

Nearly two years after a May 2002 visit by Bishop William Franklin, Diocese of Davenport, parishioners of SS Philip & James Catholic Church continued to struggle with the anger, shock, and aura of suspicion created by the disclosure of a sexual abuse allegation in our parish by a former priest. The Bishop's disclosure did not reveal the name of the accused or the victim, and our parish was spiritually and emotionally wounded. The only information received was through the media, where we learned the name of the accused priest, Father James Janssen who served in our parish from 1980-1990 and survivor, Don Green who was an active member of our parish.

Ann Green, wife of Don Green, approached the Parish Council during their December 14, 2003 monthly meeting seeking spiritual support from our parish for Don Green and victims of clergy abuse. Information was shared by Ann Green regarding the magnitude of the sexual abuse issue that was affecting our Diocese. Lawsuits revealed that evidence of the presence of pedophile priests being moved from parish to parish as was the case with Father James Janssen. The council voted unanimously to provide support to the Green Family, but needed to identify the areas of support that would involve the entire parish of SS Philip & James Catholic Church. The Council acknowledged that whatever action they took, they would speak as "one" voice encompassing the entire parish that consists of 200 families.

After several work sessions, review of Diocesan policies, and recognizing the importance of representing the well-being of all parishioners, the council elected to write a letter to Bishop Franklin. The letter addressed the issue that we had not been provided the information or services from the Diocese of Davenport that they identified as "key" in healing as noted in the Sexual Misconduct Policy (adopted 1998, revised 2002).¹ At that time, it was also decided that the letter was to be read to the parish after Mass on Sunday, January 18, 2004 with an open discussion session afterwards, and then mail it to the Bishop and media. Bishop Franklin appeared unexpectedly and unannounced at Mass having been alerted by someone outside our parish to the pending letter that would be sent to him and the media.

After the reading of the letter, the Bishop fielded questions from members of the parish in regard to James Janssen and the lack of Diocesan action in

¹ Outlined in the "Communication Policy & Response to those impacted by the pain of sexual misconduct (Pages 29-32)

regard to supporting victims and parishioners. Members were able to communicate their frustrations and feelings of betrayal to the Bishop that day. Following the meeting with the Bishop, a parish vote was taken deciding that we continue with our plans to mail the letter to the Diocese of Davenport with a response deadline of February 2, 2004 with copies to the media.

Bishop Franklin responded to our letter on January 31, 2004, but addressed it to the parishioners at SS Phillip and James via our church bulletin and bypassing the Parish Council. In his response, he stated that "We are following our policies. The section of the policy quoted in your letter refers to situations in which an accused is removed from current ministry." The Bishops reply was also published in local media newspapers by the Diocese. In essence, since James Janssen was a retired priest, the Diocese policies did not apply to our parish. In addition, the Bishop made it a point to address on a personal level various delicate issues concerning the Green family that upset parishioners.

Our parish was hurting and needed to heal, so the council decided to move forward and utilize the policy as a guide to restore "sacred trust" to our hurting church. The Diocese of Davenport Policies Relating to Sexuality and Personal Behavior stated the need for "...Parishes to form a team to assess the ongoing impact of the disclosure in the parish/entity." It also recognized forming this team was a "...key step in the process of healing". Even though the policy was considered to be inapplicable for our parish, we agreed that this team could encourage the healing of the hurt and betrayal that resulted from knowledge of the accusations.

How do we begin the work of reconciliation & healing? The Spiritual Healing Committee of Sts Philip & James Catholic Church was formed as a result of the many steps we have taken in this journey of faith. Through our church bulletin, the Parish Council invited parishioners to participate in the ministry of spiritual renewal and healing to help our parish deal with the abuse impact in our church. The mission was to form a spiritual healing team to help provide support to survivors, and to reach out to those hurting as the result of sexual abuse by clergy and the lack of pastoral compassion for hurting parishes by the Diocese of Davenport

We are a group of believers who wish to live our lives following the teachings of our faith, -- love, compassion, and mercy. When these are present, faith grows and continues to grow in grace, encouragement, prayer, and personal presence for those in need. This is evidenced in our gatherings, meetings, and presence in court hearings. We realize that we are spiritually wounded healers reaching out to heal the wounded.

We believe that this committee will help us move forward in a positive and constructive fashion. Parishioners are personally invited to share their time, faith, and grace to help our parish experience forgiveness, healing and renewed trust. Attendance averages between 25-30 participants, at our meetings that are held in our church basement.

Our goals are similar to those of Voice of the Faithful in providing support to the abused, support priests of integrity, and to bring about change in the overall structure of the church. We seek structural change in the church because laity has been excluded from church governance and not being allowed to participate in church decisions or having their voice be heard. Matters were left to the Bishops but we now see how church hierarchy has forsaken the faithful.

Although we are in the early stages of planning and meeting our goals, some of our objectives have been put into action in the formation of a:

- ✓ Forum for group discussion, sharing our hurts, fears, and anger.
- ✓ Committee to plan a Healing Mass for our parish and surrounding parishes affected by clergy sexual abuse.
- ✓ Communication plan to provide other entities with information of the presence of pedophile priests in their vicinity for the protection of children.
- ✓ Support group to provide encouragement with our presence and prayer for victims of abuse during court hearings.
- ✓ Special day of prayer supporting Don Green on the day of his deposition by allowing our church to be open all day for prayer, spiritual presence, and reflection.
- ✓ Change in Mass schedule and Intention for the faithful before attending court hearing to support victims on July 30, 2004. Over 40 parishioners were in attendance during the proceedings.

It is distressing to us that the Diocese of Davenport needs a specific policy in order to address how our parish had been impacted by the sexual abuse scandal. Our committee has chosen to follow our personal conscience and the 2,000-year old teachings of the church, based on scripture and the tradition that sexual abuse of the innocent is a grave violation of God's law. All of our policies and procedures can be found in the Bible.

In Jesus' teachings, our relationship with our fellow man is inseparable from our relationship with God. Love of God and love of our neighbors are two aspects of the same calling. As we continue to travel through un-chartered waters, we will do so with our work firmly rooted in the path of truth and our Catholic faith using the Bible as our guide.