

One week ago, Pope Benedict XVI left the U.S. after a whirl of activity in Washington, D.C., and New York. Surprisingly and consistently, the pope raised the still sore and scandalous subject of the sexual abuse of Roman Catholic youth by priests. To his bishops on April 16 he expressed "deep shame" on behalf of the church. He said to his clergy in the U.S., "It is your God-given responsibility as pastors to bind up the wounds caused by every breach of trust, to foster healing, to promote reconciliation and to reach out with loving concern to those so seriously wronged."

In the six years since the Dallas meeting of Roman Catholic Bishops, there has been no plainer statement from Rome regarding the sexual predation of youth by some ordained priests, as well as the mismanagement of those abusers by American church leaders and their waste of moral authority, credibility and resources. Only a small percentage of youth sexual abuse victims/survivors ever find the grace and courage to tell their stories as adults by facing their abuser and the institution that has long protected their abuser. They seek respect, compassion and a way to heal their wounds and pain from our community. Professionals who work with victims on a path to survival and growth estimate that there are nine or 10 silent wounded (who never open up and go public) for every survivor who puts a name on an experience by sharing a story for us to hear. The human stories are tragic. The life consequences for abused youth and clergy predators seem very unequal.

Church structure, culture and attitude have so often been legal, defensive and bureaucratic rather than pastoral, open, accountable and healing. Reconciliation that fully contemplates forgiveness, repentance and restitution has been incomplete at best in Fairfield County. How do you restore innocence? How do you attempt to heal psychic and emotional wounds inflicted an average of three decades ago when the church presents a stone wall to the world? The three-hour program of instruction by the Diocese of Bridgeport for 40,000 Catholic faithful active in ministry to create a safe environment for children is no substitute for revealing the hierarchical response that allowed the abuse to occur and continue in the first place. It does not meet the pope's call for reconciliation. Shouldn't all diocesan information be publicly shared at this time, even if victim names must be redacted? Shouldn't the diocese be responsible for lifetime tracking of "credibly alleged abuser" priests whether duties are suspended or Rome acts to laicize? Responsible revelation will prevent repetition. The special interplay of statutes of limitations and the 30-year average gestation period before memories of abuse are revealed by survivors call for this responsibility.

In line with Pope Benedict's charge to his bishops, we have written Bridgeport Bishop William E. Lori this past week, asking for an annual Diocesan Mass of Compassion for survivors and also such activities within each of the 87 parishes. We look for a positive response with hope.

Catholic anger and frustration over past unresponsiveness of church leaders to the plight of victims and survivors has caused many to leave the church. This "reverse evangelization" flies in the face of church mission but it is a direct human response to the continuing open wound. Some Catholics attend but hold back support funds from the church as their only relevant and

responsible activity that may be noticed. The area history of clergy sexual abuse of youth is contained in Diocese of Bridgeport records. Testimony about this history has become part of Connecticut court records through depositions by diocesan leaders like former Bishop Edward Egan. These records were initially sealed to prevent tainting of potential jurors through pretrial publication of that information. However, the cases were settled. There was no trial. Records remain sealed to this day despite a Freedom of Information effort by four major U.S. newspapers. Over a decade the Connecticut Supreme Court has twice ruled that the public interest is served by lifting the seal. The diocese has appealed the judgment each time. Has Bishop Lori ever disclosed the total expense of this effort by Bishop Egan and by Bishop Lori, himself, to keep this information secret? How is the church's evangelization mission advanced by hiding the records of the Rosado case? How does secrecy assist healing and reconciliation? Why are the specific activities of Bishop Egan, now Cardinal Egan, protected by Bishop Lori? To all Roman Catholics, as people of God welcomed to the Church at Baptism:

Pray hopefully, as always.

Pray for care of the most vulnerable and needy, as Jesus Christ taught. Look for best organizational practices of openness, accountability and transparency before donating to institutions. There are many alternatives. Stay faithful by following Christ daily in your life through practicing your initiation gifts of ministry, truth-seeking and leadership.

Obey Christ's words daily regarding love of God, of neighbor and of self. Reflect on your activities. Discern your life course in good conscience. Prayer and participation by all the people of God is necessary if we are to learn, grow and heal through the power of the Holy Spirit.

John Marshall Lee is chairperson of Voice of the Faithful in the Diocese of Bridgeport.