Gallagher family: The Catholic Church in Baltimore took our father from us in life, death

The Catholic Church took our father, Francis X. Gallagher Jr., from us during his life and by his death; and it takes our faith from us every day it chooses to protect itself over its victims ("New lawsuit alleges Catholic clergy abuse drove Baltimore attorney, banker to his death," June 27).

We are stepping out from the decades-long shadows of secrecy, isolation and myths because our love for our father exceeds any possible shame, fear or stigma. There were individual predators and then there was the ultimate abuser — the institutional Church and the systemic culture it enforced that allowed the sexual abuse of innocent children, like our dad, to proliferate.

We now seek accountability and justice through the courts, but we know that is not enough. We join the chorus of devastated families in demanding, finally, an end to the Church's abject abuse of power, specifically any effort to deprive victims and their families true justice by challenging the Maryland Child Victims Act of 2023, or to shield its records and vast assets through bankruptcy filings.

The Church's offer of thoughts and prayers, directed at us and others devastated by Church-inflicted abuse, is woefully inadequate, and it does nothing to stop the cycle of senseless, preventable harm and deaths.

Countless people in our community and across the country are suffering in the way our dad suffered because of this horrific sexual abuse scourge inside the Church; we honor and stand with them, too. In seeking justice in our father's name, we simply want a transparent, truthful record, and want to do our part to protect others from suffering the same fate.

Our father was a devoted and favored son of the city of Baltimore. He loved it, he gave to it, and he was loved in return. But beneath the affect of this kind and loving man were untold layers of personal anguish and pain. His trials were overwhelming, unfair and undeserved.

The shame he shouldered over nearly five decades after being abused by a seminarian when he was 14-years-old, now belongs to the defendants named in our lawsuit; we hand it back to them. We will carry it no longer ("Gallagher family lawsuit against Baltimore archdiocese aims to shift burden from abuse onto Catholic Church," July 5). We are one family, but our story is one of countless stories, often delivered only in hushed tones. Some would presume that given our family's close ties to the leadership of the Archdiocese of Baltimore — my grandfather was its primary attorney for more than a decade — that we would be spared, but the documented history reveals we were not.

A lawsuit filed by family of Francis X. Gallagher, shown in an undated photo, alleges that Catholic clergy abuse drove the Baltimore attorney and banker to his death.

Our father lost his valiant battle against his trauma last summer when he died at the age of 62 from a drug overdose, while awaiting the release of the scathing Maryland Attorney General's report on sexual abuse in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. He had voluntarily contributed his story and personal, detailed, supporting documents.

How further destroyed he would be today to see the Archdiocese continuing its campaign of deceit since his death. Even as the Church asked for our community's forgiveness and told us things regarding the treatment of abusers would be different this time, the Church funded an anonymous group aimed at preventing the very transparency it claimed it supported.

At every opportunity, the Church, to this day, refuses to tell the truth, do what is just, or follow its own teachings. So we now must do what it will not, and we put our faith in a jury of Marylanders to determine the true meaning of justice.

— Flannery Gallagher, Washington D.C.

The writer is the daughter of the late Francis X. Gallagher Jr., a well-known lawyer and business executive who was the son of the civic leader Francis X. Gallagher Sr., a former lawyer for the Archdiocese of Baltimore.