

# Priests' touch scarred a family

## Brothers seek solutions after molestations

For three brothers who were molested by the same priest, healing is taking a lifetime.

Maybe it's all the years that have passed since the Burke brothers were young and powerless to a priest's advances. Or, maybe it's their love of the church. But they are not interested in vengeance.

They want change.

Al Burke will be 70 soon, but he carries around a memory of something that happened to him when he was only 7 years old.

"It was a one-time deal," he said. "I thought I was the only one it ever happened to."

It would be many years before Al's brother, Ed, would confide that he, too, had been a sexual victim of the same priest from a parish in DeWitt, Iowa. When news broke of a sex scandal in the Catholic Church in Boston last year, Ed worked up the courage to approach their other brother, Eugene.

"He simply said, 'Yes,'" Al said. "He's been living with it for years."

Now that they knew, the brothers wanted to do something. They wanted to change things in the church so that people who needed help could get it. They wanted to protect other children from the same dark, painful memories that have been nagging at them for



**BARB  
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Viewpoint

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The Burke brothers, from left, Al, Ed and Eugene, all have come forward to say they were sexually abused by the same priest in the 1940s in DeWitt, Iowa. Although not interested in criticizing the church, they want leaders to make priests be accountable for their actions.

### LETTER TO THE EDITOR: THE BURKE FAMILY

*Editor's note: This letter to the editor was submitted to both the Catholic Messenger and the Quad-City Times. It was published Thursday in the Catholic Messenger.*

Following the recent lawsuits filed against the Davenport diocese by Donald J. Green, Steven Davis, James Wells and the three John Does, my brothers, sister and I wish to stand in unity with these brave young men. A generation before we also experienced abuse by a priest from this diocese. At one time this priest was assigned to an associate pastor at St. Joseph Parish in DeWitt. Needless to say he is now dead but there may be others who could stand in unity with us.

We speak not to condemn the present church leadership but rather to encourage the laity to hold our bishops accountable for the injuries inflicted on so many of our children, who are more important than any church property or asset. As an example we praise Bishop Robert E. Mulvey of Rhode Island, who personally met with the abused and listened to their horrific stories. He settled 23 of 25 lawsuits without going to court. Other bishops would do well to follow his example and his charity.

This problem is not isolated to the Roman Catholic Church. It is in many different societies that serve our youth. May we all pray for our youth leaders.

*In closing may we suggest*

that we follow the fine example of our Jewish neighbors who remind us every year of the Holocaust by saying, "Never Again!" We suggest there be a World Wide Day of Prayer against every type of abuse and possibly it could always be on the anniversary day that we became aware of this horrendous act in Boston.

— Cleo Edward Burke  
Avondale, Pa.

— Al Burke  
LeClaire, Iowa

— Helen Burke  
DeWitt, Iowa

— Eugene Burke

# ICKES

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so many decades.

Ed found some satisfaction in an unlikely place. He wrote a letter, not to the bishop of the Davenport Diocese where the abuse occurred, but to his own diocese in Wilmington, Del., where he now worships.

And he got a reply — a written apology from the bishop, acknowledging that the priest was wrong.

In Davenport, Al got much less.

He took his disclosure to the office of the Most Rev. William Franklin, bishop of the Davenport Diocese. But he didn't get through his door. Instead, he said, he had a meeting with Chancellor Irene Loftus.

"I was asked what I wanted them to do about it," he said. "I had a few things, but what I really was hoping for was a support group.

"That has never happened."

So, this week, the brothers tried another route. The three of them, along with their sister who wanted to show her support, wrote a letter to the editor and submitted it to both *The Catholic Messenger* and the *Quad-City Times*.

Once again, the Burkes were not interested in shaming anyone. They did not wish to criticize church leaders. They recog-

nize, of course, that sexual misconduct is a problem that reaches far beyond the Catholic Church.

They wanted to plead with Catholic leaders to make certain that priests be held accountable for their actions and that children, above anything else, be protected. They wanted to be heard.

This time, Franklin replied. But he did not speak to the family. Instead, his response was printed in *The Catholic Messenger* just below the letter signed by the Burke family.

In it, he said it has been his "practice and desire" to meet with parishioners who want to disclose an incident of sexual misconduct within the diocese. But the letter did not offer an explanation as to why Franklin did not meet with the Burkes.

He wouldn't speak with me, either.

Although I followed a diocesan policy of submitting questions in writing before an interview, Franklin's secretary called to say he would not be available. He would respond to my questions about the handling of the Burke disclosure in a written statement.

"In order to protect the just privacy expectations of the people with whom we have met, I cannot respond to your questions about individuals," the statement begins. "For these

individuals, but also for anyone who has come to the Diocese with a report of sexual abuse by a priest, our policy of confidentiality must be honored.

"If I begin discussing any one individual's dealings with the Diocese of Davenport, others may question my confidentiality and fear disclosure of their situations."

The bishop is to be admired for his commitment to protecting his parishioners' privacy. But the Burke brothers have made their disclosure public. They are not asking for anonymity.

"It is not easy for some of these individuals to come forward and I respect them for it," Franklin wrote. "I want to be sure I do nothing to create a chilling effect on reporting."

But, for those doing the reporting, the lack of action is leaving them cold. They not only have their memories to contend with, but must also accept they are still powerless.

They have less power than a 7-year-old has for holding onto a single moment for 63 years.

"I will never lie on the grass without a shirt again," Al said. "And my brother wouldn't let his sons go out for wrestling because he can't stand to see a man on a man.

"That's his scar."

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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR: BISHOP FRANKLIN

I believe this answers your questions to the extent I am able and does so in a cohesive fashion.

In order to protect the just privacy expectations of the people with whom we have met, I cannot respond to your questions about individuals. For these individuals, but also for anyone who has come to the Diocese with a report of sexual abuse by a priest, our policy of confidentiality must be honored. If I begin discussing any one individual's dealings with the Diocese of Davenport, others may question my confidentiality and fear disclosure of their situations. It is not easy for some of these individuals to come forward and I respect them for it. I want to be sure I

do nothing to create a chilling effect on reporting.

As I mentioned in *The Catholic Messenger*, I've had the opportunity to review the letter submitted by the Burke family. It was sent to *The Catholic Messenger*, and I have publicly answered it in that paper to the best of my ability, without breaching confidentiality. My personal response to the Burke family would be a matter I won't discuss publicly. In *The Catholic Messenger*, I stated: "Since my arrival in this Diocese in 1994, it has been my practice and desire to meet with any individual who believes they have been abused at any time by one of the priests of this Diocese. That continues to be my practice. I,

too, have the desire to ensure that the future of this Diocese reflects the standards set forth by the United States Bishops in 2002."

In keeping with current diocesan and Church standards and policies, my door is open for pastoral care for these individuals. We encourage and hope people come to us for pastoral care and are anxious to welcome them to visit with us. Our policies, Web site and Protecting God's Children program invite that as well. Every effort will be taken to ensure that these contacts, which are made in confidence, remain confidential. It is my fervent desire to help bring healing to anyone in need.

— Bishop William E. Franklin

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO  
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