

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Many are shedding tears these days, including myself, because of the great harm caused to minors and vulnerable adults by priests, deacons and religious brothers. On behalf of the Capuchin Franciscans I must beg your forgiveness for the trust betrayed by our abusive friars.

The knowledge has caused me personal grief. I am good friends with one of the victims, a student of mine who I taught at TMP-Marian. It took the individual many years to come forward and let me know what had happened. Sometimes victims are filled with shame and guilt. These feelings though, should not be theirs. The shame and guilt rightly belongs with the friars, especially those who caused the harm.

From an early age I became aware of the disastrous effects of sexual abuse. When I was in the minor seminary back east, a classmate came to me and shared the horrible truth that he was being abused. The offender was not a priest or friar. The offender was the groundskeeper. I encouraged the young seminarian to report the abuse. He did.

The groundskeeper was fired. I don't know whether the abuse was ever reported to authorities. The young man was asked to leave the seminary. I never saw him again. It grieved me then, it grieves me now.

Years later, when the Boston Globe made their revelations, I read that abuse victims can become victimizers themselves. Hurriedly I searched the internet and learned to my horror, that the former seminarian had become a priest and had, in fact, committed abuse himself. He was imprisoned for that.

So many people have been harmed. There is so much grief: the grief of victims, the grief of families of victims and families of abusers, the grief of scandalized parishioners, and even the grief of priests and friars who are faithful, dedicated servants but who are reeling with the constant disclosures about so many perpetrators. We cannot allow this to ever happen again.

I don't believe that we friars will ever fully comprehend the great harm done to the victims of sexual abuse. I understand that there are people very disappointed with the church for not taking concrete steps to address these terrible crimes. Apologies are not enough. In fact, after a point, apologies sound meaningless, unless accompanied by protective measures. Worse still, apologies may have the effect of opening deep wounds of the survivors.

I hope that people refer to our webpage ([www.capuchins.org](http://www.capuchins.org)) to see what positive actions we have taken to prevent this kind of sexual abuse from ever happening again. Many of the steps we are taking are mirrored across this country.

As believing Christians and as ministers of the Gospel of Christ more is expected of us. We must not only be above reproach, we must be instruments of healing in our church and in our world. Franciscans especially are called to be channels of God's mercy, compassion and forgiveness.

We want to reach out to any who may have experienced abusive treatment at the hands of our brother Capuchins. Please come forward and report the abuse if you haven't already. We want to work towards reparation of the harm done. We want to help restore faith in the Catholic Church and in the witness of those who follow the Gospel in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi.

I myself have tried to accompany victims in their healing process, as have other provincial ministers. We have not always done this well. Some victims were disappointed, even angered by our ineptitude. We need to do better.

We Capuchins also have a history of working to promote the conversion of abusers. Not everyone knows that the attacker of 11 year old Maria Goretti, Alessandro Serenelli, lived out his final days in a Capuchin friary. In his crazed passion, the young Alessandro repeatedly stabbed Maria. Maria died the following day, her last words, "I forgive Alessandro Serenelli." Serenelli was imprisoned for that heinous crime. Capuchins helped him live a life of penance and conversion after his release. He lived to see Maria become a saint. In a public act of reconciliation, Maria Goretti's mother forgave Alessandro and together they were present for her canonization.

St. Maria Goretti is often seen as the patron not only of those who were abused, but also of those guilty of abuse.

Let us pray through her intercession for the healing of those who have been deeply wounded and for the conversion of all those involved.

*Dear God, we ask you to help all those who suffer from abuse. Help them find healing and peace in their lives. May Maria Goretti, who was strengthened by Your Grace, join with us in prayer for the healing of all victims of abuse, particularly those abused as children or young adults.*

*Grant us your Love that we might reach out to them in Your Name with hope in times of trial. As Maria prayed for her attacker, grant us the grace to pray for the true conversion of all involved with the abuse: that they might seek Your Mercy through prayer and penance.*

*Loving God, pour into our hearts and lives your healing Spirit, that the sacredness of every human person might be respected and protected as the precious image of God. Help us to live in the peace which Maria Goretti had found in Christ and in the love of his mother Mary.*

*We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*Prayer taken from Aleteia.org/2018*

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Christopher Popravak, O.F.M.Cap.  
Provincial Minister