Social Interest: A Healing Agent for those Sexually Abused by Roman Catholic Priests

A Summary Paper

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Michelle Marie Winemiller
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Abstract

The Roman Catholic Church has a history of nearly two millennia of internal conflict regarding the attitude toward and role of sexuality within the Church. Just as longstanding and continuing today is the Church’s and states’ confusion and turmoil regarding the proper handling of sexual abuse by clergy. This paper explores the definitions and context of sexual abuse as well as the pervasive effects of sexual abuse on victims. Specific attention is placed on the unique characteristics of sexual abuse perpetrated by Roman Catholic priests, with details relayed through stories of several cases of such abuse, including the author’s own story of childhood sexual abuse by her priest. Adlerian concepts of social interest are explored in a way that provides healing opportunities for those with a history of clergy abuse. Details of one such project, The New Reformation Day held in Rome on October 31, 2010, are provided, including discussions regarding the social interest event as an effective healing agent.
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**The Current/Old Problem –**

**The History of Sexual Rules under Roman Catholic Canon Law**

It is very important to understand the history of manifested problems to begin to create positive solutions for the future. Adler referred to good intellectual functioning as “common sense, meaning that it provides solutions to problems which are satisfactory and make sense, not only to the individual but also to the group.” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 154) In the years since the late 1980s, the continuing saga of Roman Catholic priests worldwide who abuse children has been coming to light as a progressively expanding scandal.

According to a CNN report, there has been no trial in 60 percent of the roughly 3000 cases of priests accused of sexual impropriety (Greene, 2010a). Reverend Andreas Batlogg, editor of the German Jesuit paper *Stimmen der Zeit*, likened the allegations to “a tsunami or an extensive fire. The estimated number of undetected cases seems to be far higher than the yet known ones.” (Greene, 2010b)

Though this seems new news to those who hear about abuse by priests in the 21st century, this issue has a nearly 2000 year-long paper trail. As summarized in *Sex, Priests, and Secret Codes*, “from the earliest days of the fourth century to the early twenty-first century we find a constant flow of monastic rules and canons promulgated by individual bishops, gatherings of local bishops, councils of all bishops and papal decrees attempting to regulate the sex lives of the clergy” (Doyle, Swipe, & Wall, 2006, p. 4). Greek stoic dualism influenced pre-Christian thought, with a dichotomous regard for flesh as evil and the spirit as good. This lead to early Christian goals espoused by Seneca, “that the wise should avoid the corruption of bodily
comforts and pleasures, especially those derived from sex” (p.6). Augustine modified this vilification view of sex to accept some of its value and necessity. “By the end of the Patristic Age (800 CE), two opposing views of human sexuality had emerged: Jerome and those who followed him stressed the dichotomy between body and soul and spirit and matter, and believed that sex was the primary expression of fleshy evil; whereas Augustine had tempered the earlier attitudes and held that sex was basically a useful and good force in human life but debase by sin and passion” (p.7).

In the fourth century, the Spain’s Council of Elvira (309 AD) made was the first legal action in the church to impose an obligation of sexual constraint on its clergy. The Council of Elvira passed four canon laws that restricted sexual behavior of priests. The three most serious [sins] were fornication, adultery and sexual corruption of young boys. Many canonical inquiries regarding sexual sins were submitted to the Vatican over the centuries prior to the first of canon law in 1917. The Vatican issued legislation in 1922 about regarding clergy sexual crimes, but then a fascinating event in 1962, when Pope John XXII approved a special procedural law, De Modo Procendi in Causis Solicitationis, which was a directive regarding processing cases of clergy sexual abuse. “Unlike all previous papal legislation on this subject, these documents were buried in the deepest secrecy. It was sent to every bishop and major religious superior in the world. The dispositive section of the document is preceded by an order whereby the document is to be kept in the diocesan servant archives and not published nor commented upon by anyone. No explicit reason was given for the unusual secrecy, nor was any justification given for the document” (Doyle, et al., p. 52).

Indeed we begin to see the complexity of the long history of confusion in regards to healthy sexuality in the Roman Catholic Church. Not only has this confusion of sexuality been
sustained and allowed, it is dueled with the spiritual power of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. “The church teaches that its hierarchical governmental structure is of divine origin. Ultimately all real power rests in the individual office holders and not in collective bodies. The Pope is the embodiment of all judicial, legislative, and executive power for the entire church (Canons 331, 333) and each diocesan bishop possesses similar fullness of power in his own diocese (Canon 381). Since there is no separation of the hierarchical powers, there are no effective checks and balances” (Doyle, et al., 2006, p. 64).

This hierarchical power not only governs the temporal function of practicing Catholics, but the spiritual aspects as well. “The church teaches that the sacraments are the indispensable means for eternal salvation for Catholics. The clergy and hierarchy control access to the sacraments. This profound source of power protests and enables the clerical culture, the monarchical government, and the deep and mysterious influence that the institutional church wield over individual Catholic and secular powers as well” (Doyle, et al., 2006, p. 66). It is essential to understand the framework and history of the Roman Catholic Church in order to bring about positive healthy change.

**Reporting of sexual abuse by clerics in the Roman Catholic Church**

In 2002 the U.S. bishops attempted to look at the intrusive issue of sexual abuse by its leaders. Although sex crimes are against the law, the church does not promote its leaders in any Vatican written law to report abuse. Doyle stated “there is no requirement or recommendation to report accused clerics to civil authority in any Vatican document for the eighteenth century to the present” (Doyle, et al., 2006, p. 52).

According to the Associated Press “As of 2008, at least twenty six U.S. states required clergy to report suspected child abuse; another 15 required anyone suspecting abuse to report it.
The Irish church, which has endured a clerical abuse scandal, has required clergy to report suspected abuse cases to health officials or police since 1996” (Winfield, 2010).

The lack of any sort of directive from the Vatican regarding reporting did not change until April 12, 2010, when the Vatican issued a single sentence guideline stating, “Civil law concerning reporting of crimes to the appropriate authorities should always be followed” (Winfield, 2010). Even so, this guideline does not give any further direction, nor has it been formally adopted as a rule of Canon Law.

In regards to the Minnesota state law for clergy, mandatory reporting of child abuse was not required until after 1987. Since then, as stated by Child Welfare Information Gateway,
a person who knows or has reason to believe a child is being neglected or physically or sexually abused… or has been neglected or physically or sexually abused within the preceding three years, shall immediately report the information to the local welfare agency, agency responsible for assessing or investigating the report, police department, or the county sheriff …if the person is employed as a member of the clergy and received the information while engaged in ministerial duties, provided that a member of clergy is not required by this subdivision to report information that is otherwise privileged under § 595.02(1)(c) (Minnesota, 2009b).

The working definition of what constitutes the details of clergy-penitent privilege are important. Minnesota Statue § 595.02(1)(c) states:

A member of the clergy or other minister of any religion shall not, without the consent of the party making the confession, be allowed to disclose a confession made to the member of the clergy or other minister in a professional character, in the course of discipline enjoined by the rules or practice of the religious body to
which the member of the clergy or other minister belongs; nor shall a member of the clergy or other minister of any religion be examined as to any communication made to the member of the clergy or other minister by any person seeking religious or spiritual advice, aid, or comfort or advice given thereon in the course of the member of the clergy's or other minister's professional character, without the consent of the person” (Minnesota, 2009a).

This means that a pastor or priest in the state of Minnesota by law must hold information confidential if disclosed in a pastoral caring setting, even if that information is regarding recent or ongoing child abuse. Importantly, the statute gives broad latitude for religious bodies each to define their own rules or practice whereby a pastor or priest’s interactions with a parishioner are to be considered confessional and therefore privileged.

In Wisconsin the law states:

A member of the clergy is not required to report child abuse information that he or she receives solely through confidential communications made to him or her privately or in a confessional setting if he or she is authorized to hear or is accustomed to hearing such communications and, under the disciplines, tenets, or traditions of his or her religion, has a duty or is expected to keep those communications secret. Those disciplines, tenets, or traditions need not be in writing (Wisconsin, 2007).

One can see how these reporting laws, which differ from state to state, can create complex problems when administered by powerful church systems such as the Roman Catholic Church. It is important that all people have a safe place to disclose personal information in order for healing and for confidentiality to be maintained. When a victim reports abuse to the Bishop—outside of a privileged setting—the Bishop is obligated by most laws to report the abuse to
authorities. Yet on the other hand, we see currently, the destruction of a well intended law that is being used to cover up scandal and abuse. What the law does not address is what should happen when a pastor, priest, or lay counselor discloses—in a confessional manner to a bishop or another priest—that he or she has abused one of its parishioners. That priest or pastor by law cannot report the abuse due to the confidentiality laws in many states.

However, even within the exemption from mandated reporting environment of privileged religious confessionals, there has always been valid opportunity for a Bishop to remove a religious leader from situations and duties where they would likely perpetrate further. Lawsuits that are currently coming forward are not as to whether abuse happened in the Roman Catholic Church, but rather the extent to which various Bishops knew of and perpetuated the abuse by simply shuffling priests from church to church within pastoral care positions while knowing they were perpetrators. The charges of fraud claim that instead of protecting parishioners and getting priests help, they hid the information in secrecy and thus perpetuated the problem. These issues of non-reporting and failing to uphold nonmaleficence are where the church is currently charged with being neglectful and therefore responsible for its actions.

In several recent allegations the Pope himself was accused of not removing a pedophile priest in the Oakland, CA area. The California bishop contacted Pope Benedict reporting he had an offending priest to be defrocked, but the Pope denies any part in knowing he moved an offending priest to a different location (Donald, Gorski, Mone, Dillon, & Simpson, 2010). If we step back and look at what Adler calls “common sense,” one can clearly see the breakdown of working towards social interest. “In every case there is a ‘yes’ that emphasizes the pressure of social interest, but this is invariably followed by a ‘but’ that possesses greater strength and prevents the necessary increase of social interest” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 156). In
considering the actions of the church and quote of the Pope, one must consider the fear of inferiority as a possible motivation. Ansbacher also noted “There is only one reason for an individual to side-step to the useless side: the fear of defeat on the useful side. In this fear, one can see the increased inferiority feeling of the patient and, added to this, his hesitation, his halting, or his flight from the solution of one the social problems of life” (p. 157).

**Defining Sexual Abuse**

Fifty thousand names are etched in the Vietnam War Memorial. If we as a society would create a wall for those who survived childhood sexual abuse, it would be more than 1300 times the size of the Vietnam memorial. If we included other forms of abuse, it would be 7500 times bigger. “These are the souls lost in a betrayal and wounding that is so deep that most are unable to heal and reconnect with self, others and God without long-term recovery” (Whitfield, 1995, p. 51).

There have been numerous debates over what constitutes sexual abuse. From the age difference of the offender to the victim, to the actual acts committed of the abuser to victim, controversy continues to dominate society’s understanding of what sexual abuse is. Sexual abuse is trauma and should be treated by practitioners as such, according to Langberg, a leading psychologist of over twenty-five years in the field of sexual abuse recovery. She states “Sexual abuse of a child occurs whenever a child is sexually exploited by an older person for the satisfaction of the abuser’s needs. It consists of any sexual activity—verbal, visual, or physical engaged without consent. The child is considered unable to consent due to developmental immaturity and an inability to understand sexual behavior. Incestuous behavior is illegal in all fifty states. One of the most crucial factors in our understanding of child sexual abuse is that it
occurs in the context of a relationship with an adult from whom the child had every reason to expect protection, warmth, and care” (Langberg, 2003, p. 62).

Allender (1990) also has treated victims of sexual abuse over twenty years in his private practice as a clinician. He states there are two types of sexual abuse: contact and interaction. “A parent or adult who finds arousal in watching a naked child or introducing a child to sexual stimuli (through pornography or exhibitionistic sexual exposure) has with a doubt sexually victimized that child. Sexual verbal interactions can be equally abusive” (p. 49).

Almost all the literature of sexual abusive activity states there are multiple dimensions of sexual abuse that can occur to the victim, many acts happening at the same time. Allender (1990) defines two different types of sexual abuse: contact and interactions. Within contact type of abuse, there is a range from least severe (sexual kissing or touching of clothed body) to severe (unclothed genital contact) to very severe (genital intercourse, oral or anal sex). The abusive interactions are classified as verbal (direct sexual solicitation or seduction, repeated sexual descriptions or language use), visual (pornography, exhibitionism, inappropriate attention to body for sexual stimulation), and psychological (physical or sexual boundary violation, use of child as a spouse surrogate). Allender continues to define the typical stages of abuse, which apply to both the contact and interaction types of abuse. It is noted however that just like English grammar, there are many exceptions to the rule. These stages are a guideline to understand the grooming and process of how abuse may occur. Stage 1, “Intimacy and Secrecy,” involves building a relationship that involves sharing secrets or establishing a power differential or blame. Stage 2, “Physical Touch that Appears Appropriate,” involves seemingly innocent kisses, hugs that last a little longer than expected, or playful pinching/touching. Stage 3, “Sexual Abuse Proper,” which is actual sexual touching and fondling which progresses towards rape.
This is followed by Stage 4, “Securing Silence and/or Maintenance of Sexual Abuse Through Threat and/or Privilege,” in which the perpetrator either pleads with the victim or offers privileges to avoid specifically-identified catastrophic consequences (for both perpetrator as well as victim) that exposing the abuse would create. Allender also notes that “in most cases, sexual abuse is not an event that occurs out of the blue, suddenly or capriciously, by someone who lurks in the bushes and waits for an unsuspecting child to walk into his lair. In fact only 11% of all sexual abuse is perpetrated by a stranger. The vast majority of sexually abusive events occur in relationship with a family member (29 percent) or with someone else known by the victim (60 percent)” (p. 92). Understanding the insidious nature and confusing complexity of these typical characteristics and stages of sexual abuse is very useful when working with a victim, especially to understand and work through feelings of confusion and guilt that he/she participated in and allowed the abuse to happen.

A classic review of eight random sample communities’ surveys identified that 71 percent of the victims are females and 29 percent are males (Finkelhor, 1979). In his landmark survey of over 1000 women in the early 1950’s, Kinsey documented that one in four reported a personal history of sexual abuse (Bass & Davis, 1994, p. 481). Current prevalence studies suggest that 15%-28% (1 of every 4-7) girls will be sexually abused by the time they are 18 and just as shockingly high 5-17% (1 out of 7-20) men will also be abused before turning 19 (Finkelhor, 1994; Gorey & Leslie, 1997; Rind, Tromovitch, & Bauserman, 1998). Again contrary to the myth that perpetrators hide in black alleys with trench coats, most children are sexually abused by someone they know and trust. Deveney found the offender was a parental family member in 62 percent of the sexual abuse cases (Rossetti, 1991, p. 69). In a study of male offenders, Robinson (1989) discovered that 41 percent were biological fathers, 24 percent step fathers, 27
percent other familial relations, and only 7 percent of the offenders were men from outside the family structure” (as cited in Rossetti, 1991, p. 70).

It is important to understand that frequency, duration and the relationship between the perpetrator and victim are directly related to the severity of functioning in the survivor. When abused occurred more frequently and for a longer duration of time, the effects are more harmful and recovery will take much longer (Langberg, 2003, p. 85). Similarly, when the victim is closely related to the perpetrator, the damage is greater. In addition, with wider age discrepancy between perpetrator and victim, such as father perpetrating his daughter or son, increased damage is also noted (p.85). Langberg also states “Those whose bodies responded sexually generally carry tremendous guilt. Disclosed abuse that receives no help has more potential for damage. Negative parental reactions (punishment, accusations, disbelief, or denial) and either ineffective or stigmatizing institutional responses are also very injurious” (p. 85).

Practitioners need to been keenly aware of the signs and symptoms exhibited in children and adolescents who have been sexually abused. Detailed lists of signs for clues of sexual abuse in infants and children are available and include different warning signs depending on a child’s age (Rossetti, 1991, p. 70). Clearly, signs of physical trauma to genitalia as well as unusual bleeding, lacerations, or genital/rectal pain complaints need further investigation.

In preschool aged children, bedwetting, regressive or abruptly changing behaviors, hyperactivity, and sometimes rather nonspecific somatic complaints may be indicators of sexual abuse. Abused preschoolers may demonstrate sexualized behaviors, such as excessive masturbation, sexualized kissing or thrusting, acting out with peers, or precocious sexual knowledge or curiosity.
School-aged children may also have disturbed relationships, impaired sleep, changes in academic performance, avoidance of physical activity or undressing, or become mistrustful, depressed, or withdrawn. Adolescents, who may exhibit any of the previously mention signs, may also engage in self-destructive activities (self-inflicted injury, chemical abuse), delinquency, eating disorders, promiscuity, prostitution, or become pregnant at an early age.

**The Effects of Priest Sexual Abuse on the Survivor**

Just as society labels the disclosed abuse scandal of priest as a “tsunami” so it is for the confused victim who breaks the silence. It’s as if a tsunami hits the soul, leaving devastation and a lot of cleanup work required for years to come. Adlerian psychology believes that a person’s sense of self comes from his or her environment and that the adults actively engaged in the child’s life helps shape the child into their own private logic. Imagine a little girl or boy, trusting the beloved ‘father’ whom then fondles him or her in the confessional booth. What does this do to the mind of the child? What then does he or she believe about God, about him or herself in relation to God? What happens if the child believes “Father” is God? How does the child make sense of who God is and what happens to the child’s understanding of him or herself?

The devastation and destruction of abuse goes to the core belief of a person’s sense of worth, belonging and significance when abused by a priest. Bass and Davis (1994) state “the long-term effects of child sexual abuse can be so pervasive that it’s sometimes hard to pinpoint exactly how the abuse affected you. It permeates everything: your sense of self, your intimate relationships, your sexuality, your parenting, your work life, even your sanity. Everywhere you look, you see its effects” (p. 37). Abuse affects each of the five components which Adler believed to create a person’s lifestyle: friendship/social, work, sex/love, self, and cosmos.
Sexual abuse by a priest not only relates to the entire being or wholeness of the person, but also to his or her ability to trust in a higher power.

Ironically, that trust which is often a very critical component in psychological healing is layered with a confounded complexity due to general teaching of the Catholic Church that an individual’s priest is closer and more connected to God. It is proper practice for Catholic members to address the priest as “Father.” The common protocol for Catholics is to respect and honor their “Father” as the individual human being most closely aligned with his or her spiritual connection to God. Similar to non-clergy abuse, it is also common for priests who offend to befriend the child’s family, thereby increasing a vulnerable child’s chance to be victimized as well as the inhibition to report.

We can begin to see the incredible psychological and spiritual damage done to a child who is abused by his or her priest. This is compounded by the victim’s connection in his or her mind directly between God the Father and the abusing priest as Father. For a victim of abuse by a priest this is especially frightening territory, as one essentially believes God is in the priest. “In the Catholic Church, a priest is called Father, and the image of God is male. Thus, if God is Father, and the priest is Father, it makes sense that an abuse experience with a priest would negatively affect a child’s perception of God” (McLaughlin, 1994, p. 146). Catholic survivors may be at greater risk for permanent separation from the church of their childhood.

Burkett and Bruni (1993) report that “Few are able to seek comfort in another house of worship. If a Methodist is abused by a minister, he can simply become Presbyterian, says Marie Fortune, a United Church of Christ minister who works to heal parish’s devastated by the sexual misdeed of their clergy. Catholics don’t have a choice. They’ve been taught that theirs is the only true Church. They are left then physically violated, emotionally raw, psychologically
damaged-and spiritually abandoned” (as cited in McLaughlin, 1994, p. 148). In my own journey, I have difficulty even saying the word “Father” because intense body memories may come flushing back to remind me of the nightmares of my abuse.

Sexual abuse strips and distorts the survivors’ ability to trust himself, herself, or anyone else in the world. Virginia Satir refers to this splitting or cutting off, lost parts of the self (Satir, Banmen, Gerber, & Gomori, 1991). Not until the survivor has a secure, safe holding environment to explore, express and break into the dark secrets long forgotten will the journey of healing begin.

The Long Journey of Understanding the Effects of Sexual Abuse

Attitudes which reflect limited knowledge of the effects of sexual abuse on the person’s self image and esteem have shifted since the 1960’s. This rise of awareness began with the women’s movement, progressed to identify sexual abuse to children as a crime, and has now firmly established that sexual abuse delivers severe psychological damage to the victim. Research from the 1960s to the present day support that sexual abuse should be treated as a trauma, no different than surviving a plane crash or tsunami or any other traumatic event.

For over one hundred years, scientists have been studying the complexity of the brain and memory. In 1889 psychologist Pierre Janet “postulated that intense emotional reactions make events traumatic by interfering with the integration of the experience into existing memory schemes. Intense emotions, Janet thought, cause memories of particular events to be dissociated from consciousness and to be stored, instead, as visceral sensations (anxiety and panic), or visual images (nightmares and flashbacks). Janet also observed that traumatized patients seemed to react to reminders of the trauma with emergency responses that had been relevant to the original threat but had no bearing on current experience. Janet coined the term dissociation and
subconscious where memories are automatically stored” (Whitfield, 1995, p. 110). Freud initially introduced the concept of repression. He also focused much of trauma to a biologic base: “After severe shock…the dream life continually takes the patient back to the situation of his disaster from which he awakens with renewed terror…The patient has undergone a physical fixation to the trauma” (van der Kolk, 1993).

During Freud’s era authors suggested that “there was even less trauma in childhood sexual abuse than one might imagine because ‘the child itself often unconsciously desires the sexual activity and becomes a more or less willing partner in it” (Rossetti, 1995, p. 1469). Other early studies before the 1970s, including the most well-known Kinsey report, claimed that in most instances of child sexual abuse children “were not likely to do the child any appreciable harm if the child’s parents do not become disturbed” by the abuse (p.1469). This observation was affirmed by Gagnon and Simon (1970), who summarized “the evidence suggest that the long-term consequences of victimization are quite mild” (p. 13).

With science and time, we now understand these early beliefs to be false. Modern research has identified that sexual abuse indeed traumatizes individuals on factors including sexualization, stigmatization, betrayal, and powerlessness (Finkelhor, et al., 1986). As science unravels the mysteries of the largest organ in the body, the brain, we begin to learn the unique and incredible power the brain has to protect itself from the horror of sexual abuse.

**Trauma, Memory and the Brain**

In the video series *Trauma and Memory*, van der Kolk (1993) reports that the body cannot lie. Today researchers believe trauma survivors experience trauma in a multimodal fashion, including hyperamnesia, hyperactivity to stimuli, and re-experiencing of the original trauma. These coexist with psychic numbing, avoidance amnesia and anhedonia, otherwise
known as dissociation. Much of today’s research comes in light of adults remembering abuse, not with currently abused children. A recent prospective study identifies major neuroendocrine disturbances in sexually abused girls compared with non-abused girls (Shenk, Noll, Putnam, & Trickett, 2010).

Scientists are now beginning to understand that these memories may be repressed via complex psychological processes. “Memory repression is the creative product of a convergence of factors. It is not a single moment of memory slippage. It is multifaceted, set in motion before the abuse happens, shaped profoundly during the abuse, and reinforced by the perpetrator and family afterward (Fredrickson, 1992, p. 54).

Charles Whitfield (1995), a leading physician in the field of trauma and memory, reports that from 1987 to 1995 seven studies examine the memories of abuse victims. “By interviews, surveys and long-term clinical observation, the authors studied 1,039 people, mostly women, regarding their memories of having been sexually abused in childhood. While they do not address other kinds of abuse, they found that 16-64 percent, depending on the study, had delayed memories of having been sexually abused. The incomplete memories reported ranged from delay of memory to incomplete recollection to completely forgetting. Memories were more likely to be forgotten if the abuse occurred at a younger age or was associated with physical injury, fear of death, or resulted from multiple or highly repetitive abusers. Extra-familial abusers were least likely to be forgotten. Even in the study with highest rate of amnesia for the abuse (64%), 2 of 3 cases had corroborating evidence of the abuse from other sources (p. 70).

While all seven studies are helpful the most profound finding was in a study where all of the 129 women studied had medical records documenting previous childhood sexual abuse (Williams, 1994, p. 1167). When interviewed 17 years later, 38 percent had forgotten the abuse,
and another 10 percent reported having forgotten the abuse at some time in the past, for a total of 48 percent. Starting with written documentation of the abuse and interview the survivors years later is one way of obtaining information about our memory of abuse. Whitfield (1995) also stated, “I and other clinicians find that even when they have always remembered it, most patients don’t want to remember the abuse. Instead, they tend to minimize and often even deny its existence. This is why, in assisting people in their recovery, a gentle and supportive approach is most helpful, so that the person can feel safe enough to allow their True Self to ‘come out of hiding’ to explore their experiences of having been mistreated” (p. 71).

Expanding on the understanding of trauma after Janet, the earliest explorer of trauma and the brain, researchers today understand trauma memories exist either as semantic or declarative memory. Declarative memory contains the facts of an item or event, whereas semantic memory contains an individual’s meanings and understandings of that item. The act of remembering is a constructive process, meaning that the accessibility of memories depends on existing mental schemata. “Once an event or a particular bit of information is integrated into the existing external schemes, it will no longer be accessible as a separate, immutable entity but will be distorted both by previous experience and by the emotional state at the time of recall” (van der Kolk, 1994, p. 258). Researchers also note that sensory experiences and visual images related to the trauma seem not to fade over time. “The memories also are less likely to be distorted than ordinary experiences. When people experience trauma they experience a ‘speechless terror’: the emotional impact of the event may interfere with the capacity to capture the experience in words or symbols. This leads to the body storing memory in a somatosensory, such as somatic sensations, behavior enactment, nightmares, and flashbacks” (p. 259).
The limbic system has been studied for years and scientists now believe it is the integral part of the brain that controls the CNS (central nervous system). It maintains and guides the emotions and behavior necessary for self-preservation and survival. “During both waking and sleeping states, signals from the sensory organs continuously travel to the thalamus, from which they distribute to the cortex (setting up a ‘stream of thought’), the basal ganglia (setting up a ‘stream of movement’), and the limbic system (setting up a ‘stream of emotions’ that determines the emotional significance of the sensory input). Most processing of sensory input occurs outside of conscious awareness, with only novel, significant, or threatening information being selectively passed on to the new cortex for further attention” (van der Kolk, 1994, p. 260).

Many abuse survivors struggle with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, a diagnosis categorized in the DSM IV-TR. This diagnosis requires identification of a specific traumatic event that involved actual or threatened serious injury or death and resulted in a response of intense fear, helplessness, or horror. The following are symptoms used in diagnosing PTSD when present for at least 3 months and resulting in functional impairment: recurrent and intrusive memories, recurrent distressing dreams, feeling as if the even were recurring, intense psychological distress or physiological reactivity on exposure to cues that associate back to the event. This subsequently results in avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma, symptoms of increased arousal (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, pp. 467-468).

Until the 1970s little research had been done on the effects abuse, incest and the enduring symptoms with which victims lived. During those years it was referred to as “the Age of Denial” (Rossetti, 1991, p. 84). With courage of the victim to move from ‘victimization to survivor’ Brown notes survivors still suffered yet another trauma; it is called the “second injury.” Butler (1978) refers to this second injury to describe the pain when no assistance comes from agencies
or individuals whom the victim believed would help him or her. Whether a child who speaks out to an adult provider or an adult victim speaking out to the Catholic Diocese this “second injury” is believed to develop a self concept based on shame (as cited in Rossetti, 1991, p. 84).

**Sexual Abuse - The Production of Shame**

Shame is a complex mechanism of an internal dialog of a misperceived ideal self. The roots of the word shame are thought to derive from an older word meaning to cover; as such, covering oneself, literally or figuratively, is a natural expression of shame (Lewis, 1971, p. 63). If we look to the creation story of man from the Christian perspective, we learn about Adam and Eve experiencing shame as God spoke with Adam about eating from the tree of knowledge. Here we see the first nature of Adam feeling shame in his words: “But the Lord God called out to the man, ‘Where are you?’ He answered, ‘I heard you in the garden; I was afraid and hid from you because I was naked.’ ‘Who told you that you were naked?’ God asked. ‘Did you eat the fruit that I told you not to eat?’ The man answered, ‘The woman you put here with me gave me the fruit, and I ate it” (Genesis3:9, 1976).

Adam is telling God it is not his fault, that indeed it is God’s fault for placing the temptation, Eve who told him to eat the apple from the forbidden tree. Why would Adam hide and shift the blame to Eve? I believe this is the first glimpse of what shame is. Adam internally knows he did something ‘wrong’ and he immediately shifts the attention from his shame to Eve by using blame. He not only blames Eve, but he blames God! Why doesn’t he merely state and be responsible for his own actions? The Bible is full of people who struggle owning their actions and take out their own shame by using blame, killing people, whatever it takes to cover, ultimately producing shame over and over again. It does leave the reader with the question: Did Adam feel shame in the definition we know today?
Cultural anthropologist Ruth Benedict dichotomized shame from guilt in a landmark paper from 1946, indicating that shame is a violation of cultural or social values while guilt arises from a violation of internal values (Creighton, 1990, p. 282). Fossum and Mason (1986) also distinguishes guilt from shame, indicating "While guilt is a painful feeling of regret and responsibility for one's actions, shame is a painful feeling about oneself as a person" (p. 5).

According to a professor and researchers at the University of Texas-Houston, shame is having an intense fear of disconnection. Her research has suggested that people who live with shame believe they are not worthy to be loved, as if to say they think and believe they should be punished (Brown, 2010). Jeff VanVonderen, pastor and author of *Families where Grace is in Place*, stated “In shame based systems, love is conditional, based on performance; acceptance is not free, it is earned by performing certain behaviors and avoiding others” (VanVonderen, 1992, p. 138). Bradshaw (1988) states abuse survivors often acquire “toxic shame.” The victim not only needs to deal with the trust of the violation by the perpetrator of the crime, but also by the person(s) who failed to stop or at least protect harm from happening. This deep level of distrust on two levels develops into what Bradshaw calls “toxic shame,” that is shame that the victim believes he or she is inherently flawed (p. 21).

In this sense, shame and guilt are especially strong components of clergy sexual abuse. A clergy sexual abuse survivor may develop intense shame from a society that adores their priest, while also feeling intense internal guilt stemming from confusion about their sense of physical pleasure during the abuse. It may also be that the perpetrator puts his or her own shame from childhood directly on the victim. These dynamics are used—all too effectively—to manipulate victims into silence. The victim then puts the shameful acts of abuse on like a coat, which covers up his or her own inherent worth and beauty as created by God. The cycle continues until the
silence of the shamed-based lies and unspeakable acts are separated apart from the powerful messages they carry. Here are examples of toxic shame and the scars of sexual abuse, leaving survivors with a false sense of self:

Sally reports being a survivor of abuse as a teen girl and as an adult woman, all with the same priest:

“The memories I have are ones I want to forget. I try to push them from my mind, but they return over and over. I use to clean his house for him. This is how it started when I was fourteen. The fear that no one would believe me and my family, and community worshiping the ground he walked on, made it too hard to talk about. There was no chance anyone would believe me instead of him. There were so many points in life I wanted to die. I felt dirty daily, wanting to rip my skin off, not wanting to believe I participated. I liked it. I got married, but continued to have sex with Father. He married my husband and me. I’m worthless because I participated and enjoyed it—did I not invite it by participating in it? I felt trapped in a cage and I couldn’t get out, no matter how hard I tried (Sally, personal communication, December 5, 2010. Permission granted).

Sue is a survivor who stated she was raped by her priest on her confirmation day. Her mother walked in while being raped; her nightgown was torn and she laid in blood on her bed. The priest scurried out of the house, saying no words and continued the day of confirming her and her classmates. Her mother did nothing and told her to pray for the priest. She stated “I felt sacrificial, dirty, and confused and began my life of addiction the following year” (Sue, 2010).

Toxic shame is a strong component of sexual abuse, so much that people hold the core mistaken belief that somehow the abuse was their fault, that they are inherently bad and
unlovable. The spiritual, psychological and physical wounds leave the victim with years and year of repairing the soul and for some, this may never happen.

I believe a key component of this shame has to do with our inability to tolerate the lies that we tell ourselves while rationalizing, minimizing, justifying, or denying. Our psyche tries to protect itself by perpetuating these non-truths, while at the same time the soul is preparing to rid the person from the unspeakable, replacing shame with truth. Living in truth, I believe, is the right of every human which allows us to believe we are each worthy of love and healing. No acts or behaviors should deny a person of this right. Ironically the very components we need to survive and grow are the very components that are often blocked when we live our lives out of shame. In this way, sexual abuse suffocates the souls of both the perpetrator and victim. Until the soul rids itself of its secrets, it will suffocate into an unfruitful death.

I found my voice by breaking the silence publically (See appendix A). Much against the choice of my extended family, I decided to speak out in hope for others to speak as well. Since these articles were published, people from all over the county have been in contact with me to tell their story.

**The Layered Component of God as Father Who Abuses: Effects on the Survivor**

As noted, prevalence statistics show that 1 out of 4 girls have been sexually abused before the age of 18, and 1 out of 6 men have been abused before the age of 19 (Finkelhor, 1994; Gorey & Leslie, 1997; Rind, et al., 1998). These numbers are the staggeringly harsh reality that abuse occurs right under our nose, within our churches, communities, families, and homes. Allender (1990) stated the sad reality, “The silence is rarely broken. Few children or adolescents tell a parent, friend, or teacher about the abuse. It remains a dark secret for years, if not forever. The illusion of a good home and loving parents satisfies the curiosity of others and quiets the
crippling pain of the past. The rage and the pleasure are deeply buried in the soul, with no marker or adequate opportunity for grief. The effects of the damage, however, continue to work their way through the human personality. The streams of powerlessness, betrayal, and ambivalence continue to fuel the river of rage that has been held back by the dam of denial” (p. 110).

Considering the history of how sexuality and abuse are mishandled by individual priests, perhaps it is no wonder the Roman Catholic Church as a whole has followed suit in not properly handling allegations of abuse. Not until 2001 did the Roman Catholic Church publicly acknowledge that its own leaders may have partaken in such crimes (Doyle, et al., 2006). Even so, individual priests within the Catholic Church are very often not held accountable for the abuse. Now that victims are coming forward to speak the previously “unspeakable” done by their trusted religious Father, what happens to the survivors? What happens when the perpetrator of the abuse is the victim’s priest?

Numerous studies have reported that sexual abuse when perpetrated by a priest or minister delivers profound psychological and spiritual damage. Matchan (1992) interviewed Stephen Rossetti, who is a practicing priest who works at St. Luke’s Institute in Maryland, a healing center for perpetrating priests. It was noted that “what has been more consistently reported is greater trauma from experiences involving fathers or father figures compared with all other types of perpetrators. In the Roman Catholic Church, the ordained priest is addressed by Catholics, young and old, as ‘Father.’ He holds a position of sacred trust and is thought of as God’s representative. One of the victims of former priest James Porter, expressed his sense of betrayal, “We were brought up that the priests…were the next thing to God on earth” (p. 8).
Connection with God is often frightening territory for a victim of abuse by a priest, because one believes God is the priest. Who wants to believe in a God who abuses? McLaughlin (1994) summarized the intertwined relationship, “God is seen as holy, a member of the clergy. God is male. Thus, if God is Father, and the priest is Father, it makes sense that an abuse experience with a priest would negatively affect a child’s perception of God” (p. 150).

Research has also shown that “child sexual abuse by a trusted male figure, especially the father, is likely to be most traumatic for victims” and that “violation of an adult-child relationship is just as serious when the relationship does not involve a blood relationship as when it does.” So fundamentally, “more than the actual sexual contact, the victims are most traumatized by the betrayal of their trust” (Rossetti, 1995, p. 1471).

Catholic survivors may be at greater risk for permanent separation from the church of their childhood. Burkett & Bruni (1993) reported “Few are able to seek comfort in another house of worship. If a Methodist is abused by a minister, he can simply become Presbyterian, says Marie Fortune, a United Church of Christ minister who works to heal parish’s devastated by the sexual misdeed of their clergy. Catholics don’t have a choice. They’ve been taught that theirs is the only true Church. They are left then physically violated, emotionally raw, psychologically damaged-and spiritually abandoned” (p. 139).

In my own journey, never could I fully trust the faith I had longed for: believe in Christ and trust my life to him. Always I felt a block, this inability to feel safe within my own skin. I learned to compartmentalize God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. As a girl, I was taught that Christ would come back, walk the earth, and save those who believed in him. It was this piece that saved my mind, that he would come and get me from the abuse, from God, the priest. Not until recently could I even begin to put the trinity back together as one, and I still struggle to do so.
My Story

It once was very hard for me to admit that I was sexually abused by my priest. I feared no one would believe me, and my mind reinforced this by bringing up vividly many etched-in, old lies which prevented me from speaking. One of the most powerful was just what the priest told me for so many years – quiet, nobody would believe you. Today, I write and speak with confidence that I am in victory over the sexual abuse that happened to me by my priest over ten years, from age of four to fourteen. The priest who abused me is dead, but the trauma which he inflicted on his victims is present, and for some others, it is still silenced by denial and shame.

I grew up on a dairy farm in central Wisconsin, the youngest of 13 siblings. My parents were hard-working farmers, busy raising and feeding thirteen little ones. My priest was a family friend who attended all of our family’s holidays and visited the house frequently, sometimes daily. Much of the small farm community had knowledge that he also abused adult women, their own wives, but a blanket of denial covered the town for fear of speaking out against the Catholic religion they desperately loved. I can remember my siblings joking about Father having sex with a community member—as if to say this is something to laugh about—followed by going to the local bar after Sunday service to drink a beer with him. A few brave farmers tried to confront the issue many years ago; others silenced it in the community to protect the beloved, friendly priest.

He was my Dad’s best friend, who would fish on my father’s ‘sacred’ boat. This boat is a place where my father would fish and talk to God. Even years after learning about the abuse, the one phrase my eighty-one year old father still mumbles under his breath today which fills his eyes with tears is “I took him on my boat.” Not until recently has some of the community seen the truth of what has happened for over thirty years by their once trusted priest. Still, some
remain in disbelief. The collision of religious belief and self concept converged as one, forming an eclipse which blinded an entire community to silence about crimes being committed to their own children and wives.

When disclosing my memories to my parents with my therapists present, I feared it would be discounted, not believed. The 90-minute drive from my home to my therapists’ office is was a ride I will never forget. Sweat poured from my body in anticipation of telling my parents. I used music to help me focus on my strength from God to get me through the day. I had been struggling with body memories, flash-backs, and nightmares for weeks on end. For me, the fear of hurting my parents was bigger than life. I feared this information would kill them, as if somehow I could have stopped the abuse from happening. If I could have stopped it from happening, then my parents would not be hurt. I learned to protect the family secrets that abuse was happening right under our noses. At all costs, I learned to protect the family fantasy that we had no problems.

The fear of not being believed overwhelmed me, for the priest would whisper this in my ear when he abused me. My little girl often took over with fear, knowing how much power and influence ‘Father’ the priest had in our family system. As stated in the book The Wounded Heart, “The impossibility of being enough to change a dysfunctional family leads to the initial experience of powerlessness” (Allender, 1990, p. 116). This is where the mistaken core belief that the abuse was my fault—and hence all things are my fault—began for me.

With my two therapists present along with my husband and my parents, I looked into my therapist’s eyes. He ever so gently gave me the nod to go ahead and speak. I will never forget that moment with tears swelled up in my eyes, my body trembling, feeling small, scared, and yet knowing I am an adult woman who deserves to heal. This is something I had to do in order to
heal; to tell the truth. I told my folks the painful memories of my abuse. I fell to my knees sobbing in my Dad’s arms. My mother sat on the couch and wept.

One of the most painful experiences an abused victim can have is that of his or her family disbelieving the abuse happened. Unfortunately, this is what happened in my situation. Some family members believe me, as they themselves witnessed our priest abuse other girls and others continue to protect the family legacy that this cannot be happening in our family. Could this really be true in a family that appeared so close to one another, that had no problems on the outside and who was viewed and upheld by the community as the model family? We can see where private logic to self preserve used to protect itself from the harsh reality. Whitfield states the chance of the abuser and co-abuser to admit and apologize is substantially less than 20 percent (Whitfield, 1995, p. 140).

After I reported my abuse to the Diocese, one of the most damaging aspects of the process was that they required me to be repeatedly re-victimized by having to tell my story over and over again, to prove myself. Before I could speak to the Bishop, I had to prove my case to be valid to speak to him. With each person that made me talk further to prove this happened, I experienced more flashbacks and body memories. And yet, despite seeking ever-increasing level of details, the Diocese is not convinced they know that my abuse occurred by the hands of one of their priests. Their defense was that my abuser was dead and therefore they had no way of definitively knowing that he did it. This was their defensive stance, even though they acknowledged that he slept with other adult women in the parish and that others had given testimony of witnessing other girls abused as well.

The Diocese then claimed that my therapists were not qualified and therefore wanted me to go to see a psychologist of their choosing, several hours away from my home. Their claim
was that this visit was for the purpose of my own healing rather than as part of a forensic investigation. Many professional mental health care specialists consistently advised me against going to their psychologist, and others confirmed my diagnosis of PTSD from the abuse of my priest. The Diocesan policy is to assign an ‘advocate’ purportedly on my behalf, but in the end, after three and a half years of dealing with the Diocese, I met with the primary advocate only once at the very beginning, and after she was replaced several months into my campaign, her replacement never did end up meeting with me at any time over the ensuing three years.

Why was it that the church, veritable leaders acting in the name of a compassionate God, could not reach out and provide comfort and understanding? Why did I need to prove my abuse to someone who’d made up his mind to the contrary yet was not there to even know my childhood priest let alone the reality of what happened? Why was the Bishop’s attitude such that during one conversation he had placed a lawyer secretly hiding in an adjacent room to listen to our conversation? Would Jesus Christ handle such pain in this manner? Lawyers listening to determine whether the pain one experiences is truth? I think not! Rather, the Bible is replete with situations where Christ sat with the downtrodden and comforted his people with a gentle touch, understanding eyes, and thoughtful ears, to see, hear, and experience the pain of another human being. Indeed, Jesus Christ displayed social interest.

There are many layers a victim needs to go through to report abuse in the Roman Catholic Church. People don’t just show up and begin dialogue. When working toward what Adler referred to as common sense, which ultimately leads us to social interest, people are attuned to the wounds of another’s soul. I did not experience this from the Diocese. In fact, the policies of the Diocese, used by their Child Sexual Abuse Review Board, set a standard of proof that is so difficult to attain that the end result is little if any acceptance or action on sexual abuse
allegations. An independent review in 2004 found that this very Diocese had “exonerated clergy in 64% of cases between 1950 and 2002, compared with the national average of under 10%” (Johnson, 2010). Even a canon lawyer and vice chancellor from within the Archdiocese itself said that the policy of this Diocese requires “a high burden of proof that may have caused the diocese to return abusive priests to ministry,” and he asserted that all such cases should be reviewed (Johnson, 2010). The result is that the vast majority of accused priests in this area are actively kept in positions with parishioner contact and power, despite individuals making concerted efforts to call attention to their stories of abuse.

Three bishops had come and gone in my three years of working with the diocese, with no one taking ownership of what has happened to me, my family, and a small farm community—all of whom are still hurting. In my recent visit with the new bishop, he promised that I be paid for my therapy bills as it was evident that I was hurt. Yet in the same breath, he reiterated that he cannot prove or have the church own that it was this priest who abused me, because doing so would inflict bad character on his name, which by church law is not allowed.

Importantly, I had also presented “bigger picture demands” for the diocese to implement structural changes in the process by which it hears and processes claims of abuse. I also requested that the church announce to my childhood parish that they had received a report of abuse during the years of my childhood. My intent for this was to open the door for building a community of healing that could include other victims of this same priest. The church has not responded, so that call for change is still standing without action.

**Defining Social Interest**

When considering maladjustment from the Adlerian perspective, destruction ensues when communication is limited and controlled by dominance. Adler refers to this as striving for
significance on the vertical axis. This striving for significance is one of power and competition to ensure what appears to be security and sense of belonging. However, it actually leads to more craving of non-cooperation with others. When problems occur in society between groups of people or between individuals, it is important to understand what meanings individuals attribute to their situation. “The meaning they give to life is a private meaning. No one stops short at his or her own persons. Their goal of success is a goal of personal superiority and their triumphs have meaning only to themselves. A private meaning in fact is no meaning at all. Every human being strives for significance, but people always make mistakes if they do not see that their whole significance must consist in their contribution to the lives of others” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 156). This Adlerian mindset is pivotal for survivors and perpetrators within the Church to move from the useless side of life to the useful side of life.

One of the main components of Alfred Adler’s theory of Individual Psychology is the belief that manifestation of maladjustment directly relates to the level of the individual’s social interest. Departing from Freud’s belief that sexuality is the primary motivator for behavior, Adler believed that society shapes a child’s ability to either compensate or develop what Adler refers to as organ inferiority. Social interest is defined as seeing with the eyes of another, hearing with the ears of another, and feeling with the heart of another, or what Adler referred to as Gemeinschaftsgefühl. “Social Interest is a term that refers to the individual's awareness of belonging in the human community and the extent of his or her sense of being a fellow being. Social interest is a capacity inherent in all human beings which must be developed and trained, analogous, in this way, to the capacity for language and speech. In the Adlerian schema, social interest can be thought of as an index to successful adaptation: The more developed the social
interest, the more diminished the individual's feelings of inferiority, alienation, and isolation” (Griffith, 2010).

Adler believed an individual’s internal dialogue is socially connected to his or her environment, beginning from the first breath of life. Well established by the age of five, the child learns how his or her thoughts, feelings, and behaviors contribute to achieve significance, a sense of worthiness in his family and society, hence creating his or her own private logic. Adler also believed this striving for significance directly relates to the three life tasks which Adler defines as: work, love, and friendship. These life tasks work in tandem with the individual’s social interest. The lower the social interest in a person, the greater the degree in variance of maladjustment to complete the tasks of life.

Depending on the child’s ability to overcome feelings of inferiority, Adler believes the child either uses his or her experiences to improve social interest or to manifest a neurotic disposition. Life is movement and “everyone carries within himself an opinion of himself and the problems of life, a lifeline, and a law of movement which keeps fast hold of him without his understanding it or giving himself an account of it” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 195). This movement, acquired from childhood, carries schemes which conduct or direct a person’s lifestyle. Often a lack of courage and inferior feelings keep the adult from moving in an upward fashion, or to work on what Adler refers to as the useful side of life. “As long as the feeling of inferiority is not too great, a child will always strive to be worthwhile and on the useful side of life. Such a child, in pursuing his end, is interested in others. Social feeling and social adjustment are the right and normal compensations” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 155).
Social Interest for the Victim-a Healing Agent to Restore the Soul

The healing journey which involves the mind, body, and spirit does not come in a defined or linear package. It is what Adler would refer to as movement in search of the individual’s final fictionate goal. It is constantly in motion which is fluid, though it may appear to not be progressing at all. With pain inflicted so deeply to the soul, how does one move in the direction of health, serenity, and acceptance of what happened?

Adler believed that when we work towards seeing with the eyes of another, hearing with the ears of another, and feeling of the heart of another, we are more able to move from a felt minus to a perceived plus. The writer of the story begins to create and shape his or her own life; he or she becomes both the picture and the artist. When dealing with abuse perpetrated by a priest, it has been my experience and belief that social interest is a key component to help the victim become victorious over the abuse. Indeed the picture and the artist are in motion.

Before discussing the larger scope of social interest in regards to healing, it is important to understand the core needs of a survivor of sexual abuse. According to Bass and Davis survivors need the following in the recovery process:

1. understand how you were silenced, 2. break the silence by telling someone, 3. get validation from safe people that it happened and that it matters today, 4. understand that it was never your fault and that you are not to blame, 5. find your child within at the time of the abuse, 6. find your anger which is the backbone of healing, 7. disclosure either to family or to close friends about the abuse, 8. allow yourself to grieve and mourn, 9. forgive yourself which will move to a restored spirituality (Bass & Davis, 1994, pp. 92-165).
How does social interest help a survivor address these many needs of their recovery process? Each of the Bass and Davis stages of healing ultimately requires community in order to be addressed. When a survivor has community, he or she has a safe environment to move through the pain of the abuse. The very fact that secrecy of the abuse holds such incredible power, social interest is needed to release the silence. Victimhood remains entrenched when there is silence with the mistaken belief there are no choices.

“Abuse strips a person of the freedom to choose. This causes a sense of powerlessness. There are (at least) three forces that cause a sense of powerlessness: the inability to change the dysfunctional family, the ability to stop the abuse, and the inability to end the relentless pain in the soul” (Allender, 1990, p. 114). Social interest restores the soul by moving the victim from this powerlessness. It is the absolute crux of healing.


Bernie McDaid was abused by his priest as a young altar boy. As a teen, Bernie became addicted to drugs and alcohol as a way to cope with the shame of his abuse. Now sober, Bernie has exemplified courage to pave the way for thousands of survivors through social interest. He is the only survivor to ever talk and meet the Pope in 2008. Upon the Pope’s visit to the US, Bernie placed his hand on the Pope’s chest and said “Holy Father, you have a cancer in your flock. You need to tend to your flock and take action” (McDaid, personal interview, November 1, 2010. Permission granted.). Since this meeting there has been little affirmative action by the Pope.

Bernie then co-founded SurvivorsVoice.Org, which was created to help victims be heard. The organization was formed to build public awareness of the plague of childhood sexual abuse, which has occurred and is still occurring, not just in the Catholic Church, but in other institutions
and homes all over the world. It is working to get the Vatican to accept responsibility for the actions of its pedophile priests, make amends to survivors of clergy sexual abuse, adopt a zero tolerance policy concerning sexual abuse by its priests, and create an extensive secular outreach & support system for past and future survivors of clergy sexual abuse. An inspiration for the group comes from Martin Luther King, Jr., who proclaimed “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter” (King, 1968).

In March of 2010, I contacted Bernie after seeing his story in Time magazine. I soon became friends with Bernie and decided to experience social interest for myself. The decision to buy a ticket to Rome to experience this community gathering event certainly did raise the eyebrows of many around me. I had many mixed feelings as well. I experienced fear, uncertainty, ambivalence, doubt, and excitement all at the same time. Meeting people from around the world, to openly talk and share the stories of abuse isn’t your typical vacation to Rome. Yet, social interest isn’t a vacation; it’s a growth experience to become the person who you were meant to be.

October 31 is Reformation Day, a date regarded as a religious holiday commemorating Martin Luther’s demand for change within the 16th century Catholic Church. On October 31, 2010, SurvivorsVoice gathered people from around the world to come together outside the Vatican City to call attention to the need for modern day reform. The goals of the day were to provide support and speak out to say “Enough!” to the insidious abuse within the Catholic church and its mishandling of that abuse. Organizers regard this combination of offenses on the scale involved as tantamount to crimes against humanity. From twelve different countries, victims of clergy sexual abuse stood together and experienced social interest at its core level. This was the first time any organization had gathered for a public demonstration related to the
problem of sexual abuse of Catholic priests. It was very powerful moment in history—one I will cherish forever.

Gathering in a press room on a back street in the city center of Rome, survivors piled in to listen, see, and hear the stories of incredible pain of abuse which occurred during their childhood by the hands of Roman Catholic priests. As I sat in front with a microphone to tell my story, I experienced this incredible sense of safety with fellow human beings who understood and empathized with my journey of being a survivor of clergy sexual abuse. I was experiencing social interest at its deepest sense. As press from around the world gathered to hear and record the stories told, there was a sense of incomprehensible passion, empathy and understanding of the painful memories victims struggle to overcome.

There were over 60 deaf adults from Verona, Italy who had attend a Catholic school as children and were all abused by priests at the school. Not until this day had they spoken about their abuse, for in Italy it is taboo to speak negatively of the Catholic jurisdiction in Rome, the Holy See, or Pope. What incredible courage these people displayed! I watched and listened as each one stood up to tell their story. Despite a multitude of language barriers (International Sign Language was translated to Italian and then to English, etc), the level of communication in the room was unprecedented. One man signed the pain of his abuse by six priests during his childhood. As I was sitting at the front table he continued to look at me with fear and tears in his eyes while his entire body trembled, as if to say “Do you see me, hear me, and feel my pain?” Not a dry eye in the room for hours and hours, together we created a family, a community of understanding, safety, and love.

In the early evening we gathered outside the Vatican, with the path to enter the Catholic enclave barricaded by police. Reporters from all over the world swarmed the area to take
pictures and collect interviews of our stories. This was the first time in history sexual abuse was brought to public awareness via a gathering on Roman soil! Indeed, history was taking place.

As we lit candles, one survivor to the next, there was an intense moment of silence for all abuse survivors all over the world. There I experienced social interest, a healing of my soul. Though the police force blocked us from entering Vatican itself as a group, nothing could stop the healing momentum of our group gathered around the square.

The following morning, friends e-mailed saying they heard me on National Public Radio. People contacted us from around the country for support, as they were also abused by their priests. Forty-one thousand news articles from around the world covered the story of this Reformation Day (Bergeron, 2010). The voices of survivors indeed rang around the world to say Enough, change must occur now. Following are two stories of survivors who shared their personal reactions regarding their experience on October 31, 2010.

Bernie shared:

On Reformation Day, this year in Rome, I felt love, compassion, and understanding from people who I never met before, who traveled from different parts of the world to stand together at the footsteps of St Peters Square to say "ENOUGH." When I lit my candle and passed my flame to another survivor's candle I wasn't alone anymore. I felt strong again. For the first time in eight painful years I felt “right” about myself and what I stood for. Before that beautiful evening in Rome I always felt incomplete and compelled to fight for my life and perhaps even my sanity. Now it is my choice. What a difference!

My future as a spiritual warrior is determined by a war that is fought in the heavens. I do not know what the future holds. The battle of injustice in the Catholic Church is everyone
who cares about children. The corruption of power and deceit goes all the way to the top. The enablers of this cover up are also are friends in the church pews, our politicians and governing bodies, weak priests and nuns and the powerful Catholic Church. The problem begs for resolve and healing. It certainly rings from the heavens and hell as well as down here in our simple little three dimensional existences on earth. I do not know where I will be, but I now know the direction I am heading (McDaid, personal communication, November 15, 2010. Permission granted).

Sue, a 63 year old woman from London with bright gray hair and a sparkle in her eyes carried herself with such poise and courage despite an awful story. She spoke of her priest who raped her on her confirmation day. There in her room, she laid on her bed, nightgown torn, with blood on the sheets the day she was to pledge her journey to be blessed by the priest and bishop to follow Christ in the Holy Roman Catholic Church forever. Her mother walked in on this terror, but immediately simply told her daughter to get up and never speak of it to anyone. In addition, she ordered her daughter to get on her knees and pray for the priest.

As she stated in her own words:

I am a survivor of sexual abuse by a Catholic priest from when I was ten years old until I was thirteen. The priest then hid behind his office, and the fact that my Mother, who had caught him in the act, was too “Priest obsessed” to protect me or seek justice on my behalf, I felt sacrificial. It left me with the legacy of alcoholism, addiction, and serious self harming, eating disorder, fear, shame, guilt, and unworthiness, inability to form relationships, trust anyone, feel anything more than an outcast, and on occasions be suicidal. At age seventeen I ran away into an unsuitable and very violent marriage. Age thirty and newly sober, I was left alone with six children under twelve, with no support.
It would be silly to suggest that my early experiences and sexual abuses didn't play a role in the loss of my faith, and of spirituality itself for a long time. For years I was like a dog who having been badly treated, will still hang around it's cruel owners, waiting for a word here, a pat there, despite everything, because it is all he knows! I hung around the Catholic faith because it was the only pack I knew, I didn’t think of doing anything other, in fact it was not until I was in my thirties that I realized I actually had a choice in what I believed. I always felt like an outcast, on the periphery of the Church, after all I felt utterly guilty that this "demigod "of a priest had abused me! The real loss of faith was erosion rather than an event. Gradually, I became stronger, more aware, and able to walk away from something that I see as destructive.

In terms of Rome, I felt I had arrived, I was at home! Not in Rome itself, the Vatican holds no interest to me, other than I don't trust them, but the amazing people I met, the people who couldn't speak or hear, whose abuses were horrific, humbled me, the others from America, I felt an immediate connection with. Poignant and unforgettable, it was a mixture of extreme emotions, joy at having found such kindred spirits, anger, and disgust at their abusers, and sadness for lives lost. Over all I felt like celebrating, every life saved, every unique and irreplaceable human being, who had been to Hell and had come back and gathered with me, holding my hand, hugging me, showing me what compassion and spirituality was all about. It made me feel invincible and yet vulnerable at the same time. It has had a profound effect on my life. I am still processing what I feel, but I know I
wouldn't have missed it for the world (Sue, personal communication, November 15, 2010. Permission granted).

**Conclusion**

The conflict regarding attitude and role of sexuality in the Roman Catholic Church dates back to early Roman times, even to the very formation of the church by Constantine from within a sexually-charged Roman pagan culture. There has not been consensus about what healthy sexuality is and how it relates in biblical terms to our daily lives. Not only has this been difficult to understand, but complications arose when applying rules and regulations for those who are called to priesthood. This conflict is most poignant in the setting of Catholic priests called to celibacy, who are put in positions of extreme emotional power over their parishioners. It has continued to foster confusion, secrecy, mistrust, anger, and dismay into the present.

Not until the women’s movement in the 1970’s was sexual abuse brought into public awareness. During this era, the subject and previously unspoken histories of horrific sexual abuse were brought to light. From state to state, reporting laws of sexual abuse in regards to clerics still vary widely, which adds to the confusion of how to handle allegations of sexual abuse by a clergy member. As of this moment, the Roman Catholic Church has not changed its formal Canon Law to require its members to formally report sexual abuse to state authorities. It is considered a crime in all fifty states. Reports estimate 20-40% of women and 1 out of 6 men will be sexually abused before the age of 18. These numbers are the staggering reality of the occurrence of sexual abuse in our world.

Today, with the help of research in how memory is stored in the brain, sexual abuse is better understood, validated, and treated as significant trauma. The layered effects of sexual abuse committed by a priest leaves survivors with symptoms of spiritual confusion, profound
shame, a distorted image of self, addictions, PTSD, and a host of other psychological challenges. When perpetrated by a Catholic priest, survivors often suffer profound alienation of their own faith, likely due to Catholic teaching which instructs children the only way to heaven is through the sacraments administered often by that same priest. This creates a whirlwind of confusion for the survivor regarding who God and his/her ability to trust in someone so powerfully and intimately named ‘Father,’ any other human being, or even in a higher power. The ideal self and reality collide, leaving the victim with a painfully fractured sense of self.

Social interest referred to as Gemeinschaftsgefühl by Adler, is to see with the eyes of another, hear with the ears of another and feel with the heart of another. This concept in action can serve as a powerful agent of healing and growth. Social interest changes lives to have meaning, belonging, and worthiness. Within the framework of Adlerian social interest, survivors of sexual abuse perpetrated by Catholic priests gathered from around the world at the Vatican on October 31, 2010 to experience healing and restoration with one another. By sharing their stories, many for the first time publically and some for the first time ever, these survivors developed a bond and mutual understanding which transcended the shame and pain of their collective histories of secretive and life-shattering abuse. Forty-one thousand news stories from around the world covered the story of these survivors who came forward—on Roman soil as a group—to approach and challenge the Vatican. That act that was the first of its kind in history (Bergeron, 2010). In the 21st century, people are now able to speak up publically about the reality of clergy sexual abuse and its horrible effects. Survivors no longer need to be held captive in silence. With this break of silence, victims become survivors. At the New Reformation Day, survivors held their torches of light, saying “ENOUGH!” to further abuse itself, to the secrecy that surrounds abuse, to the dismissal and re-victimization of survivors, and to the deep
sense of isolation and pain among the lost souls of church. Reflections gathered regarding this experience demonstrated the unexpected power created by being together, united in resolve, to share in each others’ stories and needs. The journey certainly continues for individuals of sexual abuse by clergy to find their voice. Through this social action, however, survivors are still continuing to find new meaning, plan for new events, build community stronger, and bring more awareness even for others who may have not—yet—found their voice.
References


Appendix A – News Articles regarding Reformation Day

Postbulletin.com: Rochester, MN  Page 1 of 2
Clergy Abuse Victims Rally At Vatican

by SYLVIA POGGIOLI

November 1, 2010

In the first such gathering at the heart of the Catholic Church, victims of clerical sex abuse from around the world gathered Sunday night outside the Vatican to demand justice. But police blocked them from bringing their protest under the windows of Pope Benedict XVI.

Close to 100 sex abuse victims carrying torches were outnumbered by paramilitary police who cordoned off the main avenue leading to the Vatican. Only two protesters were allowed to approach Vatican walls and deposit sealed letters addressed to the pope from abuse victims.

At a rally staged just 500 yards from the Vatican, Gary Bergeron — co-founder of the group Survivors Voice — addressed the crowd:

"What we once had as children we can never get back," he said. "We stand here today to serve as reminders to the world that what was once taken from us should never be taken from another child again."

Bergeron also said the group called on the United Nations to define and include the systemic sexual abuse of children under Article VI of its charter definitions of crimes against humanity.

Prompted by the worldwide explosion of sex abuse scandals, the event aimed to show victims they're not alone.

Bernie McDaid — who met with Benedict in Washington two years ago — said he had told the pope there was a cancer in the church. But, McDaid said, little has been done.

The demonstrators included a group of Italian men who were abused by priests at a Catholic Institute for the deaf in Verona between the 1960s and 1980s. They made themselves heard with whistles and held placards with messages such as "Shame," "The pope protects pedophile priests," "Church without abuse," and "Pope on trial."

Margaret Kennedy, an abuse victim from Ireland, said she felt betrayed:

"I feel sad, because I was a happy Catholic," she said, "but I think the institution has become very corrupt, and I find that incredibly sad, because my faith means so much to me and I think they have not been good servants of the people."

Earlier, participants stood up one by one to tell of lives devastated by the abuse they suffered as children, of the guilt and shame and solitude they suffered in the belief that they were alone.

Gianni Biscoli, 62, a victim of abuse at the institute for the deaf in Verona, spoke with difficulty. But his message was clear.

"This is a worldwide problem," he said. "We want justice. We want these priests to be defrocked and kept away from children."

Shelly Winemiller, a 42-year-old mother from Wisconsin, said she was abused from age 4 to 14 by the family priest.

"It's time to stop the stonewalling and denial," she said. "The pope has got to understand he has to do something about this world crisis. It's like a tsunami over the world, and he has got to do something."

1/16/2011
Police Block Sex Abuse Survivors Near Vatican

Police block clergy sex abuse survivors from walking on street leading to St. Peter's Square

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME October 31, 2010 (AP)

Italian paramilitary police blocked a boulevard leading to the Vatican to prevent a march Sunday by some 100 survivors of clergy sex abuse from reaching St. Peter's Square, but later allowed two protesters to leave letters from the abused at the Holy See's doorstep.

The two also left a dozen stones near the obelisk in St. Peter's Square to mark a symbolic path so other survivors might know they have company in their suffering.

The candlelit protest was the first significant demonstration in the shadow of the Vatican by people who had been raped and molested by priests as children, and organizers said it would be repeated until the Holy See takes decisive action to ensure children are safe.

"Today what began as quiet whispers are whispers no more," organizer Gary Bergeron told the crowd, which included about 55 deaf Italians from a notorious Catholic institute for the deaf in Verona where dozens of students say they were sodomized by priests.

Organizers had tried to stage the march on Vatican soil but were forced to hold it nearby after the Holy See denied permission. It is standard Vatican practice to ban non-Vatican-sponsored events from St. Peter's Square.

Sunday's protest kicked off with the unexpected arrival of the Vatican spokesman, the Rev. Federico Lombardi, who said he had wanted to greet the organizers and had prepared a statement he hoped to read. He beat a hasty retreat to his office after a protester shouted "Shame, shame" in Italian.

Lombardi said later he left when he saw "it wasn't going to be easy" to meet with the organizers.

Bergeron met with Lombardi later inside his Vatican office and told him that abuse survivors had been "waiting a lifetime to be able to stand up and speak out."

After the demonstration, Bergeron accompanied several other survivors to speak with Lombardi and tell them their stories. They said they asked Lombardi to pass along their request to speak with other Vatican officials. Lombardi said he listened to their concerns and reasons for gathering.

The event, which aimed to show survivors worldwide that they are not alone, was organized by Bergeron and Bernie McDaid, who were abused by the same Boston priest starting when they were in the sixth grade. The two became some of the most prominent victims to speak out in the United States after the clerical abuse scandal erupted in their native Boston in 2002.

McDaid was the first victim to meet with Pope Benedict XVI when the pontiff visited the United States in 2008.

Bergeron and McDaid organized the rally after the scandal erupted anew on a global scale earlier this year, with revelations of thousands of victims in Europe and beyond, of bishops who covered up for pedophile priests and of Vatican officials who turned a blind eye to the crimes. They are seeking to have the United Nations designate systematic sexual abuse of children as a crime against humanity.

About 100 survivors from a dozen countries — Italy,
Britain, the United States, Ireland, the Netherlands and Australia among others — took part in Sunday's protest, although they seemed outnumbered by journalists and police.

After Bergeron and McNeill spoke, large torches were handed out to the other survivors, many of whom were coded to read "Enfant" in English, Italian and German. The crowd, some blowing signs that read "Hands off children," approached the line of camouflaged police who blocked them from marching toward St. Peter's.

Eventually, Bergeron and another protactor were escorted by police as they carried thick candles to the edge of the square. Vatican security guards accompanied them to the foot of the staircase leading to the Apostolic Palace's bronze entrance doors.

According to Bergeron's account, the two deposited the sealed letters from survivors addressed to the pope at the foot of the stairs, and after their passports were examined they were accompanied to the octagon in the middle of the square. There they left a dozen stones in a pile — in the same way Rivers leave piles of stones along mountains in paths to show others that someone has been there before.

"The journey of a survivor is one step at a time. This is one step," Bergeron said after he had deposited the letters. "Today was very powerful for many survivors. This is the first time that a group of survivors this large has come together, and people have listened to us. In Italy! That's success to me."

At a briefing before the march, participants stood up one by one to tell how their lives had been destroyed by the abuse they suffered as children. Many recounted years of drug and alcohol addiction, eating disorders and other psychological and emotional problems.

"For 50 years I thought I was the only person in the entire world that had been abused by a Catholic priest," said Sue Cox, 63, from Warwickshire, Britain. She clarified herself. "Raped by a Catholic priest, not abused, because what he did was rape me and rape is different.""

"It's taken 50 years for me to find my voice. But now I've found it, I want to continue to speak on behalf of people who may not be able to speak or have not yet been able to face the fear and the guilt and shame that survivors feel."

Cox said she was raped in her bedroom when she was 13 by a priest who had been living in her parish priest and had been staying at her parents' home. Her mother discovered what had happened immediately — her nightgown was torn, she was bleeding — but did nothing, and instead told Cox to pray for the priest.

"I felt afraid," she said. "I wanted to die."

By 14 she was an anorexic, by 17 she had entered into a violent marriage. By 30 she was clean, and now all 35 is confronting what she calls the final piece of her recovery — the hardest bit — speaking out about her abuse.

The pope has admitted the church failed to take sufficient measures to stop the abuse and has apologized to victims during several foreign trips. He has said victims were the church's top priority, although the Holy See itself has not initiated any wide outreach programs.

Lombardi, the Vatican spokesman, said in the statement he had intended to read to the protesters that, while he didn't share all of their positions, there were points for consensus. He said he hoped the demonstrators could see in the church an ally in the broader fight to end child sexual abuse wherever it occurs.

"Of course, we must continue to do more. And your cry today is an encouragement to do more," he said. "But a large part of the church is already on the good path. The major part of the crimes belongs to times bygone. Today's reality and that of tomorrow are more beckoning. Let us help one another to journey together in the right direction," he said.
Police Block Sex Abuse Survivors Near Vatican

Police block clergy sex abuse survivors from walking on street leading to St. Peter's Square

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME October 31, 2010 (AP)

Members of the Survivor's Voice foundation, an association for alleged clergy abuse victims, with from left, Shelly Winemiller of the US, Sue Cox from England, and Margaret Kennedy from Ireland, answer journalists' questions during a press conference in Rome, Sunday, Oct. 31, 2010. Italian paramilitary police are blocking a boulevard leading to the Vatican to prevent a march in Rome by survivors of clergy sex abuse from reaching St. Peter's Square. ▲

(Pier Paolo Cito/AP Photo)

Italian paramilitary police blocked a boulevard leading to the Vatican to prevent a march Sunday by some 100 survivors of clergy sex abuse from reaching St. Peter's Square, but later allowed two protesters to leave letters from the abused at the Holy See's doorstep.
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