

SNAP asks victims to come forward

In January 2002, a stunning series of stories in the Boston Globe appeared about clergy sex crimes and cover-ups in that archdiocese. Within weeks, news outlets across the country began asking, "Have such crimes happened here?" and began discovering that child molesting clerics and complicit officials could be found in nearly every Catholic institution in the U.S.

And five years ago last month, at a closely watched meeting in Dallas, America's Catholic bishops pledged to usher in a new era of "openness and transparency" regarding child sex abuse by clerics.

But the sad truth is that few citizens, Catholic or otherwise, know the identities of many of the more than 5,000 admitted, proven or credibly accused abusive priests that even bishops admit have worked in churches and schools over the past few decades.

That's because while bishops promised to disclose information about pedophile priests, there's been precious little follow-through. Sadly, that leaves parents unaware and kids at risk of more horrific child sex crimes.

At least three such priests, Fr. Robert Dollinger, Fr. James Hargadon, and Fr. Joseph Irvin Mouser, worked in the Lebanon area, with many more in Springfield, Bardstown, and nearby areas.

Other sex offenders often wind up on the state sex offender registry. But that's only if they are criminally convicted. That rarely happens with pedophile priests, because church officials work so hard and so shrewdly to keep their crimes hidden.

In the rare instance where a predator priest is prosecuted, they often get top-notch defense lawyers and exploit legal technicalities to escape prison.

This happened just weeks ago with a now defrocked Kentucky priest, Daniel Clark. He was convicted of abusing two boys in 1988 but did just 90 days behind bars.

Then, a few years ago, he was named as abuser in 19 civil lawsuits. Clark was found guilty in a second criminal trial in 2003. But last month, the Supreme Court ruled he should walk free because a lower court mistakenly let one of Clark's victims testify when it shouldn't have.

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The only silver lining here is that a new trial against Clark is set for this fall.

So what should happen with these predator priests, especially those who aren't locked up?

At a bare minimum, we believe every bishop should do what roughly 15 bishops have done - disclose to their parishioners and the public who these potentially dangerous men are. If we know their names, we can better protect our kids.

This obligation is especially crucial for Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, the new head of the Louisville Archdiocese. He has an opportunity to demonstrate true transparency and openness by taking this simple, proven, cost-effective step.

Kurtz should also, we believe, personally visit each parish where predator priests worked, and beg others who witnessed or experienced their crimes to come forward, get help, and call the police.

In our nearly 20 years as the nation's largest support group for clergy molestation victims, we know the kinds of outreach work. Deeply wounded, mistrustful, and often depressed victims often step forward and begin recovering only when someone they know or someone in authority prods them to do so.

Removing known child molesters from active ministry and apologizing for the devastation they've caused is only a first step.

If kids are to be safer, Archbishop Kurtz and his colleagues will have to do more. Naming the predators is a logical place to start.

Editor's note: Ann Brentwood is the southeastern director of Survivor's Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP). Clergy abuse victims of all denominations are represented by the organization of SNAP and people from all denominations are welcome to call. Anyone who would like more information on SNAP or victims who have not come forward can contact Brentwood at (865) 607-6119.