

11-26-07 - In effect, [Philadelphia]archdiocese gives sexual predators a pass

Sister Maureen Paul Turlish, Philadelphia Inquirer

Sister Maureen Paul Turlish is a Delaware educator and victims' advocate who testified in support of the recently signed Delaware Child Victims Law

There should be no statute of limitations where the sexual abuse of children is concerned, period.

The sexual abuse of children is a major epidemic going on in our country, a pandemic if one considers it in its worldwide proportions.

So it is hard to believe, in light of the statement above, that we continue to have churchmen who actually oppose the removal of statutes of limitations regarding the sexual abuse of our children.

It is unconscionable that the Archdiocese of Philadelphia apparently is still of the opinion that sexual predators and abusers should not be held accountable.

"Window" legislation, as it relates to civil statutes, is the single most important factor in holding sexual predators and their enabling institutions or individuals accountable. ("Window" legislation is so called because it would allow previously time-barred cases - in this case, those concerning childhood sexual abuse - to be brought forward.) There should be a window of at least two years for abuse cases.

How blithely Mary Achilles, victims' advocate for the archdiocese, speaks of the church's failure to comply with the criminal statutes. So much so was the hierarchy's imperious disregard of the law, that the statute of limitations now protects known sexual abusers of children from criminal prosecution forever.

I cannot comprehend the hubris that would occasion the type of behavior that is so graphically delineated in the 2005 Philadelphia Grand Jury Report on the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

And still, the archdiocese questions the rightfulness of extending the statute of limitations.

Why isn't the archdiocese distributing postcards for the members of the Catholic community to sign and send to their legislators in Harrisburg to support the complete removal of statutes of limitations going forward in regard to the sexual abuse of children, criminally and civilly?

This is not a matter belonging to what our church calls the "deposit of faith," and, leaving aside the matter of mortal sin for the moment, the sexual abuse of children is a matter of criminal behavior.

Can there be any question about the intrinsic evil of the sexual abuse of children or of the fact that such individuals are intrinsically disordered?

Certainly not!

Statements made by Donna Farrell, the archdiocesan spokeswoman, are patently untrue. The burden of proof in civil cases falls on the accusers, not on the accused, possibly complicit institutions or their leadership.

Window legislation is not "anti" any particular group; it is pro-child. It forces records, if they exist and have not been destroyed, to be made available in a court of justice and hopefully into the public venue as well.

Moreover, there should be no accommodation in law giving more protection to individuals who have been accused of the sexual abuse of children than to the victims themselves.

We know that pedophiles, rapists, molesters and child abusers come from all walks of life and that the sexual abuse of children happens primarily in the home.

I think now is the time to make those who violate and abuse our children accountable in all states no matter when the abuse took place. Remove statutes of limitations going forward and include window legislation for past crimes.

It is unconscionable for religious denominations and their leadership to protect and enable sexual predators by refusing to support changes in the laws that would hold both the perpetrators and their enablers accountable.

In all good conscience, I would strongly encourage the good Catholics of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia to support criminal and civil laws that are as strong as possible in holding the sexual predators of our children and any individuals or institutions, who were complicit in their protection, accountable.

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