



Denying Another's Memories

In his LI Catholic column of April 1, Bishop Murphy writes about the sacrament of reconciliation. In wondering about why some haven't availed themselves of this sacrament for many years due to bad experiences in the confessional as children, he says the following:

"While I personally never experienced these 'horror stories,' I am not going to try to deny anyone's memories."

That's not quite true.

By opposing the Markey/Duane bill, which extends the statute of limitations for reporting child sexual abuse and allows a one-year "window" for filing civil suits against abusers and their enablers, that's exactly what the bishops of New York State, through their lobbying arm, the New York State Catholic Conference, are doing. And they are being less than candid about the reasons behind their opposition to this legislation.

Over and over, in newspaper accounts, in parish presentations and bulletin handouts, in video presentations and on their websites, the Diocese of Rockville Centre and the NYS Catholic Conference have repeated what they say is their reason for opposing Markey/Duane: The legislation focuses only on private institutions, particularly the Catholic Church, which it selectively targets, while an alternative bill, the Lopez/ Kruger bill doesn't target any particular group or institution for lawsuits. It also doesn't allow a one-year window. The DRVC and the NYSCC oppose Markey/Duane for "looking backward," as they say on their website.

Yet, in the March 11 edition of The Jewish Week, Dennis Poust, spokesman for the NYSCC, admitted that even if Markey Duane was amended to include both public and private institutions, the NYS Catholic Conference - our bishops - would still oppose it.

Why?

Perhaps because in 2009, seven long years after the clergy abuse scandal surfaced, there are some who still refuse to accept responsibility for the abuse of young people and the vulnerable.

Is it about fairness, Mr. Poust, or is it about protecting those who might have to admit what they know in civil court? Is it fair to use the possibility of diocesan bankruptcy and the depletion of funds for Catholic Charities - both untruths - to again victimize the abused by painting them as greedy or desiring to destroy the church for wanting to face their abusers in civil court - which they were denied at the time they reported their abuse to the diocese because of the deception of those who handled these abuse cases?

From the Suffolk County NY Grand Jury Report, 2002:

"The evidence before the Grand Jury clearly demonstrates that Diocesan officials agreed to engage in conduct that resulted in the prevention, hindrance and delay in the discovery of criminal conduct by priests. They conceived and agreed to a plan using deception and intimidation to prevent victims from seeking legal solutions to their problems. This included victims who were seeking compensation for their injuries in the civil courts. There, Diocesan officials pursued aggressive legal strategies to dismiss time barred claims and improperly named parties. They insisted upon confidentiality agreements in cases that were settled. This policy put children at risk inasmuch as victims were prohibited by law from speaking out about the criminal conduct of sexually abusive priests."

And about that Lopez/ Kruger bill...

(over)



Voice of the Faithful of Long Island



On April 3, in an article on the *Bushwick (NY) BK* website titled *Abused Kids Pawns in Brooklyn Power Struggle*, reporter Aaron Short writes the following:

“Is Brooklyn Democratic Boss and State Assemblyman Vito Lopez pushing a lenient clergy abuse bill in order to curry favor with the Catholic Church so that his pet organizations can more easily control the contracting of an ‘affordable housing’ scheme...”

According to the article, Father James O’Shea of All Saints Church in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, served as the Executive Director of *Churches United*, a coalition of parishes in northern Brooklyn. The organization’s focus was on advocating for affordable housing in Williamsburg’s South Side neighborhood. In November 2008, Bishop DiMarzio of the Archdiocese of Brooklyn asked Fr. O’Shea to step down. The diocese then reconstructed the Board of Directors, appointed a new chair, and the members formed a new organization, *Churches United for Fair Housing*. Sources say that Fr. O’Shea was asked to step down because of his opposition to the city’s rezoning plans of a lot in the area known as the Broadway Triangle, which has been the focus of development plans by many organizations over the last 30 years.

However, a partnership forged by Assemblyman Vito Lopez in 2005 among several organizations in Brooklyn, one of which Lopez founded, now appears to have the inside track on developing the Triangle.

From the article:

“The Brooklyn Diocese’s aggressive lobbying in support of Lopez’s bill has raised eyebrows in his district. *Broadway Triangle Community Coalition* leaders believe that the Brooklyn Diocese splintered *Churches United* and pressured local priests to support [the partnership’s] control of the Broadway Triangle project in return for Assemblyman Lopez’s legislative efforts to block Markey’s bill from passage with his own, more lenient sexual abuse bill.”

Rob Solano, Executive Director of *Churches United for Fair Housing*, asserted O’Shea was forced to leave because of his vocal opposition to the rezoning of the Broadway Triangle. He and other coalition leaders believe that O’Shea is afraid to comment on the record about this dismissal because Diocese leaders have threatened to transfer him to another parish out of the city.

The Diocese’s lobbying efforts regarding the sex abuse bills may change his mind. Two weeks ago, the Brooklyn Diocese arranged for four buses of *Jornadistas*, Hispanic Catholic young evangelists, to travel to Albany to lobby assembly members to oppose the Markey bill. More than 150 *Jornadistas* personally visited the offices of state legislators after writing and emailing them over two weeks.

“We were told by our Catholic pastors that the Broadway Triangle was too political, that we must keep a separation between Church and state but turn around and support the Vito Lopez bill and then send four buses filled with children to Albany,” said Solano. “Why can’t these pastors stand up and fight to maximize affordable housing?”

All of this political activity has troubled long-time parish leaders who prefer the intentions of the Markey bill to bring to justice colleagues who preyed on children without impunity and finally end this troubled era of the Church’s history.

“DiMarzio doesn’t know what’s going on,” one pastor said, refusing to be identified. “Allowing Vito to save you is the wrong move. He doesn’t give a damn about the Catholic Church.”

John 8:32 – “You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.”



Looking Backward

From a website linked to the New York State Catholic Conference's website concerning the difference between the Markey/Duane and Lopez/Kruger bills:

“There is a dramatic difference between the two visions in the Assembly: the Markey/Duane bill looks backward with an eye toward inciting litigation selectively against religious and other private organizations; the Lopez/Kruger bill protects children now and in the future, treats all victims fairly, and doesn't selectively target any particular group or institution for lawsuits.”

Besides being patently untrue (Markey/Duane would not prevent any victim from petitioning the courts in civil suits; Markey/Duane protects children in the future better than Lopez/Kruger because it extends the statute of limitations for reporting abuse longer than Lopez/Kruger does; Markey/Duane does not target any institutions – it is the Catholic Church that repeatedly paints itself as a target), there is good reason for all of us to look backward to protect children and the vulnerable in the future. For example, the following is from an article that appeared in Newsday on May 1:

Former LI priest accused of molesting boys dies

BY BART JONES

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10:04 PM EDT, April 30, 2009

A former Roman Catholic priest who was one of the most notorious figures in the Diocese of Rockville Centre's child sex abuse scandal has died in Florida, authorities said.

Brian McKeon, 58, was found dead in his home in Port Richey, Fla., on Monday about 11:30 a.m., the Pasco County Sheriff's Office said. He had become sick at about 3 a.m., coughing up blood and suffering a seizure, a roommate told authorities.

McKeon refused medical care and became unresponsive after another seizure and vomiting more blood. The sheriff's report said McKeon, an unemployed nurse, suffered health problems, "most of which were believed to have been caused by Brian's chronic alcoholism."

But McKeon's death does not mean the numerous cases linked to him are over, Northport attorney Douglas McNally, who said he represents nine of McKeon's alleged victims, said Thursday.

If a bill in Albany becomes law, McNally said, victims could still file civil lawsuits against the diocese, charging negligent hiring and supervision of McKeon.



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The bill, sponsored by Assemb. Margaret Markey (D- Maspeth), would drop the statute of limitations on child sex abuse cases for a year. McKeon was never charged with a crime, largely because the cases' statute of limitations had expired.

The church is fighting the bill, saying it could bankrupt it and that it is discriminatory because it does not include public institutions such as schools.

In 25 years as a priest, McKeon served in parishes in Holbrook, East Northport, Garden City and Mattituck. Diocesan spokesman Sean Dolan said Bishop William Murphy removed McKeon from active ministry in fall 2001 following accusations he had sexually molested boys. The pope laicized, or permanently removed, McKeon from the priesthood two years later.

The father of an alleged victim who testified before a Suffolk grand jury identified McKeon as "Priest C" in a report the jury issued in 2003. The report said McKeon "wreaked havoc" by abusing boys as young as 10. "For this, he was rewarded by being a pastor."

In a March 2002 interview with Newsday, McKeon acknowledged he had made "a mistake" more than a decade earlier by inappropriately touching boys. He said he had not been involved in any incident since, noting, "I was wrong, and I admitted I was wrong."

The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests said, "Although the death of former Father Brian McKeon may bring him the peace he so sadly missed in this life, it will not bring peace to the many victims he molested/raped in the Diocese of Rockville Centre."

"The childhood innocence of so many were shattered," the group said, "because too many bishops, chancery officials, pastors, priests, parishioners chose to be silent and look the other way."

Dolan responded that "any victim of clergy abuse that has a credible claim - whether the case is legally time-barred or not - has been cared for by the church. We continue to encourage victims of abuse to come forward" to report abuse.

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Brian McKeon, an admitted child sexual abuser, was not criminally prosecuted because of the current statute of limitations for reporting child abuse. Had he been tried and convicted, he would have been held accountable for his crimes and would have had to register as a sexual offender. He would have been visible and his movements would have been monitored. Instead, he was laicized by the church and allowed to enter private life – and the greater community – with no accountability and no strings attached. He became a nurse in another state where no one knew his history. In his capacity as a nurse, could he have had access to children and the vulnerable? Of course.

Should we be looking backward? Of course. Unless we have something to hide.