

CONFRONTING CRIMES & COVER UP: A REFLECTION

Sister Maureen Paul Turlish
Voice from the Desert
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By the time my 7:30 Sunday night flight from Boston, Massachusetts touched down in Philadelphia the adrenaline rush I had been operating on all weekend also began to power down.

I was up in Boston over the weekend of January 6-8 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of “Confronting Crimes & Cover up of Sexual Abuse by the Boston Clergy & Catholic Hierarchy.”

As a member of a number of national and regional support groups for victim-survivors of childhood sexual abuse, I have long been active in supporting legislative reform in MA, NY, MD and PA after having been part of Delaware’s successful action removing the civil statute of limitation going forward while providing a two-year civil window, open from July 2007 through July 2009, that allowed previously time-barred cases of childhood sexual abuse – by anyone – to be brought forward.

I was honored to be with the Boston and New England victims of childhood sexual abuse, especially those sexually violated by priests and then further betrayed by the Episcopal leadership of the Roman Catholic Church. I met some of their family members, friends, and advocates. While I already knew, talked, or corresponded with some, most I had never met in person.

I was also privileged to walk with and address them at the Sunday morning demonstration and solidarity march around the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in the South End. Many have been part of this demonstration for the preceding decade.

http://news.bostonherald.com/news/regional/view/20220109clergy_abuse_activists_mark_decade_of_struggle/

The main and recurring theme of the conference, “The Year of the Survivor,” was that the leadership of religious denominations, including the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church, cannot and should not be depended upon to do the right thing where the sexual exploitation – including rape and sodomy – of children is concerned.

That responsibility belongs to our respective state legislatures.

As Constitutional Law Professor and author Marci Hamilton said in her Boston comments, “The time is past for us to care what the bishops think (regarding the protection of children). We must hold our elected representatives accountable. They are the only ones who can change the law and they are responsible for the law as it stands now.”

I could not agree more.

While criminal trials are about to open in Philadelphia against Msgr. William Lynn (reckless endangerment & conspiracy) and four others (the sexual abuse of minors) which will undoubtedly make public previously sealed depositions and records of archdiocesan officials, legislative reform of the statutes covering childhood sexual abuse, in one sense, is even more important.

Current statutes of limitation are arbitrary and discriminatory.

Removing statutes of limitation for previously time-barred cases of sexual abuse is the most effective way to hold accountable those who would sexually exploit children.

I chaired the national sub-committee which produced the Advocacy Guide for Legislative Reform based on the successful Delaware action for use across jurisdictions.

http://votf.org/via/Advocacy_Guide.pdf

The job of protecting children is one which belongs to all of us and it begins with adequate legislation.

That time is now.

Sister Maureen Paul Turlish is a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur, an educator and an advocate for legislative reform. She is a founding member of the National Survivor Advocates Coalition.