

Abuse Victims Must Not Give up Hope

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BALTIMORE (Map, News) - There is a certain irony to the fact that a Baltimore cleric, the Rev. Michael Salerno, stands accused of possible sexual abuse that was alleged to have occurred 30 years ago, before Salerno was a priest but while he was a lay member of the Pallottines in New York. Not that when it occurred should influence his removal if the charges are credible.

Hopefully, there will be a full investigation and Salerno will receive the due process that every citizen in the United States is entitled to.

Sadly, the irony is that on the very same day, Del. Eric Bromwell withdrew House Bill 858, which he introduced.

That Bromwell was not able to withstand the attacks of the well-orchestrated and well-financed opposition, including the Maryland Catholic Conference's high-priced lobbyists and the leadership of his own Calvert Hall, does not lessen the man's integrity and concern for all victims of childhood sexual abuse in introducing legislation whose time has come.

The inflammatory rhetoric and untruths circulated by the institutional church certainly did not help either.

Justice and truth, however, are not concepts that can be trotted out when convenient.

Rest assured that the institutional church's loud protestations of commitment to victims of sexual abuse in the present offer neither absolution nor justice for the crimes and the sins of the past.

Do not give up hope. This battle only is lost.

In Delaware, we were not successful when our landmark anti-child-abuse legislation was initially introduced. It took much planning, lobbying, advocacy and careful explaining that no denomination's churches, schools or programs had been closed where this type of legislation was passed.

In fact, neither did any the five dioceses in the United States that declared Chapter 11 bankruptcy on the eve of going to trial in a transparent attempt to keep records and files from public scrutiny.

Real transparency and accountability appear to be as elusive now as they were when they were first promised by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops back in 2002.

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