

Restoring Faith



Gary Emord-Netzley, Messenger-Inquirer

"Everybody needs somewhere to go with their hurt and their pain. For me, the only place possible to go for healing is to go to God," said the Rev. Gary Hayes, who became the focus of national attention last year when he accused two priests of sexually abusing him as a teenager. Hayes hopes to help other victims of sexual abuse through an ecumenical service Friday at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church.

Priest who was sexually abused as a teen wants to aid others in recovery

By Karen Owen
Messenger-Inquirer

Sometimes the Rev. Gary Hayes gets to be a part of solving other people's puzzles. Restoring faith in God after enduring sexual abuse is like putting puzzle pieces back together, says Hayes, a Catholic priest who gained national attention last year after accusing two priests of abus-

ing him when he was a teen-ager.

"The abuse generally leaves you without a place to go," said Hayes, in his first interview in Owensboro since the case was settled.

At 7 p.m. Friday, Hayes hopes to help more survivors recover through an ecumenical service at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, where he became associate pastor just as the news broke about his landmark lawsuit.

The service of prayer and healing is being sponsored by the Catholic Diocese of Owensboro's Family Life Office, Office for Social Concerns and Women's Commission.

Hayes, a New Jersey native, now serves

three rural Grayson County parishes as pastor and is living in the country for the first time in his life — and loving it.

Wearing a gray sweater over his black priest's shirt with his clerical collar unbuttoned, he talked and sipped from a coffee cup in a Lourdes conference room.

A survivor can feel isolated because family and friends often feel uncomfortable talking about sexual abuse, Hayes said. Often, victims believe God caused the abuse or allowed it to happen, so "you can't even go to God with it.

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Surf's up, sun's down

A silhouetted surfer walks the beach near a Huntington Beach, Calif., pier during a warm winter spell in Southern California at sundown Friday.

Faith: Priest wants to help other abuse survivors

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"If there's not a God to go to, there's nowhere to go," he said. "Everybody needs somewhere to go with their hurt and their pain.

"For me, the only place possible to go for healing is to go to God. That's one piece of the recovery puzzle, to develop that relationship with God again."

Last June Hayes became the first priest ever to sue church officials over alleged childhood sexual molestation by a clergyman. Joined by two childhood friends and their parents, he accused two priests of sexually abusing the men when they were teen-agers.

The class-action suit was filed under federal racketeering laws used to prosecute organized crime, and named two dioceses in Rhode Island and New Jersey, America's Catholic bishops and several church officials in the Northeast as defendants.

The lawsuit contended Catholic bishops destroyed documentation of the sexual misconduct and

threatened the youths to keep them silent.

The suit was settled out of court in October.

One of two priests accused of the abuse already had resigned from the priesthood and had been convicted of sexually assaulting three boys at his Rhode Island parish. He served one year in a prison work-release program.

The other priest was on leave of absence from his parish when the suit was filed.

Hayes said he didn't want to sue, but he wanted to ensure the perpetrator would not abuse again. "It simply became impossible to have that addressed without taking a legal action."

Hayes refuses to discuss the settlement, except to say the perpetrator is "no longer able to function as a priest.

"There's no pleasure for me," Hayes said. "It's just sad and tragic."

After the lawsuit became public, other sex abuse victims were able to disclose what had happened to

them, he said. "I'm very glad about that. I made a difference in some people's lives."

"My experience with the church in Camden, N.J., was totally hurtful," he said. "My experience with the church in Owensboro has been quite the opposite." The church here has been "a refuge of support, understanding and healing for me."

As a youngster, Hayes always wanted to be a priest, he said. He even pretended to celebrate Mass with his brothers in vestments their mother made them, Hayes recalled.

After all that happened in New Jersey, though, it would have been impossible to be ordained there, so he came to western Kentucky at the invitation of friends, Hayes said.

He was 39 years old when he was ordained in 1990. "It took that long to work through everything," he said.

"This is the place that has allowed my dreams to be restored, and given me a chance to shoot for those dreams again."

His faith in God was especially bruised by the fact that his abuser

was a priest, Hayes said.

"There are days when I'm not sure I'm all the way past it," he said.

He picked up the pieces with the help of friends, prayer, support groups, and "by understanding God as a loving God who cares for me" and would not want him to be abused, Hayes said.

"Once I got things with God in a better perspective, then all things became possible again."

These days, when he attends support group meetings, he leaves his clerical collar at home but is open about his occupation, he said. When other survivors of clergy abuse attend, "I guess there's a healthy tension.

"Usually, when we get a chance to sit and talk, some very marvelous things happen." It helps the lay people to see not all priests are alike, and that some priests, like them, are survivors too, he said.

"I find I can be a piece of their puzzle getting put back together. That's very exciting for me.

"It ends up being very hopeful."

Landfill: Bill would streamline permit process

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should be, since the public has no idea of the final results of the technical review until that time."

Shepherd also questioned the idea of appointing hearing officers. The hearing officer's salary would be equal to that of a circuit court judge — about \$70,000 annually — according to the county's proposal.

The county proposed funding the legislation with a surcharge of \$1 on every ton of garbage dumped in

officers were unnecessary. He believes they could make the process even more complicated.

"Although I know Daviess County officials have been frustrated by the time-consuming administrative hearing process required by law, I believe their proposed suggestion would be both more costly and more time-consuming," Shepherd wrote. "To hire two hearing officers and pay them the salary of a circuit judge, and provide them with their own support staff would

said Daviess officials would like to face an independent officer rather than the environmental regulators.

"I'm sure he feels like they're impartial, which is ludicrous," Logsdon said. "Anybody with some common sense knows that's not a fair way to operate."

The bill also includes proposals on increased recycling efforts and

guidelines surrounding the cleanup of illegal dumps.

Majority Whip Kenny Rapier, a Bardstown Democrat, is a co-sponsor on the bill along with Johnson.

Treesh said the bill has been posted in the House Natural Resources Committee, which meets at 2 p.m. Monday in Room 149 of the Capitol Annex.

