

# **What about Accountability and Transparency in Wisconsin?**

**By Sister Maureen Paul Turlish  
Voice from the Desert  
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**<http://reform-network.net/?p=1423>**

**Recent news stories coming out of Wisconsin illustrate the tragic need to change that state's inadequate childhood sexual abuse statutes for the protection of everyone.**

**Wisconsin's laws have been among the most ineffective in the nation, allowing little civil action in older cases. Wisconsin victims have been virtually barred from suing the church because of court decisions issued in 1995 and 1997.**

**The situation in Wisconsin is much like the situation in many religious denominations across the United States, not just in the Roman Catholic Church. Because of the magnitude of the sexual abuse problems in the church, however, along with what may prove to be possible collusion between a former district attorney who is now a Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice and the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, the sexual abuse problems have now been ratcheted up a level.**

**This is tragic and it speaks to the skewed value we as a society place on children, especially those victims of childhood sexual abuse.**

**We say we are concerned about the protection of the human rights of immigrants, legal or illegal.**

**We say we are concerned with the trafficking of persons.**

**We say we are concerned with the rights of the unborn.**

**But while we may take the moral high ground on these issues, many of us ignore the victims of childhood sexual abuse who are right in front of us and instead talk about greedy lawyers, make inflammatory statements about the anti-catholic attitudes of anyone who would suggest accountability and the bias of just about every newspaper in the country, calling down God's eternal wrath on them from time to time.**

**None of this does much to address the problem.**

**This is a continuing tragedy of unspeakable horrors which must be dealt with, but justice, like charity, should, must, begin at home.**

**It should have begun in earnest when all the bishops of the United States received the Doyle, Peterson, Mouton Report in 1985.**

**It should have begun in earnest in 2002 when our bishops said it would.**

**It should have begun in earnest when Pope John Paul II said that there is no place in the priesthood for those who would abuse a child.**

**We are all still waiting for that promised accountability and transparency even while then United States Conference of Catholic Bishops president Bishop Wilton Gregory was telling us that, "The terrible history recorded here today is history."**

**No, it is not behind us as Gregory would have wished because church records, forced into the public venue by the courts, have brought that reality home to us with a vengeance.**

**One can only blanch at what else may lie among the thousands of documents the Archdiocese of Milwaukee refuses to release, but what has already been made public appears to document decisions that may be more criminal in nature than the "mistakes" and "poor decisions" already mentioned.**

**Jesus said, "the truth shall set you free," but when will the truth be known?**

**Yes, the tragedy continues in the larger society but the tragedy in our own church continues while the list only gets longer with the addition of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Wisconsin.**

**Real accountability requires that all arbitrary statutes of limitation, criminal and civil, on the sexual abuse of our children be removed and that a window of at least two years be provided to allow previously time barred cases to be brought forward in a court of law.**

**Window legislation is the single, most effective means of holding sexual predators and their enablers responsible.**

**How could an accommodation in law be permitted by Wisconsin courts in 1995 and 1997 that virtually barred victims of childhood sexual abuse from suing the church?**

**Statements made by Wisconsin church leadership that the “Church made some dreadful mistakes in its handling of these cases,” “poor decisions were made,” and the “Church’s decisions about Becker were badly misguided,” is reminiscent of statements made after the release of the Grand Jury Report on the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in September of 2005.**

**Church spokesmen there even went so far as to blame everything on the Know-Nothings of the 1850s.**

**Unbelievable but true.**

**Church history tells us that the problems of sexual abuse were seriously condemned in the earliest days of the church. Church Councils and Canon Law were very specific in their condemnations of sexual aberrations and just as specific as to punishments, sometimes even including death.**

**In Delaware, we were successful in totally removing statutes of limitation in regard to the sexual abuse of our children by anyone and we included a two year window for previously time barred cases. The Child Victims Law was signed by our Governor Ruth Ann Minner on July 10, 2007, and it covers everyone, everyone.**

**Visit the Delaware coalition website of Child Victims Voice at [www.childvictimsvoice.com](http://www.childvictimsvoice.com) and learn how we were able to get this accomplished through broad non-sectarian support.**

**The people of Wisconsin deserve better and their state legislators need to pass similar child abuse laws.**

**As one Todd Merryfield is quoted as saying of the Catholic Diocese of Green Bay in one newspaper story, “there will be no hope of even a small sense of closure for anyone,” until the records and names of all known pedophiles are released and the truth told.**

**Justice and Charity are what Jesus taught. He never said it was contingent on the price tag.**

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