

The Diocese of Scranton

Keeping Our Youth Safe



As I am sure you are aware, a Grand Jury report investigating child sexual abuse within the Catholic Church in Pennsylvania has been released. I would like to offer my most sincere apologies to all victims, and to the community at large, for this tragic reality. The report brings up painful and uncomfortable issues that we must face together so we can eradicate child sexual abuse from the church altogether.

I know you are all concerned. I share those same concerns and I want to assure you that your child's safety is our highest priority. Our current standards are built upon years of ongoing improvements as we constantly reevaluate and improve our procedures and policies.

HOW DO WE PROTECT OUR CHILDREN?

- All volunteers and employees must have criminal background and child abuse clearances
- Every person is trained extensively on sexual abuse prevention, reporting, victim advocacy and more
- Since 2003, we have trained more than 28,000 adults in child protection awareness
- Every child in kindergarten through 12th grade is taught how to recognize and report inappropriate behavior

HOW DO WE HANDLE ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE?

- We strictly adhere to a zero tolerance policy on abuse
- We immediately notify law enforcement of all allegations of abuse
- We notify Pennsylvania Child Line
- We remove abusers from ministry and immediately notify the parish and the public
- And we provide all necessary support to victims, knowing that the healing process can be difficult and lengthy

Once again, I am deeply sorry and grieved for the unsettling nature of the behaviors described in this Grand Jury investigation. I hope we can work together to restore trust in the church and move forward in a more positive way.

If you are in need of resources that can help you discuss these issues with your children, we recommend:

- Catholic Social Services (cssdioceseofscranton.org)
- Darkness to Light (d2l.org)
- Prevent Child Abuse America (preventchildabuse.org)
- Stop It Now! (stopitnow.org)

Thank you and God Bless you.

Bishop Joseph C. Bambera

PRAYER: A CHALLENGE FOR SURVIVORS

Fr. Lewis S. Fiorelli, OSFS, Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish, Vienna, VA

The relationship between an adult survivor of child sexual abuse and God is fraught with many challenges, not the least among which is prayer.

How can adult victims pray to God when God was not there for them while they were being sexually abused as children? How can they hope to grasp the failure of a supposedly good and loving God to intervene when an evil of that nature was being perpetrated upon them as innocent children?

I cannot hope to answer those and other questions in any satisfying manner. Still, I know from personal experience that some adult victims somehow manage — through hard work, grit and grace — to recover a desire to engage in a prayerful relationship with God, but sometimes they are not sure how to go about it. It is for them that I write these words.

It helps to begin with a definition of prayer. I take my lead from St. Francis de Sales. For him, prayer, especially mental prayer, is simply a heart to heart conversation with God. The topic of the conversation can be anything that's on the heart of the one who is praying. I like to suggest that one pray what's on the "front burner" of their life at that moment. Are you still angry with God for not being there for you during the years of abuse? Then tell God you are angry with him. Indeed, be angry with God. The prophets often prayed in such a blunt and candid manner. Such prayer is known as the prayer of expostulation.

And don't think that you have to use pious or scripted words. Use the words that are your words. Prayer of this sort is meant to be a heart to heart conversation, an honest and open exchange of feelings, however strong, and of thoughts, however confused or muddled. God can handle whatever we can throw at him in prayer of this sort. The very fact that you are talking to him is already an act of faith in him, however fragile.

Your feelings may be all over the place and your words a cascading torrent. There is no right or wrong way to carry out this kind of conversation with God. Do you think that he would not see — despite our effort to use pious or sanctioned words— that our heart is not really in those words at all? Honesty and candor, even bluntness, is best here. God knows. God understands. God hears.

Remember, this is a conversation. Therefore, we have to



let God speak as well and learn to listen to what he says to us with what St. Francis de Sales describes as "the ears of our heart." God will speak directly to your heart and to the concrete circumstances of your life at the moment of prayer. Bottom line, there is *another* with whom you are speaking and who is speaking to you. Such a conversation is a good in itself, an end in itself.

Yet, something truly wonderful also happens over time as a result of prayer of this kind. The one who prays is gradually transformed from within. Anger lessens, grief subsides, confusion lightens, and the heart heals. You may not have words to describe what is happening, but you begin to see yourself as God sees you and as you truly are — as someone who is both loving and loved.

You even begin to grasp that his heart was breaking even as you were being abused and that, far from being absent or indifferent at that time, he was very near to you, present and suffering. Even though Jesus felt that God was absent during his agony on the cross ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"), still, in the end, he entrusted himself into God's care ("Into your hands, I commend my spirit!").

The innocent one suffering while God seemed to be absent — this experience of Jesus on the Cross is a paradigm for the innocent victims of child sexual abuse. Somehow prayer lays hold of the mystery of it all and is, on some deep but real level, able to make sense, not indeed of the suffering, but of God's abiding love even in the midst of the suffering.

Bio: Fr. Fiorelli offers workshops, retreats and spiritual guidance to survivors, their families and those who minister to them in the diocese of Arlington, Virginia. He taught dogmatic theology and Salesian spirituality in the Washington DC area before being elected as 10th Superior General of the Oblates. He has served as chaplain to several Salesian lay groups and is the Auxiliary Religious Assistant to the monasteries of the Order of the Visitation in the United States. In 2007, Fr. Fiorelli was appointed to General Formation Coordinator for the Oblate Congregation. He has led retreats for survivors of clergy abuse and presented many workshops to priests, nuns and others seeking to offer spiritual guidance and support to survivors of abuse by clergy and others in authority. Along with other books on spiritual guidance and St. Francis de sales, Fr. Fiorelli has written, with co-author T. Pitt Green, a workbook entitled [Veronica's Veil: Spiritual Companionship for Adult Survivors of Child Abuse – Integrating Faith with Recovery. A Christ-Centered Support for Healing from Child Abuse](#). For our magazine, Fr. Fiorelli has written [Child Protection as Survivor Ministry](#).