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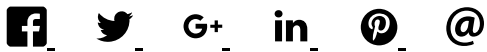
Victim of clergy abuse shares his story

By Pat Bywater Feb 15, 2008



Kevin McParland

The Herald, Sharon, Pa.



The Roman Catholic faith had always played a central role in Kevin McParland's life.

He served as an altar boy for several years and attended a Catholic school through sixth grade. For years his mother, a Eucharistic minister, gathered the family together each night to pray the Rosary for her husband, who, since a 1972 heart attack, experienced bouts of failing health. When McParland's father, a medical doctor who often provided free care to priests and nuns, was too sick to attend church, she arranged for a priest to deliver the sacraments in their home.

Even when McParland left home to study at Penn State University's main campus, he remained dedicated to the church, regularly attending services.

As he returned from college in the summer of 1980, the 20-year-old sophomore was worried about his father once again. McParland's dad had just suffered another heart attack, and McParland did not know how he could cope if he ever lost his father and the close relationship they enjoyed.

Little did McParland know that an important lesson he was taught at St. Michael's School in Greenville would be turned on its head. The nuns there, he said, stressed obedience to the church and to its priests in particular. The lesson was clear, McParland recalls: "If you didn't do what they said, you would go to hell."

In the space of just a few days, that summer McParland claims to have had sexual encounters that stripped him of his religion and dragged him into years of mental illness, drug addiction and homelessness that would nearly cost him his life.

McParland claims to have become the victim of unwanted sexual relations at the hands of his parish priest at St. Margaret's Roman Catholic Church in Jamestown.

According to experts in the field, McParland's dramatic, near-death struggle to recover is not unusual among victims of clergy sexual abuse. His story also shows that while the Roman Catholic Diocese of Erie is not alone in refusing to disclose exactly what it has done to address priests accused of sexual impropriety, it did try to help McParland. In the end, however, his requests for help went beyond what the diocese was willing to support.

A life-altering event

McParland stuck to his usual schedule of attending church regularly when he came home in the summer of 1980.

What was unusual was his reaction to the parish priest who had just been appointed to his home church that summer, Father Stephen E. Jeselnick.

Jeselnick had been at St. Margaret's only a short time – maybe a week – when he approached McParland as he was leaving Mass one day. McParland cut the meeting short because he found Jeselnick "a bit creepy."

Embarrassed by his reaction, McParland later called Jeselnick to apologize.

He said Jeselnick suggested a meeting at McParland's home one evening so they could get to know each other better. McParland agreed.

The night of the meeting McParland was alone at home and had dipped into his dad's whiskey. Worries about his dad's health were taking a toll on him.

Three or four drinks later, he was admittedly drunk.

The conversation with the Rev. Jeselnick was good – more like two friends getting together. “Talking to him wasn't like talking to other priests I knew,” McParland said.

At one point Jeselnick began to give McParland a massage that eventually worked its way down to between McParland's legs. When that happened, “I froze,” McParland said.

Jeselnick did not respond to calls and e-mails seeking comment on this story, but a letter from Jeselnick's attorney, Brian Balenson, that accompanied a 2005 settlement between Jeselnick and McParland said Jeselnick thought the meetings “were free will and he now recognizes that, although (they) were both young adults, (McParland) did not view the meetings the same way as (Jeselnick) did.”

McParland continued to explain what he claims happened next.

Jeselnick led McParland to McParland's bedroom, where the sexual encounter continued. McParland claims the priest ripped off his shorts. He said he told Jeselnick no, but the priest didn't stop.

Looking back, McParland claims several things kept him from stopping the incident.

He was shocked and had been taught to obey.

“I did not even know priests and nuns had sexual organs,” McParland said. “I was taught they are God's representative and you do what they say.”

He was almost paralyzed.

As the sexual incident unfolded, McParland claims it was almost as if he disassociated with his body. “I thought this can't be happening. It was like watching it happen to someone else.”

And finally, in general, he was a passive person.

“I did not know how to fight back, especially with a priest,” he said.

McParland had never been athletic and did not deal well with confrontation.

When it came to bullies and fights in school, for example, McParland said he would always just take what was dished out. He believed that “the best way to have the least pain inflicted was to submit.”

Although some may find it hard to believe, it is not unusual for those who are victimized by priests to freeze up or offer little resistance as the sexual encounter unfolds, according to David Clohessy, director of the Chicago-based Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests. Through SNAP, which was founded in 1988 by a female social worker who was victimized by a priest, Clohessy comes in daily contact with victims across the United States. He has been involved with the organization since 1990.

“Catholic children are trained from birth to trust, respect and revere priests and also that they are God’s representative on Earth,” he said.

“These are men who can take away our sins and get us into heaven. They are imbued with almost superhuman powers.”

This “power imbalance,” as Clohessy calls it, combined with Catholic priests’ vow of celibacy, often renders victims helpless when a sexual advance occurs, he said. In many cases victims do little or nothing to resist, according to Clohessy, even in situations like McParland’s when they are abused more than once by the same priest.

In addition, Clohessy believes most abuser priests pick their victims carefully. “These men are unbelievably cunning, shrewd and manipulative,” he said. “They know how to pick people who have a hard time saying no and who won’t report it.”

Often, according to Clohessy, that means finding a victim who is vulnerable, as McParland was over his father’s failing health.

When the encounter was done, Jeselnick simply left.

The incident left McParland confused and scared. "I figured I was going to hell," he said.

He did not want to tell anyone what happened, but he wanted to find help understanding why it happened and what it meant. He thought what had happened was sinful and had left him in jeopardy of eternal damnation, but how could a trusted priest do such a thing if it was a mortal sin? Had he done something to deserve this? Was God punishing him?

McParland turned to the only person he thought he could trust for answers.

"I called him a couple days afterwards because I did not know where to turn," McParland said. "I thought somehow he could take away what happened."

McParland said Jeselnick suggested another meeting at McParland's home.

Again McParland agreed, and he says Jeselnick turned the meeting into another sexual encounter when he found McParland alone. Initially, McParland pressed the priest for answers to his questions. Was he doomed to eternity in hell? McParland said the priest responded that the only thing McParland needed to worry about was pleasuring him.

"It was like this wasn't real," said McParland of the second incident. He recalls thinking "at a certain point the best way is to submit and get him out of here."

The encounter ended when McParland's parents came home. Hearing them approach, Jeselnick stopped, made himself presentable and acted as if he was just visiting. "It was uncanny how he could switch from one character to another," McParland recalls.

The fact that McParland went back to someone he felt was an abuser for answers is another strand Clohessy finds running through many cases of sexual abuse by a priest. He likens it to a battered spouse who goes back to her or his abuser again and again.

The downward spiral

McParland's life slowly began unraveling from there.

His drinking was getting out of control, he was smoking marijuana and his studies suffered. He stopped going home for visits and became withdrawn.

“I cut off all relationships,” he said. “I did not tell anyone about it (the incidents with Jeselnick). I sank into a really deep depression.”

He still wanted to know what would happen to him as a result of the encounters, so much so that he called Jeselnick again. When the priest suggested a meeting at Penn State, McParland hung up the phone. He went to confession at a church near State College. When the priest began asking for graphic details of the incidents with Jeselnick, he left.

The downward spiral continued, but he managed to graduate. “I wanted to get as far away as possible,” McParland said, so he caught a ride to Los Angeles.

The drug abuse escalated, and McParland was unable to hold a steady job and started to have panic attacks.

He again sought help at a local Catholic church. A priest offered counseling, but did not want details about McParland’s abuser. The priest also offered no reassurance about the status of McParland’s soul.

He continued to believe he was destined to go to hell and began to think that “maybe if I am punished enough, God will forgive me.”

He ended up homeless, but lied to his family to keep it from them.

He attempted suicide twice. Then his father died in 1985, bringing him to a new low. McParland nearly died of a drug overdose just months later.

It was all predictable, and some of it may have been avoidable, had McParland known three things. He was not alone. It was not his fault. There was help available.

In some ways he was further victimized by history. As he struggled through his worst days in the 1980s, the national priest abuse scandal had not yet come to light. Victims were isolated and the sources of help were not as obvious as they are today.

In the end, Kevin McParland nearly had to lose his life in order to begin reclaiming it.

2 comments

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Lightkeeper2016

May 22, 2017

I am looking into the names of a couple of other Priest/ Deacons who were also involved, at the time , one Deacon went thru the Seminary twice and at the end of his 2nd attempt was told "maybe the priest hood was not his calling" and was asked to leave the priesthood. Now it makes perfect sense, why!!! I was shocked to say the least when I heard he was one of my siblings abusers . I will say the Erie Diocese have been very helpful in looking into this abuse. Since the first of the year, especially trying to match the names with the Priest/ Deacons who were at the church during this time frame. One Priest came in to help from out of state which makes it difficult to track. I have to be honest I'm not Catholic but my mother was the cook in the Church where these priest/Deacons were assigned and for my part the two Priest there at the time were awesome and some of the Deacons I knew were the nicest people you would ever want to meet . One Priest even got ordained but fell in love with a student at the College nearby and left the priesthood and got married. A Msgr in Erie who is presently the Director of the Office for the Protection of Children and Youth has said a law firm in Pittsburg, would be contacting me trying to tie up loose ends, like trying to put names together, remember my siblings may have been barely 8 at the time and they have tried to hide this abuse, also the reporter who first did the article on this Priest has passed to me a number to call in regards to sexual abuse cover up by the church at the time. My youngest Brother tried to commit suicide and it stems from this abuse from all these years ago. I am surprised there is a statue of limitations in Pa for Priest Abuse what do little kids know what is being done to them, let alone by a Priest, then threatened with their life if they say any thing. My family has told me one of the Priest would come into their room with a baseball bat and tell them there bodies would never be found. They feared for there life. My research into this issue was made at the request of my now deceased sister the Monday before her Death. So my point in all this is there has to be a watchdog group somewhere in Crawford County or surrounding counties who I can be referred to. My reason to call the Crawford County DA's office was to see if How I could legally charge former Priest Jeselnick with more time on his sentence and to make hi aware of the Deacon's Name who was asked to leave the priest hood who moved to Franklin Pa . I was told by the DA's he would inform the local authorities about this person, and I will follow up when I call the law firm in Pittsburg, I have found out for the most part these Priest/ Deacons are no longer in the Priesthood but I am trying to track down the Where about of the deacon who went to Franklin Pa. I also heard the DA in Crawford county mentioned in a article that someone had contacted him about Priest abuse but he said people need to call his office. All I can say is again my siblings had no idea what was happening because of there age and this was the mid 70's and 80's everyone didn't have a phone attached to their ear like today. How would they know who to call? R/S Paul

Like Reply



Lightkeeper2016

May 22, 2017

I spoke to my oldest sister on the Monday before her death and that is when she shared with me that this Priest abused her and my other siblings and caused her to have nightmares for years before her death, This Priest started this abuse as early as the early eighties. I have spoke to the local DA's office back in Crawford county but the statue of limitations was 5 years at that time of the incident but I am not going to rest until I exhaust my self on my sisters behave, I made a promise to her and I will keep it. Paul

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Rough N Rowdy Brawl

Covelli Center

Tue, Jul 24



Mom2Mom

Buhl Community Recreation...



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