

1-1-08 - Church still unreformed

LOS ANGELES TIMES - by Anthony M. DeMarco

Plaintiff's attorney says don't trust stats on clergy abuse.

Sister Sheila McNiff's recent Op-Ed article "Tallying church abuse" is nothing more than the Archdiocese of Los Angeles' latest attempt to have the laity and public simply trust that the church will protect children placed in its care. Sister Sheila opines that the Archdiocese of Los Angeles' policies since the mid-1980s are the reason why fewer victims of abuse from the late 1980s, 1990s and early this decade have so far come forward.

These policies did not prevent Father George Michael Miller from allegedly sexually molesting boys in his rectory bedroom at Santa Clara parish in Oxnard in the 1990s. Nor did the church's purported openness result in parish staff, priests or the archdiocese reporting to law enforcement that Miller was routinely witnessed having boys spend the night in his bedroom.

These policies did not prevent Father Lynn Caffoe in the mid-1990s from allegedly taking boys up to his parish bedroom and locking the door more than 50 times and having "a good time" with them, while current archdiocese leaders such as Timothy Nichols allegedly did little more than watch.

These policies did not prevent Father Michael Stephen Baker from molesting altar boys even after he had previously admitted to Cardinal Roger Mahony that he was a child molester. These policies are slim comfort to the children Carlos Rene Rodriguez molested in the 1990s when he was appointed as the head of the Office for Family Life in the Santa Barbara and Santa Paula region, even after a police report was filed alleging he sexually abused a boy.

These policies did not prevent Father Fernando Lopez from sexually molesting numerous altar boys in 2003 and 2004.

Sister Sheila claims that the archdiocese now has a policy of openness, and yet the archdiocese continues to fight to keep secret hundreds of deposition transcripts of their own personnel from the clergy abuse litigation and hundreds of personnel files including those of convicted child-molesting clergy. By continuing to fight to keep these transcripts and files secret, the archdiocese is seeking to rob the laity and society of the chance to learn from the mistakes of the past, and to see that many of the mistakes that allowed the epidemic of abuse to occur are still at work. Those mistakes include maintaining absolute loyalty to fellow clergy and putting the protection of the reputation of the church ahead of the protection of children.

Finally, if Sister Sheila did listen to the hundreds of victims who bravely came forward, she would know, as do those of us who did listen, that victims of childhood sexual abuse suffer from overwhelming feelings of guilt and shame. Victims of childhood sexual abuse typically do not come forward until they are adults, and have children, nieces and nephews who are the age they were when they were abused. It is only then that victims of childhood sexual abuse finally realize on a visceral level that the adult truly was in control, and the abuse was not the child's fault. Because of this, many of the children abused in the late 1980s, 1990s and in this decade have yet to come forward.

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