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Philadelphia: Where is the outrage?

By Maureen Paul Turlish SNDdeN April 21, 2011

COMMENTARY

Many, probably most, Catholics in the five counties that make up the Philadelphia archdiocese believed Cardinal Justin Rigali in 2005 when he promised that things would change, that there would be no more cover-ups and that those who were raped, sodomized or sexually exploited by predatory priests and church workers would be treated humanely instead of being intimidated, harassed and bullied.

I was not one of them.

Since 2002 I have tried to do everything I could possibly think of doing to bring attention to what I perceive to be an entrenched pattern of deceit and dishonesty orchestrated by the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic church to protect its image, hold onto its power and authority, and keep known sexual predators in ministry while failing to even consider the welfare of untold numbers of children.

February's release of a second grand jury report on the Philadelphia archdiocese shows just how futile it is to put one's faith in church leadership.

Philadelphia's hierarchy has failed the People of God. Cardinals Krol, Bevilacqua and Rigali have failed us and they have betrayed us.

They failed to protect children and they failed to deal appropriately with those known sexual predators who used and abused the spiritual gifts that were so trustingly and lovingly bestowed on them when they were ordained.

And speaking of ordination, where are the "good priests?"

They, like many of us in ministry and mission, have been judged guilty by association while bishops have done little to help. Yes, we all have known, worked with or have had friends whom we now know are sexual predators but there is no more outrage coming from the "good" priests of Philadelphia than what has been coming from the pew-sitters.

In a recent Philadelphia Inquirer piece, "[A docile tradition protects the church \[3\]](#)," pastor emeritus of St. Malachy Church, Fr. John P. McNamee, commented on 300 Chicago priests who spoke out against their then new archbishop for "publicly rebuking local pastors for minor infractions" during pastoral visits, saying that "in Philadelphia, not three of us priests would lodge such a complaint" against the archbishop.

"Fearful, mute submissiveness?" Yes, all that and more. In the name of God, where is the structural reform that is so sorely needed in the institutional Roman Catholic church?

Signs of reform in the Philadelphia archdiocese are conspicuous by their absence and yet it has been almost 10 years since the Boston archdiocese imploded.

Do rank and file Catholics realize what has happened in the Philadelphia archdiocese? Have they read the grand jury reports?

Because of what has been revealed in the second grand jury report on the Philadelphia archdiocese, not only has church leadership lost all credibility but Cardinal Rigali's failures have shown the actions of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops for what they really are, more window dressing and PR spin than substance.

For years, bishops in the United States have followed the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People as they saw fit with no real independent oversight.

The failures of Philadelphia's episcopal leadership, now documented in two grand jury reports, have resulted in putting the lie to the bishops' much praised "zero tolerance" policy. It simply is not the reality that exists. It was not true in 2002 or 2005 and it is not true in 2011.

With it all, however, Cardinal Rigali wants Catholics to trust episcopal leadership; to trust him. Do you?

I do not. In all good conscience I cannot.

However, I would give serious consideration to revising my opinion if Cardinal Rigali did the following:

- Held a press conference on the steps of the archdiocesan office building at 222 North 17th Street or outside the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul and announced his unconditional support for Pennsylvania House Bills 832 and 878, to abolish the statute of limitations in child sexual abuse cases and to suspend the statute of limitations for adult victims of childhood sex abuse.
- Direct Catholic Conference president, Bishop Joseph McFadden, along with the pastors and the priests of Pennsylvania to publicly pledge their support for PA House Bills 832 & 878 from the pulpit, directing parishioners to call their state representatives and mount postcard campaigns if necessary.

If he would do this and whatever else becomes necessary to move these bills into laws as expeditiously as possible, then I might consider revisiting my opinion.

Such a clear statement of justice and concern for all children, past, present and future would go a long way toward restoring my faith and trust in church leadership but only if Cardinal Justin Rigali's words were followed by action.

No such actions have been forthcoming from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia only "sounding brass and tinkling cymbals," 1 Corinthians 13:1-2.

[Maureen Paul Turlish is a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur. She is a founding member of the National Survivor Advocates Coalition, a member of the steering committee of the Greater Philadelphia Voice of the Faithful and a member of the Child Victims Voice Coalition.]

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