

Reflections from 25 Years of Experience  
At the Start of the New Year

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It is the beginning of 2010. Back many years ago when a new year would dawn, I remember when I would predict that this would be the last year of the Catholic sex abuse scandal. This year the Church will change. This year the bishops will shift gears and focus on the thousands of victims. This year the lawsuits will end because they will no longer be necessary.

Some would call that wishful thinking. Others may believe it to be delusion. In either case it was obviously magical thinking based on unreality.

None of my past hopes have come true and I doubt they ever will. The contrast between the reality of what has happened and continues to happen to victims at the direction of bishops, and what the bishops themselves claim they have accomplished is a chasm the depth of which defies the imagination.

As this new year of pragmatic action starts I'd like to share some random reflections from my experiences with the Catholic Church and clergy sex abuse. I have been closely involved on all levels since 1984. As many know, I did extensive research on the Church's historical response for the book I co-authored. I have been involved in thousands of clergy abuse cases as a consultant, expert witness and/or pastoral minister in the U.S., Canada, Ireland (North and South), the U.K., Mexico, Italy, Malta and Israel.

In all of the research I have done and in every case I have seen or been involved in, the initial response of the official church whether it is on the part of the pope, a bishop or religious superior has been to hide the facts from the public. The second response has been just as consistent. The bishops have done everything they could to prevent the case from public exposure. If it does, then they do all they can to manipulate the truth so as to protect the image of the hierarchy first and the institutional church second.

In all of my research and in each and every case I have studied on any level, I have found something profoundly disturbing. I have not seen evidence of *one single instance where the bishop or religious superior's **first response** was to even ask about the condition of the victim much less reach out to the victim.* I know there have been exceptions, but they have been very few and far between.

In every case where the bishop has met with victims, and this has only happened since 2002 with only a very few instances known to me between 1984 and 2002, the meeting has not been a spontaneous gesture by the bishop. In every case known to me the meeting took place because the bishop was mandated to do so in the terms of the settlement.

Throughout the U.S. there have been many cases brought to court where there has been little doubt on the part of either side that the sexual abuse actually happened but where the case was thrown out because it was outside the Statute of Limitations. I know of no such case where the bishop has, in spite of the lack of a civil process, offered to make monetary reparations to the victim. Uniformly...the victims are ignored. The bishops and their lawyers think they have won. They have protected their precious church's money. But have they won...really? Hardly! They continue to reinforce the image of the "church" as a callous and insensitive business enterprise.

Since 1984 thousands of priests, deacons and brothers have been exposed. Many have ended up in jail or prison. Since 2002 the bishops have been scrambling to get rid of every cleric who has ever abused...but not because of a sense of Justice. Rather, getting rid of them creates the illusion that they are doing something. Getting rid of them reduces the liability!

Over two-thirds of the U.S. bishops have knowingly covered sexual abusers and in so doing have directly caused the ruination of the souls and often the bodies of countless more victims. The almighty Vatican, for all its carefully tooled statements of concern has not called a single bishop to accountability. A few have resigned but so what? They have committed crimes with impunity. Why? Because they are bishops and in the magical thinking of the papacy, bishops

are above hard-ball justice. Some bishops have even been sexual abusers themselves. None have been defrocked.

I have seen consistent, hard evidence of a radical disconnect between the mandate of Christ in the Gospel in reference to such matters, and the actual actions of the bishops and the popes. In short, the popes (JP2 and Benedict XVI) and the bishops have not acted as Christians but rather as agnostic, self-serving businessmen.

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