

What is Missing in “Assistance” for Abuse Victims: God and Care.

I am a priest of the archdiocese of New York. I was abused at least thirty times by my pastor when I was ages thirteen to fifteen. It happened in the parish rectory where I worked to earn high school tuition. My father died suddenly when I was in the eighth grade. The pastor celebrated what was then a solemn high funeral Mass. After that the pastor, who would come to the school yard and mingle with the boys, often sought me out. I was invited to take the rectory receptionist job and to work every other evening for four years. In June I graduated from the parish school. I received the “Leadership” award donated by the pastor. The prize was a sterling silver rosary. The winner was always designated by the pastor. I was being groomed. The first time he came into me at the rectory was two weeks after I started the job.

Then every other week or so the pastor came into my “office” and abused me, either after the priests’ dinner or when he returned from the Country Club. In the latter case I smelled alcohol on his breath. The abuse ended when he got sick two and a half years later. I knew something was not right. But I said nothing to anyone – family included.

I did not even admit it to myself. I ate myself through high school and weighed 240 pounds in junior year. After he died I ate normally. No one noticed? No one suspected? Those were the different times.

On an evening in November 1992 – thirty-three years later -- I blurted out to a friend “I was abused by my pastor when I was thirteen.” Where did that come from? The news in the American Catholic world that week was that Cardinal Bernardin from Chicago was not going to the annual meeting of the national bishops’ conference because he was dealing with priests who had abused children. This got national news. It was the first time child sexual abuse was on the church’s radar...at least in public. My reply was spontaneous. His name is George G. Murdock. He had access to many young men in his life. I spoke that sentence thirty-three years later. No statute of limitations for me – ever.

The next day I started to cry. I cried every day until the summer. When I was alone all I did was cry.

I had been seeing a psychiatrist for depression and sleep problems. I called him and was in his office the next day. Then weekly, monthly and every three months for close to thirty years. I went on anti depression pills. I got off them. I tried my best to do well. I performed very well. I was always a high achiever and I enjoyed my work. Did I enjoy it too much? Was that my sublimation for the abuse? Or was it that I worked too hard to compensate for the inner loneliness, the deep seated insecurity, lack of self confidence and lack of self worth?

When the McCarrick story broke in the spring 2018 the dam I had constructed to keep me from being hurt broke into shambles and the scab of my “healing” was torn off. I started to cry. Again. My therapist had just retired so I needed to find a new one. With good advice I found a superb one. I now see him weekly. We are a good match.

After a “listening session” that fall I was put in touch with a man whose brother was similarly abused by Murdock. This led to emails and phone calls. Within ten days I learned that at least eight other boys had been abused in the same time period, aged nine to thirteen. One classmate struggled with intimacy in his marriage, depression and alcohol abuse.

I recently learned that the priests who were assigned to the staff of the parish when Murdock was pastor knew of the abuse. They would separate him from boys in the playground. Some parents told the priests what their sons told them about being abused in the church sacristy. This is all documented.

Victims' Assistance and Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Programs

Then I decided to seek help from the “Victims Assistance” program of the archdiocese of New York as well as the “Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Program.” (Who knew they were separate bodies who do similar yet somewhat separate things. Should victims be expected to know the ins and outs of two sets of programs?)

I prepared an eighteen page dossier for the Victims' Assistance Coordinator: a letter summarizing my history of abuse, a letter from the my friend attesting to when we realized I was abused, letters from eight other students corroborating that they were abused or knew of those who were by the pastor during the same time frame, two letters from therapists.

I asked for and received an appointment with the Assistance Coordinator at the New York archdiocesan Catholic Center. I dreaded entering the building that represented the institution that Murdock worked for.

The sister in charge, Sister Eileen, could not have been kinder. But I do not envy her being involved in this work. She has got to be shell shocked by what she has seen and heard in that job. She was joined by a detective who was professional and open to what I had to say. But he set aside my documents and worked from a check list of things to ask. He took notes. At the end of the interview I thanked them. But I also said how awkward it was for me to have to meet at the Chancery Office which represented my abuser. What I did not say was that the statistics in the meeting was two against one. No one suggested that I bring a friend, a lawyer, or a priest. In the Victims Assistance process no one spoke of God. No one offered spiritual direction.

Ten days later Sister Eileen called me to say that the detective drafted a report. But she said he wrote that I worked in the rectory for thirteen years. She had recalled four. I said she was right that I worked there for four years but began being abused at the age of thirteen. I immediately became suspicious of the accuracy of the report. My initial letter stated four years. Why write up a dossier and have it ignored? Then again the detective likely worked on a per hour basis. It's a job.

I then turned to find out more about phase two (sounds like a housing development!) about reconciliation and compensation. Their very long directives (twelve pages single spaced) indicted that I might want to hire a lawyer or rely on the group itself who handles these “cases” to do that part for me. A lawyer friend read the documents (message: they were all too complex

for me to read much less understand) and said that I should find my own lawyer. I was referred to one who in turn recommended a big name from the Midwest. I judged I was not worthy of that person (self worth dies when you are abused). But I was persuaded to call him. We spoke the next day for a half hour. He advised me to ask Sister for a copy of the report. Normally victims do not get to see it. Can you imagine? There is a written report with statements made about you which may or may not be true! But my lawyer judged they would send the report to me if I asked. She did. It was a seven and a half page double spaced document containing fifteen errors! I emailed her the corrections. I was horrified. What about other victims who never get to see the reports written about them? What are they hiding?

After several inquiries I found out that in the “Assistance” process this report goes to the archdiocesan lawyer, Mr. McCabe. The Advisory Board for abuse cases then normally reviews the report. But in my case they would not meet to discuss because the priest was dead. I only found out this part of the process after asking several questions. Full disclosure? The report ended up in the archdiocesan lawyer’s file cabinet. Although Sister did say that “we share information with them” (the reconciliation and compensation program) she did not say what information. Full disclosure? Transparency? I was told and believed that these are separate processes? But what information is “shared?” Secrecy again. Abused again.. So why did I go through all of this? What kind of “assistance” is this? More secrecy like the secrecy of being sexually abused for two and a half years. And irrevocably damaged for sixty more.

Promises Unfulfilled

Sister Eileen also said that from now on the archdiocese would pay for my therapy. I asked what about more than thirty years of therapist’s bills? She repeated “from now on.” End of discussion. I have the sense that there is a formula and template for all of this. Fill in the blanks no matter who and what trauma they are still going through. The phrase is “from now on.”

In addition Sister said that she would submit the name of my abuser to the District Attorney’s Office. I was very pleased. I wanted to be sure his name was out there for other victims to come forth and receive assistance toward healing. She reiterated that offer at our appointment in April 7. But I learned on May 20 that Ms. Camille Biros of the IRCP group (phase two) emailed my lawyer on May 16 indicating that the name had not been reported by the archdiocese to the DA. My lawyer submitted the name that day because Sister had not. A broken promise about a sacred trust. You are presumed to trust someone like Sister to do what she said she would. But you cannot verify whether she had done it. Trust and no way to verify.

In mid April I submitted several things to the IRCP: my eighteen page dossier, the report from the Victims’ Assistance folks plus my corrections and the set of forms required by the IRCP.

New York Archdiocese Publishes Names of Abuser Priests

On the morning of April 26 Cardinal Dolan announced via a blast email that he would be publishing the names of “credibly accused” clergy sex abusers. He did so an hour later. Msgr. George Murdock’s name did not appear. I was stunned. Another punch in the stomach. Another severe blow to my self worth and personal credibility. Self doubt gain. In commenting about

the list of abusers the archdiocesan the Vicar for Clergy said that some names were not listed because of a “technicality.” Cardinal Dolan and he judged that the list would be updated as the need arose.

I wondered why I had not been told prior to the blast email about Murdock’s name? Abused once again. not informing me ahead of time? Might I offer the suspicion that if Murdock’s name were to appear that there might be a flood of requests from victims and so the less the public knows the less the archdiocese has to pay out in settlements. Delay. Lawyers love to delay. Somewhere I read “justice delayed is justice denied.” Delay means fewer victims come forth. Less money is paid out.

My Lawyer and IRCP

On Monday May 20th I again spoke to my lawyer. He followed up with a phone call to Ms. Biros and discovered that on the previous Thursday (May 16 as noted above) she had contacted my lawyer’s associate in NYC to ask for a copy of the letter about appointing him my lawyer and the assurance that the DA was contacted by his associate. Four days later she told my lawyer that she had no recollection of my case despite having spoken about it the previous Thursday.

My lawyer reminded her of my case and she checked her computer. She found it and said that her office did receive the requested missing “items” that had not been in my file.

She then asked for two weeks for them to get back to him. One more delay caused by them. In reply to my question about whether I should ask for an interview in person with the IRAC my lawyer said we should wait the two weeks, receive an offer and if it is too low then to ask for an appointment which would signal our interest in a counter offer. He would come with me. That is pastoral care. But before that comment and since it had all come down to the money. Not human beings. We imitate our culture when it comes to offering money to “settle” issues.

As planned two weeks later (June 3) my lawyer called Ms. Biros but could not reach her for two days. Then she replied that my case was close to being settled but that they needed another two and a half weeks to get back to him.

Another delay. Another revictimization. When you are abused you spend your life being afraid of the abuser and being abused again. Self doubt and anxiety rise again. You are always nervous. Another delay means a revictimization. A case study for PTSD. You get very tired physically and emotionally from fear and having to protect yourself. To this day anyone who approaches me from behind gets an elbow from me. It is simply instinctive. I have no choice. I feel the need to defend myself.

Do they not know that when you are sexually abused that your life is changed forever? All the king’s horses and all the king’s men cannot put Humpty Dumpty back together again. These are unhealable wounds. Unhealable wounds.

“Close to being settled” but without a face to face meeting? They will “deal out” the dole based on a data base? Not the needs of a broken human being?

Church Response No Different from Any Others

The church's response to abusive, predator priests? Procedures, lawyers, forms and (maybe) money. What makes their "assistance" any different from the Boy Scouts of America or a teacher's union? This process now revolves around financial payouts from a bureaucracy that mirrors any other institution or firm that is being sued. Of course the real issue in these processes is to minimize costs. You sign on for IRAC you (may) get merely a percentage of what you would receive in a real court of law. (A lawyer friend suggested that today a victim receives 1.2 million in a court of law.)

This whole thing now simply disgusts me. In five months I went from trusting the church to wanting to have nothing to do with the archdiocese.

The very structures and processes that are said to "assist" and foster "reconciliation" do nothing of the sort. They punish the already psychologically damaged victims and seem to ignore or, dare I say it, presume that these processes will wear one out so as not to apply? How can it be that God is missing and pastoral care for human beings is missing in these processes? God is missing and victims are the worse off because of these processes, not better.

Last week Ms. Biro responded to my lawyer with a proposed settlement dollar figure. 100K for sixty years of a life lived bearing the after effects of abuse, day after day? 100 K for thirty years of professional psychological help? 100 K for the stress and lack of peace in my life every day that I live?

This all makes for anxious days and many sleepless nights.

Assistance? Reconciliation? No way.