

Donnellan: Paul Shanley's deception

Guest Commentary by Diane Donnellan

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How did he fool us? An entire parish full of families thought he was wonderful. Fathers, mothers, grandparents and children welcomed him into our parish and into our lives, our homes and, yes, our hearts.

I was probably one of the first people to meet him in the rectory way back in '79. Being on the School Board for St. Jean's School and a member of the Parish Council, I was always in and out of the rectory meeting with the pastor or on some errand or another. It was on one of these visits to the rectory that I was introduced to him during his first few days at St. Jean's. He told me that he was sent to our parish to help out our elderly pastor, and I thought how wonderful that our cardinal had seen fit to send us a young priest to help out.

How naïve of me - I wonder.

He did indeed help out. Fr. LeBrun counted on him to help with the daily running of the parish, and he took on these duties without complaint. He called me the night Fr. LeBrun passed away. Days were spent at the rectory getting everything in order for the viewing and the funeral. He and I drove to Logan Airport to pick up Fr. George, who was coming into town to help out with the funeral, etc. I listened with fascination as we drove back to Newton. They were talking about the church and their stand on homosexuals and the sacraments. I have never forgotten that conversation.

How naïve of me - I wonder.

Pursuant to Fr. LeBrun's death, he was named pastor. He blessed us one evening while closing a parish council meeting and announced to us that was his first blessing as our pastor. We were ecstatic. Why do I not remember anything other than happiness in those days at St. Jean's?

I was a young mother of four boys who were all attending St. Jean's. Some say I was overprotective of my boys. I say, "Thank God and His Blessed Mother" for that.

Everyone was happy to volunteer to help the parish and the school. Knowing him made you want to help out. We threw a 50th birthday party for him. I still have the photos taken that day. We helped him raise money so that the youth group could go on a retreat to the mountains - I get sick when I think of that now. I found a thank-you note from him just today while cleaning out my desk ... he sent it to me after his "banishment," as he put it, from St. Jean's and signed it "Paul of the Desert." I remember feeling sorry for him and the way that he signed the card.

How naïve of me - I wonder.

Why didn't we know? Why didn't one of these many people from other parishes around the archdiocese who have now come forward to say that he was a monster before he came to us, come to our parish and tell what they went through? Was it the "it's someone else's problem now" attitude? It shouldn't have been.

He was tried and convicted and is where he belongs for perpetrating horror on our young children, but I also blame the hierarchy in the church for sending him to us. Cardinal Law should be in jail instead of saying Mass at the Vatican, but that was a long shot that never happened. I had hoped it would.

How naïve of me - I know.

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