

MAY 24 1994

6



May 20, 1994

Pope John Paul II
The Vatican
St. Peter's Square
Vatican City

Dear Holy Father:

You may find this letter lengthy, but please read it all. This is a very difficult letter for me to write but with the news of your upcoming visit to the United States and visiting so close to my home in Washington, DC, I was compelled to write to you.

When I was a small boy of about 10 years old, I was sexually abused by our parish priest at the time a Father Cotter. The abuse lasted for over four years. At the time what was happening to me was extremely frightening. I was very battered on the inside and very cold on the outside.

I'll speak about what I had to be on the outside first. I was forced to lie or remain silent which for a confused little boy is nothing short of a miracle. To my parents I had to make sure that to them I was a normal happy boy who liked to do little boy things. I was good at basketball because we had a small court in the backyard.

One thing I wasn't good at was swimming. I was and still am afraid of water. This was a little strange to my folks because I used to go swimming every Wednesday afternoon with my older brothers and the rest of our Boy Scout troop. Our chaperon was Fr. Cotter. The pool was an old city pool and it was an all male swim and everyone swam naked as was the long held practice. You can bet that would never happen today!

Fr. Cotter would say that he was trying to teach me how to swim and float. He would always do this when we were in the shallow end. He told me, "You can't swim well enough to go in the deep end with the older boys." And he would pretend to be teaching me to swim again. Only my learning to swim was the last thing on his mind. He was only concerned with how far up my behind he could shove his finger and how long he could play with my testicles and penis under water.

On the inside I was dead. I could watch from above what was happening below to me all I could say to me, was to keep still, it will be over soon. I was afraid that the other kids would find out. Countless other acts of abuse occurred on camping trips with the Boy Scouts. On one camping trip I was very ill and almost lost my hearing due to Fr. Cotter keeping me in a tent overnight and raping me instead of taking me to the hospital as the doctor had said. I was ashamed of myself because I thought I must have done something wrong. As a matter of fact I believed that I must have sinned something awful. And I couldn't say anything because that

COTTER-2 089

would somehow leave a big black or blacker mark on my soul and I surely wouldn't get into heaven.

Also what was happening to me felt somewhat special. This priest "second to God" was the earth to spread the word of Jesus, forgives my sins and those of my Mom & Dad and brings all children to his bosom and tells them they are very beautiful and blessed children. How could he do anything wrong. It was in my mind unthinkable and to the minds of the adults in my world at that time. My own father told me just last year that if I had said something then, he never would have believed me.

From the age of 10 silence and drink was the ruler of my day. I would keep to myself as much as possible and steal drinks from my grandfather's bottle. I remember after going to the pool one time that I was in so much pain I could not even sit down. I got drunk from grandpa's bottle and got very sick. I think that was the first time I really wanted to die, I was both physically and mentally raped of everything I knew. My world was dark.

All of this I kept locked away inside from everyone, even myself. I wanted it to all go away. And somehow it did! All the pain went away. Somehow my mind and body was able to forget the actual acts of sexual abuse.

During my high school years I was very devoted to my church's CYO group. I worked very hard to make the group a success. I held the office of president my senior year and had a membership of over three hundred young adults. We even had kids from other parishes joining our group.

All of the horrific and tragic abusive memories of which there are thousands were locked away until 1989. My life was not a bed of roses by any means. The lessons that I should have learned as a child such as; being responsible, handling money, balancing a checkbook and other needed skills for sound social development were never learned. I had to spend too much time on trying to protect my body and protecting my secret.

In the fall of 1989, I entered a hospital for alcohol abuse. It was when I became sober and started to deal with myself did the memories start to come back little by little and then all at once. I entered therapy to help myself cope with the flood of emotions that were literally paralyzing me. I could no longer hold a job, which affected all the money issues in my life. This only greatly added to the low self esteem problem I had. I began to take antidepressants and pills to help me sleep at night.

The nightmares were at times so intense that I would awake screaming and shaking. It became so bad that I began to drink again so that I could pass out because I was so afraid to go to sleep. When I did get into bed I made a wall of pillows to protect myself.

I again was hospitalized in 1992. I was severely depressed, suicidal and afraid of everyone. I spent six weeks there learning a new way to deal with the effects of my abuse. It is a very slow and difficult journey.

I am trying my best to shed the role of a victim and regain the life of that little boy. You must know that as an act of validation for what I had been through I have entered into legal talk with the Archdiocese of Boston.

What I had originally wanted was a formal apology from the Church. You see when Fr. Cotter was caught he apologized on his hands and knees to my parent with tears in his eyes.

The apology was given to the wrong people. I am still waiting.

What I can't understand is all of the silence by the Catholic Church. This priest admitted what he did. The Church knows he abused sexually, spiritually and mentally many children. He was transferred to another parish where he continued to sexually abuse children.

I am convinced that they knew about Fr. Cotter before or during my period of abuse. If this man were a carpenter he would have been thrown into jail. Not protected by the carpenter union.

The Catholic Church in this country is suffering from a lack of communication with church officials. The people who fill the pews and the collection baskets are the church not the officials.

Some of these officials have placed themselves above the local and state laws of government which is very wrong. And certainly the laws of god do not have a clause which allow for a priest to sexually abuse children. In the end we must all answer to the faith in which we have.

For myself my faith has been stolen. I want to have the faith of my childhood back and then start from there to rebuild.

As head of the Catholic Church I hope that you above all people would realize the value of faith in a persons life, for sometimes it is faith and faith alone that give life.

I believe that my faith could begin to be renewed if when you came to the United States we could meet and talk. I am not alone as you well know!

By us sitting down together you could help the healing process for thousands of people. I would not take up much of your time and it would mean so much to countless others that the pastoral responsibilities of the Catholic Church were making a comeback and holding themselves accountable for actions of their ordained representatives.

I have not been able to tell you the whole story and I have at points let my heart talk. but I would like to thank you for reading my letter and look forward with great hope that you and I can meet. I assume there will be a lot of red tape and such but I'm sure we can cut through all of that.

May I offer my house as a place to meet it is a comfortable home in Northwest Washington, DC. And there is a lovely and peaceful garden. Perhaps not as peaceful as yours but it works for me.

Please let me know when it would be convenient for us to meet.

Sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction covers the signature and name of the sender.

cc: The Vatican Embassy
cc: Cardinal Bernard Law
cc: Cardinal James Hickey