

OBSERVATIONS

Effect on Family and Community

The pain and betrayal of sexual of abuse is felt beyond the circle of actual victims. The effect of the sexual abuse at St. Anthony's Seminary has generally been outrage that the abuse occurred and loss of credibility of the friars, as well as the credibility of the Church hierarchy and all clergy. Parents of victims go through a grieving process similar to experiencing the death of a family member. There is depression, guilt, sorrow, anger and pain. Even former seminarians who were not abused have suffered the loss of their cherished memories of the institution, and the mentors in whom they believed.

The families of the victims are also victims. Parents have feelings of guilt arising from lingering questions of whether they could have prevented injury to their children. They question the way they raised their child: What made him want to leave home? Were we wrong to turn over parental responsibility to the friars? Why didn't we recognize that our son was being molested? Should we have let him return home when he first asked? Why didn't he feel he could tell us? We should have been more understanding of his problems (anger, alcohol and drug abuse, etc.). We might have saved him from devastation and feelings of hopelessness. If we had spent more time with him when he was young, we could have done more to develop his self-confidence. Have we caused our son to lose the best years of his life?

Parents and members of the Greater Community are angry at God, Church hierarchy and all clergy in general, and toward the friars and faculty of St.

Anthony's in particular. Parents ask: Where was God when my son was so severely molested? Many people ask why the Church does not do something about sexual child abuse. Why do clergy continue to deny that it is a serious problem? Are they all perpetrators? Why don't they speak out against sexual abuse? Families sometimes think all that the friars care about is protecting themselves that they do not care about the victims, that they are more concerned about how much they hurt, and how the spectre of false accusations, and damage to the morale of the Franciscans. Many people wonder how other friars could not have known about the abuse at the time.

The effect on the St. Anthony's Seminary Greater Community is wide-ranging. There has been some divisiveness. Some members were in denial that anything happened. Some believed that it would ruin the Greater Community to have the investigation. Some thought the inquiry was a witch hunt that would bankrupt the friars. Nonetheless, in general there has been solid support for the Board from the members of the Greater Community.

A Mother's Experience

A student was molested by two friars. He had a clear memory of his abuse by one friar; however, he originally stated that he could not remember any of the details about another friar. He later reported to a member of the Board that his memory had been recovered and gave a detailed account of the molestation by the second friar.

His mother, who was with him at the time his memory returned, was later interviewed by a member of the Board. She related that about 5:45 on a Saturday morning she found him lying on the couch trembling, pale and staring at the ceiling. Trying to comfort him, she asked if he was all right. His response was, "No, I'm not okay. I'm a mess! It's this whole thing with [another student], seeing how it messed him up too...going through it again with him...the walk through the seminary until some shitass friar ordered us off the grounds...the interview with the Board of Inquiry...."

After expressing his anger at all priests and friars, he began to despair, saying, "I'm losing it...can't work...can't think straight...can't cope...I'm scared." He began sobbing and trembling with spasms involving his entire body. Comforting him and holding him in her arms as though he were a six-year-old boy, she asked what he was afraid of at that moment. He responded between spasmodic sobs, "Fear all around me...helplessness...I'm so damned mad...it's tearing me apart. The seminary was filled with it [sexual activity]...there was no protection...no peer support."

Sobbing and trembling, he clung to her for several minutes and then began to hyperventilate. When asked if he could remember any more details, he nodded yes, pulled away from her and put his arm across his face. Suddenly, he said, "I remember...I remember it. I remember it all now!" He told her who it was, then putting both arms across his face, he said, "I can't tell you...it's too awful...I wouldn't do that to you, Mom!"

She asked him if he could write out everything that had come back to him, and he agreed. She gave him a tablet, pen and envelope. Sobbing and trembling, he wrote for about twenty minutes. Writing seemed to have a calming effect on him. When he finished, he placed the writing in the envelope and sealed it, then held it a few minutes before placing it under his keys on a table near him. Almost immediately, he went to sleep on the couch in a fetal position, and slept for about four hours. When he awakened, he appeared rested and responded warmly to his parents, telling his father that it seemed like a heavy weight had been lifted from his shoulders.

His mother described the episode as having watched her son go through an emotional grand mal seizure while he recovered his memory of the molestation which had occurred over ten years ago. She stated that the destructive effects on her son could fill a volume of horror. He has lost his Catholic faith and his family is struggling to keep theirs.

She stated, "The devastating effects on me and the rest of my family do not seem to have a limit. Trust has been destroyed. Will I ever be able to cope with my outrage in a constructive mode? I will never forget the effects of these criminal acts that have created so much anguish for us, nor will I ever forgive the perpetrators; only God can do that!"