

9-30-08 - BISHOP EDWARD BRAXTON'S ACTIONS RE: JURY AWARD  
Sister Maureen Paul Turlish, A Voice in the Desert

Bishop Edward K. Braxton would have the people of the Belleville, Illinois diocese accept as fact that the paying a 5 million dollar jury award in the case of the Rev. Raymond Kownacki, a known sexual predator, “would diminish diocesan resources and significantly limit the church’s ability to continue to serve our people, our parishes, (and) our schools,” yet no financial statements have been produced to support the bishop’s claims.

What is known, however, is that the diocese is said to be earning approximately 3.5 million dollars a year in interest from investments. If true, that fact alone would go a long way in weakening the bishop’s arguments.

Like the words of too many bishops, Braxton’s words indicate that there is still a long way to go before the transparency and accountability promised in 2002 becomes a reality.

Not one enabling bishop or church official in the United States has been held accountable for his part in the conspiracy, collusion and cover-up in which unknown numbers of children were put in harm’s way by the perverse actions of thousands of predator priests.

Even in the light of Pope Benedict XVI’s words to do “all that is possible in addressing the scourge that is childhood sexual abuse,” the majority of bishops, together with their State Catholic Conferences, continue to fight tooth and nail against any reformation of arbitrary statutes of limitation.

In refusing to support the complete removal of statutes of limitation, the hierarchy puts all children at risk from predators of any stripe, persuasion or religious affiliation.

Bishops like Edward Braxton, Charles Chaput of Denver, Edwin O’Brien of Baltimore, Donald Wuerl of Washington, D.C., Justin Rigali of Philadelphia and John McCormack of Manchester, New Hampshire, along with many others, continue to viciously oppose the removal of arbitrary statutes of limitation which give more protection to predators than they do to the very real victims of childhood sexual abuse. Some even refuse to make public the names and present locations of known predators.

Even in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles Cardinal Roger Mahony has resisted producing predator priests’ files and records for many months, in direct defiance of a court order.

Such positions from the spiritual leadership of the Church is hard to reconcile with Jesus’ words from St. Luke 17:2: “It would be better to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck than to face the punishment in store for harming one of these little ones.”

More unworthy still is Braxton's appeal of the Illinois court's decision on the grounds that the statute of limitation has passed since it comes from one whose first and foremost responsibility is to protect the Lord's "little ones."

The institutional church's loud protestations of commitment to victims of sexual abuse in the present offer neither absolution nor justice for the the sins and crimes of the past.

Justice and charity are what Jesus taught. He never said it was contingent on the price tag. The people of all states and religious persuasions deserve better and our churches should be leading the way, not building barriers that thwart victims' access to justice.

In Delaware on July 10, 2007 the Child Victims Law was signed. It removed all criminal and civil statutes of limitation regarding the sexual abuse of children and included a two year window for previously time barred cases of abuse by anyone.

W. Francis Malooly, the new bishop of Wilmington, Delaware said during his Installation Mass of September 8, 2008 that, "the innocence of too many...children was stolen by the very individuals whose duty it was to safeguard and protect it."

If bishops were to follow the words of Delaware's Bishop Fran which are more reflective of the words of Pope Benedict, perhaps there would be some chance of restoring credibility to the church's leadership because without that their words are only so much, "sounding brass and tinkling cymbals" (1 Corinthians 13:1-2).

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