy in 1943. Later in that year he joined the Jesuit Order at the Novitiate of the Sacred Heart in Milford, Ohio. Five years later, in 1947, Powell joined the Jesuit Seminary at West Baden College in West Baden, Indiana, as well as Loyola University Chicago—of which the West Baden

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seminary was an affiliate.¹ In 1948 Powell was awarded a A.B. degree in philosophy from Xavier University. He then began his graduate studies at Loyola and West Baden. He earned his A.M. from Loyola and added a licentiate in Philosophy while working towards becoming a priest. He took his priestly vows 1956.

As a newly ordained priest, Powell first served for a year in the seminary at West Baden College, before moving to Cleveland where he lived at the St. Stanislaus Novitiate, working on his tertianship, the final stage of Jesuit training.² After completing this step, he spent a year in Rome at the Jesuit residence of College of St. Robert Bellarmine, where he received his Doctorate of Sacred Theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University. He then returned to the U.S. to teach at West Baden College starting in 1960. Since West Baden College was an affiliate of Loyola University Chicago, Powell was listed as a faculty member at Loyola University Chicago since 1960 in the undergraduate coursebooks. He moved back to the Chicagoland area in 1965, and joined the faculty at Loyola University Chicago's Bellarmine School of Theology in North Aurora, a Chicago suburb.³ Throughout his career Powell taught classes in theology at Loyola University Chicago.⁴

At the same time, during the early sixties, Powell became a frequent director of spiritual retreats, which he conducted for the Jesuits and later on his own initiative.

¹ "Religion: Spa to Jesuits," *TIME Magazine*, July 9, 1934, <https://web.archive.org/web/20101125083924/http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,769923,00.html>.

² "Tertianship," *Jesuit Vocations* (blog), accessed January 27, 2022, <https://beajesuit.org/jesuit-formation/tertianship/>.

³ Jeff Anderson & Associates PA, "The Anderson Report - Child Sexual Abuse in the Archdiocese and Dioceses in Illinois" (AndersonAdvocates.com, December 2019), 86, <https://www.andersonadvocates.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Child-Sexual-Abuse-in-the-Archdiocese-and-dioceses-in-Illinois.pdf>.

⁴ Loyola University Chicago, "Undergraduate Studies Course Catalog, 1983-1985," 1983, 391, https://luc.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO_354b6e37-5d0b-4755-9126-0646b53e5b9f/.

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Organizing and leading these activities allowed him to become close to devout Catholic families—the usual participants in such retreats. Through building these close relationships, Powell gained the trust and eventually also access to the families' underage children. The priest's first abuse of a minor took place while he was working as a visiting retreat director for St. Mary's College of Notre Dame University in November of 1963. Beyond a factual listing only very little detail on this case is available in publicly accessible records. The Jesuits added this entry as a credible accusation only in 2020, eleven years after Powell's death. This late listing indicates a possibility that more victims could still step forward in the future. And even though this was the most recent addition to Powell's credible accusations received, the entry also concerns the one incident that as of 2022 dates back the farthest, to 1963. The St. Mary's College accusation also appears on the list of the diocese of Fort Wayne/South Bend, Indiana on which the diocese chronicles child sexual abuse by Catholic priests that took place within its boundaries. At that time Powell was regularly assigned to West Baden College.

A 2008 legal complaint against Powell and the Jesuit province of Chicago argued that the order had been aware of at least some of Powell's abusive proclivities prior to 1966, the alleged date of his second abuse. He was accused the sexual abuse of the two daughters of a devout Catholic family in the northern Chicago suburbs in that year. Powell became close to this devoutly Catholic family, with two girls and three boys, living in the northern Chicago suburb of Winnetka after having first met the parents at one of the spiritual retreats he directed. The family's mother was worried about one of her daughter's decisions to become a cloistered nun.⁵ This context provided Powell the

⁵ Cathleen Falsani, "4 Women Sue Priest, Allege Sex Assaults," *Chicago Sun-Times*, September 9, 2003, Bishop Accountability, https://www.bishop-accountability.org/news/2003_09_09_Falsani_4Women.htm.

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opportunity to integrate himself with the family, the parents as well as the children. The daughters were daily communicants, the family attending spiritual retreats frequently. Active Catholicism was a central pillar of their lives. But their domestic life was not free of issues. The family stayed in contact with Powell after returning from the retreat, repeatedly inviting the priest to their home, which the Jesuit initially refused due to his busy schedule. This changed after the family's mother suffered a heart attack. Over time his visits became a frequent fixture in the family's household. Powell would hold mass in their home, dispense spiritual advice and offer himself as the children's confessor and personal counselor. He developed a close relationship with the youngest daughter of the family. He became her personal confessor, as well as her school tutor, mentoring her through seventh-grade school work. After he had inserted himself into the family's spiritual life in this manner, he began to repeatedly and frequently abuse this girl over the course of a year. During this time, he then also took her along on speaking engagements. Powell presented the teenager as an ideal, precocious, honest person who could develop into a better adult when following the guidelines Powell developed for inter-personal relationships.⁶

4 Women Sue Priest, Allege Sex Assaults⁷

Longtime Loyola prof, now ailing, accused of abuse in '60s, '70s

By Cathleen Falsani
Chicago Sun-Times
September 9, 2003

⁶ John C. Seitz, "Secrecy, Sex Abuse, and the Practice of Priesthood," in *The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Secrecy*, by Hugh B. Urban and Paul Christopher Johnson (New York: Routledge, 2022), 4.

⁷ BishopAccountability.org 2004; Cathleen Falsani, "4 Women Sue Priest, Allege Sex Assaults," *Chicago Sun-Times*, September 9, 2003, Bishop Accountability, <https://www.bishop->

Patrice Regnier remembers the priest taking her into the bedroom of her parents' Winnetka house to hear her confession.

But there was no confession. Instead, she says, the priest sexually assaulted her. He told her the crucifix had come to life and instructed him to do what he was doing to her. He told her God was watching.

Regnier was 13, and the Roman Catholic priest was a friend of her devoutly religious family who often said mass in their living room and stayed overnight. The sexual abuse continued for about two years, she said.

[Photo captions: Jesuit priest and best-selling author the Rev. John Powell, who Patrice Regnier accused Monday of sexual abuse. RIGHT: Powell, a friend of Regnier's family, is shown in 1965 or 1966 in Regnier's home with Regnier (right) and Regnier's sister.]

According to a lawsuit Regnier and three other women filed in a Cook County court Monday, the Rev. John Powell, a Jesuit priest, longtime Loyola University professor and best-selling author of Christian books, sexually abused them between 1966 and 1973.

Powell, 77, is the author of two dozen books -- many of them mixing Catholic theology and spiritual devotion with psychology and self-help -- that have sold more than 15 million copies.

A well-regarded counselor and retreat master described by admirers as "magnetic," Powell is now retired and living in a Jesuit convalescent home near Detroit. He is in extremely frail health, said the Rev. Daniel Flaherty, treasurer for the Chicago province of the Jesuits.

Powell, who was ordained in 1956 and taught at Loyola from 1967 until his retirement in 1996, was unable to come to the phone at the convalescent home Monday afternoon to speak with a reporter.

The three other women -- known only as "Jane Doe 49A-C" -- who filed suit with Regnier against Powell and the Jesuit order were college-aged girls when they say the priest abused them. One of the women was a student at Loyola. Another is Regnier's older sister.

An allegation of sexual abuse by Powell was reported to the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago in April, said spokesman Jim Dwyer. When archdiocesan investigators contacted the Jesuits to determine Powell's ministry status, they were told he was "unable to perform priestly duties any more," Dwyer said.

Neither Flaherty nor an attorney for the Jesuits could say whether the religious order had been aware of any allegations of abuse against Powell before Monday.

However, correspondence between one of the Jane Does and Powell indicates that his Jesuit superiors were aware of her allegation. After the woman sent a letter to Loyola's faculty director in February 1983 -- recounting a sexual encounter she says she had with Powell when she was 19 and home on Christmas break -- Powell wrote back to her, saying his religious superior had read her letter to him.

"I would like to invite you to write directly to me, to say whatever you have been thinking or feeling. I think it would be good for both of us," Powell wrote. Jeffrey Anderson, the woman's attorney, said she never heard directly from the Jesuits.

Regnier, 50, a professional choreographer for a modern dance troupe in New York City, met Powell when she was in seventh grade after her mother went on a retreat led by the priest.

"One of my sisters wanted to become a cloistered nun, and [my mother] was worried about that. So she brought [Powell] home," Regnier said. "One time when he was taking off my shirt . . . he told me about this nun who had opened her habit to poor children in Africa to give of herself, that she was nursing these kids. . . . Father Powell reached in and ripped out my soul."

According to John Seitz, Powell made his victim feel superior and specially privileged through the connection she had with him. This emphasized for her that he thought of her as someone special, and that the secret, abusive relationship they shared was indeed a part of something elevating. He would go so far as to relate to her stories of how he received visions from Jesus who stepped down from the cross and told him, personally, that pursuing the relationship with her was his holy duty.⁸ All of these issues ultimately made any of his victims speaking out against him less likely. Which in general rarely happened in cases of clerical sexual abuse. Accusing their abuser publicly meant speaking ill of a priest within a cultural context in which priests were by and large seen as more perfect people than any layman. The social context of their abuse discouraged

⁸ "Five Questions with John Seitz on John Powell, SJ," Taking Responsibility, accessed February 9, 2022, <https://takingresponsibility.ace.fordham.edu/five-questions-with-john-seitz/>.

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the victims from ever raising the issue with anyone else. Accusing a priest of sexual abuse ran the danger of self-ostracism in devout Catholic circles.⁹

The parents of the victims in Winnetka never had any suspicions toward John Powell, both because he was a member of the Catholic clergy, but also because he was their priest. He was a charismatic, well-educated and well-renowned man who frequently honored them with his presence. And since he was a clergyman, neither the parents nor the children questioned his requests for spending time with their daughters alone, be it for confession or counseling.¹⁰ Thirteen years after her abuse, in the early 1980s, one of the family's daughters stepped forward and exposed John Powell's transgressions to the administration of Loyola University Chicago. The only reaction she was met with was that she found out her letter had been passed on to her former abuser: instead of a reply from Loyola's faculty director whom she had addressed her letter to, this victim instead received a letter from John Powell, inviting her to engage in a conversation with him directly.¹¹

In 1968 Powell transferred from Loyola University Chicago's Bellarmine School of Theology to the university's main campus, where he would remain among the teaching faculty for almost twenty years, until 1996. That his Jesuit superiors were aware that he was guilty of numerous transgressions against mentees and even against students of Loyola University is a certainty as early as 1983. That the Jesuit administration did not transfer him away from the university and that the priest seemingly did not see any sort of disciplinary action makes his case, again, an outlier. In

⁹ Robert A. Orsi, "What Is Catholic about the Clergy Sex Abuse Crisis?," in *Anthropology of Catholicism* (University of California Press, 2017), 287,
<https://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520288423.003.0022>.

¹⁰ John C. Seitz, "Secrecy, Sex Abuse, and the Practice of Priesthood," 7.

¹¹ Cathleen Falsani, "4 Women Sue Priest, Allege Sex Assaults."

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the majority of cases in which a priest's sexual transgressions against minors became known to his church superiors, the priest in question was usually just quietly transferred to another congregation. Donald McGuire, for instance, who spent time as a graduate student of philosophy at Loyola University Chicago in the 1970s while John Powell was teaching at the Department of Theology, had effectively been re-assigned to this position. McGuire's superiors at the Jesuit-run Loyola Academy high school in Wilmette, where he had been assigned as a teacher previously, had become aware of his sexual abuses, and decided to transfer the abusive priest away.¹² Legal scholar Jo Renee Formicola found that church leaders, regardless of whether they were diocesan bishops or ranking members of a religious order, reacted exactly in this way: when confronted with sexually abuse by priests, they reassigned them and ordered them to reflect on their sins. In accordance with Canon Law, the church understood the sexual abuse of children not so much as a crime, but rather as a sin against their priestly vows. Also, the church, and by extension religious orders, did not understand its members as being subject to secular law, which resulted in frequent denials of church officials cooperating with secular law enforcement when it came to priestly crimes.¹³

Powell's personal documents are held by the Midwest Province of the Jesuits. Up to today, they have not made them available to the public, as John Seitz stated in regards to his own research into the case of John Powell. In an interview with Fordham University's *Taking Responsibility* Seitz stated

¹² Circuit Court of Cook County, Illinois, "JOHN DOE 117 and JOHN DOE 118, Plaintiffs, v. THE CHICAGO PROVINCE OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS a/k/a THE JESUITS and FATHER DONALD J. MCGUIRE, S.J. Defendants," March 28, 2010, 11, https://www.bishop-accountability.org/docs/jesuits/McGuire_Donald/Punitive_Damages_Motion/#motion.

¹³ Jo Renee Formicola, *Clerical Sexual Abuse: How the Crisis Changed US Catholic Church-State Relations*, First edition., Palgrave Studies in Religion, Politics, and Policy (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 10.

“Powell’s papers, housed at the Jesuit Archives in St. Louis, have not been made available to researchers. His correspondence, assuming these are among the documents, might be revealing about who among the Jesuits knew what about his long career of abuse. I would like to know about his Jesuit provincials’ attitudes toward him, the degree they reprimanded him (or didn’t, as it appears) when they learned of the problem, and the ways they may have benefitted from the (no doubt substantial) cash his books brought into the order.”¹⁴

Whether or not the Jesuits did in fact reprimand Powell in any way is hard to determine as long as access to his files is denied.¹⁵

During the time he was a faculty member at Loyola University Chicago, Powell reportedly continued to abuse young women. According to one of his students who accused him of sexual abuse, he repeated the pattern he had engaged in with his previous victims. First he established a mentorship relationships with individual female students, both minor and adult. Then he began to abuse them in the seclusion of counseling sessions or spiritual meetings.¹⁶ However, both the university’s Jesuit and secular administrations ignored the claims women made about John Powell. Their calls for help when trying to make Loyola University Chicago leadership aware of the things he did were met with inaction.¹⁷ Due to the dearth of documentation publicly available, any search for the motivations behind these actions—or rather inactions—remains guesswork. Powell’s national celebrity as well as the desire by university leadership to avoid reputation-tarnishing scandal likely played a role. But without access to the

¹⁴ “Five Questions with John Seitz on John Powell, SJ.”

¹⁵ “Five Questions with John Seitz on John Powell, SJ.”

¹⁶ “Priest Accused of Sexual Abuse Former Loyola Jesuit Was Professor, Author and Counselor, The Phoenix, December 5, 2008,” accessed October 21, 2021, https://www.bishop-accountability.org/news2008/11_12/2008_12_05_ThePhoenix_PriestAccused.htm.

¹⁷ Kearns, Frost & Pearlman, “Jane Doe 125 v. The Chicago Province of the Society of Jesus a/k/a the Jesuits and Father John Powell, S.J.” (Circuit Court of Cook County, November 8, 2008), 3, Bishop Accountability, https://www.bishop-accountability.org/complaints/2008_11_06_JaneDoe125_v_ChicagoJesuits.pdf.

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Powell's archived correspondence, no certain conclusions on the motives behind the administration's inactions are possible.

In the late 1960s, Powell's star rose within the Jesuit order. He was a well-liked instructor at Loyola University Chicago's Department of Theology, and he was sought after as an organizer, director and facilitator of religious retreats. During one of these retreats, taking place in Florida in 1967, Powell acted as a visiting priest at Rosarian Academy in Palm Beach. At this Catholic private school that teaches kindergarten through middle school aged children, he engaged in a mentor-mentee relationship with a female student. As before with the family in Winnetka, Powell used this relationship to groom his victim, get closer to her, have time with her alone without any supervision and to lower her defense against him as a mentor figure of respect and authority. According to the complaint filed against Powell and the Jesuits with Cook County Circuit Court in 2008, Powell repeatedly sexually abused the student in a series of counseling sessions. Since Rosary Academy was a Catholic school, Powell could assume that as a Catholic priest his behavior would be shielded from exposure and that he had not to fear much in terms of consequences. In addition to the institution being unlikely to suspect him of any untoward behavior, his victim at Rosarian Academy had also been raised in a devoutly Catholic family. Through her upbringing she had developed a deep trust in and reverence for members of the Catholic clergy. This meant that this young student was in a situation where her trust in priests would ensure she would not be suspicious of a clergy member asking to spend time with her without any form of supervision. And lastly, her background would also ensure that she was unlikely to

report on crimes a priest committed against her. Her social environment would likely not believe accusations brought against a member of the clergy.¹⁸

Priest Accused of Sexual Abuse

Former Loyola Jesuit Was Professor, Author and Counselor

The Phoenix
December 5, 2008

<http://media.www.loyolaphoenix.com/media/storage/paper673/news/2008/12/04/News/Priest.Accused.Of.Sexual.Abuse-3569566.shtml>

As a Jesuit and a professor at Loyola University Chicago, the Rev. John Powell, S.J., built a reputation as a popular teacher and a best-selling religious author - and all of it was called into question again last month as he faced his third sexual abuse lawsuit since 2003.

The civil lawsuit, filed Nov. 6 by the plaintiff "Jane Doe 125," who has chosen to remain anonymous to the public, claimed that Powell held "private counseling sessions" with her during a religious retreat in 1967. During these sessions, said the official complaint, he forced her to kiss him and required her to remove her school uniform so that he could fondle her.

The lawsuit also named the Chicago Province of the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits, as a defendant on counts of negligence and fraud, and stated that the Jesuits knew about Powell's pedophilic tendencies before the alleged incident and failed to act on that knowledge.

Powell, 83, now retired in Michigan, worked as a professor of theology at Loyola from 1965 until his retirement in 1996. During that time, he held spiritual retreats and wrote popular books such as *Fully Human, Fully Alive*, inspirational self-help manuals that blended pop psychology with Catholic theology and established him as "one of the best-selling spiritual authors of our time," according to *Publishers Weekly*.

"This guy sells books about sexually intimate relationships, and the Jesuits make millions off of them, and it's a fraud, a complete fraud," said attorney Marc Pearlman, who represents the anonymous plaintiff for the law firm Kerns, Frost and Pearlman. "The guy was sexually abusing his students and people who came to him for counseling."

He also, according to a number of accusers, used his position as a counselor and professor to abuse young girls. Throughout the years he was assigned to Loyola University, the lawsuit said, Powell held spiritual retreats that brought him into contact with minor children. It was during one of these retreats, held at Rosarian Academy in West Palm Beach, Fla., that he sexually abused the plaintiff, according to the lawsuit. She was "approximately 16 or 17," the suit said.

¹⁸ Kearns, Frost & Pearlman, 4.

The lawsuit also claimed that Powell "engaged in a pattern and practice of sexually abusing Loyola University students." In 2006, a former Loyola University student, Diane Ruhl, named the Chicago order of Jesuits as the defendant in a civil lawsuit along with three other women. The lawsuit, which is still pending, claimed that Powell sexually abused Ruhl during private counseling sessions while she attended Loyola and also said that both Jesuit leaders and Loyola administrators received reports of Powell's alleged abuses and ignored them.

Powell has never been charged with a crime.

Pearlman, the attorney, represented four women in a 2003 sexual abuse lawsuit against Powell, which the defendant settled publicly in 2005. He said that he has dealt with a number of women who have come forward and claimed that Powell abused them, enough to convince him that there may have been dozens more.

"I really doubt the number is just six or seven or 13," he said. "We had a client, her sister went to Loyola and he was abusing her 13-year-old sister. He used to frequent the house, and he'd tell her parents he was going to tuck her in and bless her and read her confession, and then he'd abuse her. A 13 year-old."

Powell could not be reached for comment. A statement from the Chicago Province of the Society of Jesus said he was in "extremely poor health, requiring 24-hour medical care and supervision."

Pearlman also said that in his experience, the Jesuits displayed a record of covering up sex abuse within their ranks.

"The Jesuits have a history of being horrible on these types of issues," he said. "They've had sex abusers in their ranks, they've known about them, they've covered it up, they've transferred them and ignored it, and Powell's not the only example. I really think the way they approached this sex issue was to sweep it under the rug."

Pearlman pointed to the case of the Rev. Donald McGuire, S.J., as an example. A public jury convicted McGuire in a 2006 criminal trial of sexually abusing two teenage boys in Chicago in the 1960s. Documents show that Chicago Jesuit leaders received alerts about McGuire's behavior dozens of times during his career, according to multiple news sources.

A spokesperson for the Jesuits' Chicago Province said he was not able to comment by phone. In an e-mailed response statement, the Rev. Edward Schmidt, S.J., Chicago Provincial of the Society of Jesus, said that the Chicago Province does not comment on ongoing legal proceedings out of respect for the judicial system.

"The Province takes allegations of sexual misconduct seriously," said the statement, "investigates them fully, and cooperates with authorities. We believe the individuals who have come forward deserve our understanding and prayers."

The statement also encouraged anyone who has been abused by a member of the Province to contact the appropriate law enforcement or child protection agency no matter what amount of time has passed since the abuse.

Barbara Blaine, founder and president of the Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests (SNAP), agreed with Pearlman's estimate, calling the Jesuits "the worst in this country" in terms of religious organizations with a track record of concealing abuse. SNAP is a Chicago-based national advocacy and support group for survivors of sexual clerical abuse.

Blaine said that the 30 year span between the alleged incident and the lawsuit typified cases of clerical abuse based on her experience, especially so with cases involving Jesuit priests. She also said she was disappointed by Loyola University's lack of response to the claims of abuse by Powell.

"When you're raped by a teacher in your school," she said, "you're not really in a position to speak up or do anything about it. It takes years, sometimes decades of healing to withstand the scrutiny, especially because the Jesuits and Loyola do not make it easy for victims to speak up."

Steve Christensen, communications manager at Loyola University Chicago, declined to respond. He said that the university refers all questions about Powell and the alleged abuse to the Jesuits' Chicago Province and said that university officials would not comment on the lawsuit.

In an e-mail response, Ellen Kane Munro, vice president and general counsel at Loyola, said that the university "will not tolerate sexual abuse, or indeed sexual harassment of any kind, by anyone, including its faculty and the Jesuits."

Pearlman said the case might reach a settlement, but he promised to make the results public.

"If the Jesuits want to step up and settle the case," he said, "that's always better for the victims, but it will be public, whether it goes through the courts or not."

Powell rose to national prominence starting in 1969 when the first in a series of self-help books based on his insights gained as a spiritual counselor and religious retreat organizer was published. These books became national best sellers, giving Powell of the status of a minor celebrity. In *"Why am I Afraid to Tell You Who I am? – Insights into Personal Growth,"* Powell lays out ways of communicating more directly and gives

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guidance for the reader how to let others see who they really are, regardless of fears of rejection for these revelations. his subsequent books covered similar topics, in which Powell presented a Catholic spirituality infused psychological self-actualization. Through his writing Powell developed a strong, nationwide following. His books frequently rose to the top of the New York Times bestseller lists in nonfiction.

In the wake of the 2002 revelations from the Boston Diocese, six of Powell's victims stepped forward, suing both the Priest himself for sexual abuse, together with the Jesuit order, the latter for gross negligence. When Powell was directly contacted by one of his former victims he admitted the wrongdoing. But he also defended his behavior: "he told me that it was to awaken my sexual identity and because I was vulnerable and naive and he was well known and spoke about love, I believed him," the woman told ABC news.¹⁹ Between 2003 and 2008 eight women sued Powell for sexual abuse. The cases were settled out of court, and Powell himself was never charged with a crime.

Given that Powell was so far accused of having abused seven underage girls, he stands out from the bulk of Catholic priests accused or found guilty of minor sexual abuse in the wake of the child sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church that started to break with the Gaughan case in Boston in 2002.²⁰ Most Catholic priests credibly accused of child sexual abuse sought teenage boys as their victims, and the majority of these priests had only one or two accusations of child sexual abuse over their lifetimes.

¹⁹ Theresa Guterrez, "Settlement Reached in Priest Abuse Case," WLS-TV ABC7, November 17, 2005, https://www.bishop-accountability.org/news/2005_11_17_Gutierrez_SettlementReached.htm.

²⁰ Michael Rezendes Globe Staff et al., "Top Vatican Prosecutor Failed to Report Abuser - The Boston Globe," BostonGlobe.com, accessed October 14, 2021, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2014/11/22/vatican-new-top-prosecutor-abusive-priests-implicated-past-failure-stop-notorious-abuser-donald-mcguire/gPaBPJUdvuTy5PST1j5sM/story.html>.

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However, since the data on child sexual abuse is based on accusations and self-reporting by the victims, and therefore prone to large gaps and undercounting, these findings are not necessarily reflecting the whole truth. Of the cases reported, the majority were boys, and of the priests publicly accused, the majority only had a small number of accusations against them. John Powell's case therefore looks like he was an outlier.²¹

John Powell passed away in 2009. But as late as 2020, new credible accusations were added to his file by the Jesuits Order, indicating that the true number of his victims is ultimately still unknown.²²

²¹ Marie Keenan, *Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church: Gender, Power, and Organizational Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 69.

²² "Priest Accused of Sexual Abuse Former Loyola Jesuit Was Professor, Author and Counselor, The Phoenix, December 5, 2008."