



EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF PENNSYLVANIA

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STANDING COMMITTEE RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Standing Committee of the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania met with Mr. Ralph E. White, Jr., of Philadelphia, a former member of the Episcopal Church in this Diocese, on January 7, 2008; and

WHEREAS, Mr. White presented to the Standing Committee a horrific story of physical and sexual abuse and exploitation that he suffered as a child and young adult at the hands of a Priest of the Episcopal Church in this Diocese beginning when he was about 12 years old, the likes of which are so despicable as to be almost beyond comprehension, particularly when perpetrated by a member of the clergy; and

WHEREAS, Mr. White provided the Standing Committee with a narrative of his abuse which has caused him a lifetime of pain, physical, mental, emotional and spiritual; and

WHEREAS, Mr. White presented to the Standing Committee numerous documents which the Standing Committee finds to be clear and convincing evidence substantiating the statements contained in his narrative; and

WHEREAS, the Episcopal Church has failed to address adequately the terrible injuries and injustice suffered by Mr. White at the hands of an Episcopal Priest now more than sixty (60) years ago; and

WHEREAS, Standing Committee desires to make this tragedy public and to offer a public apology to Mr. White for the pain he has suffered both by the acts of a Priest and by the failure of the Episcopal Church to provide adequate care to him;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Standing Committee, acting as the Ecclesiastical Authority for the Diocese of Pennsylvania, finds that Mr. Ralph E. White, Jr., of Philadelphia, suffered horrific physical and sexual abuse and exploitation at the hands of an Episcopal Priest of this Diocese more than 60 years ago; that such behavior toward any human being, much less a child, is morally and theologically reprehensible and a clear violation of the mission and message of redemption entrusted to the Church; and that the Church has failed to address adequately the terrible injuries and injustice suffered by Mr. White; and be it further

RESOLVED that the members of the Standing Committee, acting both individually and collectively as the Ecclesiastical Authority for the Diocese of Pennsylvania, on behalf of the Episcopal Church, hereby express concern for Mr. White, who is, and always has been, a loved child of God and extend a most sincere apology to Mr. White for the pain he has suffered both by the acts of an Episcopal Priest and by the failure of the Episcopal Church to provide adequate care to him; and be it further

RESOLVED, that a copy of this Resolution be published on the official website of the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania along with Mr. White's narrative; and that a copy of this Resolution be given to Mr. White.

Adopted January 22, 2008

President

Secretary

WHAT THE CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE OF THE REV. DR. GIBSON BELL DID TO ME:* Ralph E. White
March 1998

The Rev. Dr. Gibson Bell entered my life when I was about twelve years old and at first - at some level - I thought that I would get some of my needs met as nurturing, caring, protection and validation for living. And freedom from fear, unworthiness and almost total rejection that I received from my parents. This at first made me feel good and I hoped on some level to get them. At first, when Dr. Bell showed some personal interest in me, I thought that I'd finally get from him what I hadn't from my parents, especially since he was our priest and an important person to my family, highly esteemed with trust from both the Church and our Community. I very soon found that there was a very great price I started paying for this attention that I was receiving. He started to molest me sexually. It got to the point where I felt that I could not stop him from using my body - and that even my body was not mine. It all made me feel as if I was in a very deep tunnel/trap from which I could see no escape - at least until I was of age or in some way able to leave my parents' home. This treatment thoroughly confused me because at some level I knew this was not something that I could possibly be open about/share with anyone. In essence, it made me ashamed of who I was. I received the unspoken message that this sexual abuse or punishment was coming from God, through His representative, meaning that I deserved this. I came to this conclusion logically since all the other children in my neighborhood I could see/have contact with were well treated/did not seem to have a life of extreme stress constantly as I did. Dr. Bell, it was said, had "a way with boys." He literally relieved my parents of all moral responsibility for their son. Dr. Bell got further into their good graces by helping them a great deal to get me into private boarding schools and summer camps. He had even been given a key to our home. This act made me feel even more that I could not even get away from him where I lived/that there was no escape.

I came to the conclusion that the constant stress and punishment I had so often in so many ways was deserved and I felt I was bad. I came to this conclusion but a very few years ago as I was able to put the pieces together - finally with adequate professional help - that I had buried as a child in order to keep my sanity. He approached me as a priest. I was always subtly conveyed that his power lay in his office as a priest in the Church. And he used it. Since both my parents and our Priest were so highly respected in the Community I felt that I must have deserved all this pain and confusion. Since this man's authority came from God then I felt that He too must approve.

My anger is greater because I was abused by my family's cleric. I was damaged in every area possible: emotionally, verbally, physically, sexually, and spiritually. Since my abuses started so young and continued until I was twenty years old, and there was simply NO help available until I was 58 years old, very little more can now be done to assist my recovery and live a normal life - in a healthy and meaningful way. The amount of anger that this has left me with has extended to the medical profession and several times I have not been able to receive needed medical help because of this. It left me with an inordinate amount of anger - however justified - so much so, that it has alienated me from almost all people, all my life. It caused me to have to live alone all of my life, simply because no one wants to be around an angry person. The abuse left me with an inability to trust, since I was literally nurtured on DISTRUST by my family priest. As a child, I had no one to go to. I grew up not knowing one protective adult and so my logical conclusion was that no one cared; that there was no safety or protection in the world. The combination of emotional deprivation at home and sexual abuse by the Priest, later collusion with the Priest by my mother, left me VERY seldom able to love and about incapable of trusting. This lifetime of living alone and social isolation has definitely and profoundly affected my physical health, mainly my heart.

WHAT THE CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE OF THE REV. DR. GIBSON BELL DID TO ME: * Ralph E. White
(continued)

I told Dr. Bell that I would expose this abuse. He then had me incarcerated in the Montgomery County Prison for the summer and then he obtained a court commitment indefinitely to a State Asylum - Norris^{town}. This destroyed my credibility for years and caused me directly to loose at least two jobs. I had - in essence - been given a record; who would ever believe someone who had been in a mental hospital. While there I received 70 insulin shock treatments, that were not only unnecessary, but dangerous, having a high mortality rate. I was also threatened with a lobotomy. I was there for a year and was only released by having friends secure an attorney who engaged two psychi-^{at}rists and going to court on a writ of habeas corpus. In all of the year that I was imprisoned I had the daily fear of being hurt by other disturbed inmates and a long range fear of wondering if I would ever be free again. And of course, during the insulin shock treatments each time I would wonder if I would awaken - live.

Until I received adequate professional help for the first time - my central difficulty being addressed - in 1986 I never knew what it was that caused me to loose almost all of my jobs, be evicted from most places where I lived, and later being dismissed from almost all volunteer work. It was the anger that I had: the principal residual from the abuse and batterings. My mother on death in 1955, seven years after my father's, left her entire estate - real, personal, and mixed - to Dr. Bell, with no restrictions whatsoever: accounting, bond, or inventory. This meant that I had to pay to get out of the institution where he had me committed in 1947 indefinitely. This made me even more angry and with Dr. Bell being the sole beneficiary and executor made me feel that to my mother I did not even exist. Her death was seven years after I was released from the State Hospital. Dr. Bell was an object of my mother's devotion and he was close to her until her death.

As a victim of injustice and oppression I lost my sense of worth as a person, my dignity, especially so since this treatment came from my Priest/the Church. Principally due to time, very early onset, the amount, in every area, and severity of the damage - in my case - restorative justice, which is focused on restoring the personhood that is damaged or lost, is not possible. Restoring that sense of self means restoring memory - a recognition of what happened to me happened. I have not been crazy. Something seriously evil happened to me. I am now - mainly because of the media in the past 15 years - at least publically validated. This acknowledgement is crucial if healing is to go on and if the undercurrents of conflict are not to be left simmering.

Any childhood sexual abuse always leaves one with some life-long very serious residuals, that never go away by themselves, and no one can recover alone. It is perhaps the cruelest, most baffling of human experiences. It is a betrayal of the most basic trust between a child and priest. It is emotionally devastating. The young victims are totally dependent on their aggressors, so they have no where to run. Protectors become persecutors, and reality becomes a prison of dirty secrets. Incest betrays the very heart of childhood - its innocence. The sexual violation is a genuinely evil act. Priests, no matter how toxic, have a monopoly on power and credibility.

What I was left with was constant emotional pain; therefore, I reasoned that God was punishing me since this treatment/punishment was coming from His representative. I further reasoned that I must be committing a sin of such magnitude that I wondered if God could and would forgive me. I proved an ultimate and most viable target for my Priest, Dr. Bell; I was young, male, vulnerable, and helpless.