

Priest M

Four of *Priest M*'s victims testified before the Grand Jury; by *Priest M*'s own admission there could have been more. As with many other of the abusive priests in the Diocese, *Priest M* gained access to his victims by first befriending their parents. He became a guest at their table, gained their trust and thus, had unfettered opportunity to abuse their children.

For two brothers this pattern led to trips outside of the diocese for a variety of purposes including, cutting down Christmas trees, visiting a vacation home, retreats and one trip to visit colleges. *Priest M* began his abuse by touching the boys and later tried to have them engage in oral sex with him. He told the boys that what they were doing was a, "caring thing" One of the brothers refused, the other, who was younger, did not. In fact, *Priest M* showed him a graphic book describing sexual acts on one of their trips. As the victim described it, "we just followed along" During these trips the sexual contact occurred almost every night and, even sometimes during the day, if they were alone. One of the brothers still had a page of his childhood scrapbook complete with plane tickets from a trip to the Midwest that he had taken with *Priest M*. (Grand Jury Exhibit 51)

Whenever the boys refused *Priest M*'s sexual advances, he became angry. As a child, the one victim told the grand jury, that he had once expressed certain fears to *Priest M*. Thereafter, *Priest M* played on these fears and provided comfort only in exchange for sex.

Of course, neither of the brothers told anyone what was happening to them until they were adults. For the youngest brother his disclosure was prompted by the fact that his sister had a son who was approaching the age that *Priest M* had first started his abuse. Since his sister was still friendly with *Priest M* he was afraid the priest would turn his attentions to his nephew. He decided to tell his sister so that she could take action to prevent this from happening. Later,

during therapy that included family members, his older brother disclosed that he too had been abused by *Priest M*.

Both of the brothers sought help from the church. Although he was living out of state, the younger brother contacted the Diocese of Rockville Centre. His brother contacted a Diocese in Florida where he was then living. The only thing they learned was that *Priest M* had left the priesthood.

Two classmates, who were good friends, were also victims of *Priest M's* abuse. Both were active in their parish folk group, one was an altar boy and ultimately they attended the same midwestern university. What they only learned later was, that they were also both victims of *Priest M*.

The pattern of *Priest M's* abuse was similar. He abused the boys on a variety of trips and in the rectory, where they often stayed overnight. The abuse was relentless and included fondling, oral sex and with one of the boys, repetitive anal sex. *Priest M* would often drink alcohol and repeatedly gave it to the boys. He would tell the boys that what they were doing was an, “expression of love”, and their relationship was, “special”. When the boys would refuse to engage in sexual conduct, *Priest M* acted hurt and was frequently tearful. One of the victims described that he felt traumatized about what was happening to him but that he had no idea what to do, “it was really, really terrible”. For both boys it was simply inconceivable that they would say anything about what was happening to them.

When the boys left for college, *Priest M* received permission to follow them, ostensibly for the purpose of pursuing an additional degree. *Priest M* became the director of a dormitory where he continued to abuse the boys. During this time neither boy suspected the other was being abused and *Priest M* encouraged them in this belief.

Both boys ended their relationship with *Priest M* when they were in college although *Priest M* continued to pursue them for some time afterwards. For one victim, disclosure of the abuse came shortly thereafter, to the woman who would later become his wife. He decided to contact the Diocese about *Priest M* and wrote a letter to a high-ranking Diocesan official. (Grand Jury Exhibit 52) He did not discuss this with his family and in fact did not disclose his abuse to them for another eight years. In the letter, the victim graphically relives his experiences with *Priest M*, and writes,

I cannot begin to describe the amount of fear, guilt and pain I experienced over those years. It has taken me a long time to accept what went on with Father (name omitted) and to overcome it. I am absolutely certain that none of this would have happened were I approached by someone who was not a priest.

The victim goes on to emphatically relate the purpose of his letter.

I am writing this letter for one reason. I feel a responsibility to those young boys who may be approached sexually by Father (name omitted). I feel that giving you this information is the best way to prevent another person from having an experience similar to mine. I believe that Father (name omitted) is emotionally disturbed, and in need of help. I hope you will see to it that he gets the help he needs.

He received no response from the Diocese. Three months later he wrote to the Diocese again. (Grand Jury Exhibit 53) He sent the letter certified mail. (Grand Jury Exhibit 73) Without reiterating the entire contents of his first correspondence, he nevertheless writes,

It is very important to me personally to know that you have taken some action with regards to this situation. As I stated in my initial letter to you, I feel a responsibility to others who may be abused by Father (name omitted).

Two months later he met personally with the high-ranking Diocesan official to whom he had written. He assured the victim that he would act. He left the meeting feeling that the Diocese

understood the situation and stood ready to help. During the meeting he had learned that *Priest M* was assigned to a Diocese in Florida.

Two months later the victim received a copy of a letter that the Diocese of Rockville Centre had sent to *Priest M* requesting that he contact them to arrange to meet with Diocesan officials. (Grand Jury Exhibit 53A) A month after that, he received another letter, describing the results of this meeting (Grand Jury Exhibit 54)

I had a meeting with Father (name omitted) on July 24 here in the Chancery. He informed me that he is very happily situated in (name omitted) in Florida. I brought the matter of our mutual concern to his attention without ever mentioning any name, so that he is not conscious of your being the source of my concern.

Father acknowledged his responsibility and assured me that he has been receiving counseling and spiritual direction and that this matter has not been a problem for over a period of approximately two years. He seemed relieved to be able to discuss the matter with me. I asked him to write me in confirmation of our meeting. Enclosed is a copy of that letter. I will keep all this material in Father's confidential folder and I hope and pray that this is a closed chapter.

Father sincerely regrets the past and I reminded him of his responsibility in this regard. At no time was your name mentioned by Father or by myself.

Although the Diocese may have felt that the matter was closed, for the victim it was not. He wrote again for two reasons. First, the letter from *Priest M* that was to be enclosed with the correspondence was not there. More importantly, the victim began to realize that he might not have been the only one abused by *Priest M*. As he writes in a follow up letter (Grand Jury Exhibit 55),

Father also claims that this matter has not been a problem for a period of approximately two years. This means that I was not the only person abused by Father (name omitted) In fact, it means that he continued to be sexually abusive for two years beyond his abuse of me. Obviously, there are other victims.

All of these factors concern me very much. I honestly feel that more than Father's word is needed to back up his presentation of the facts. I suggest to you that you request a letter from his psychotherapist outlining Father's presenting problem and confirming his involvement in therapy.

He goes on to request that something be done about *Priest M*'s situation in Florida and suggests to the Diocese that they notify officials there about *Priest M* so that he can be monitored. He also asks that the Diocese investigate the issue of *Priest M*'s additional victims. He reminds the Diocese that,

...we are dealing with sexual abuse here and not homosexuality. If Father were simply a homosexual, he would have been involved with consenting adults. However, as a sexually abusive person, he coerced and manipulated people far too young to be considered consenting adults. There is an enormous difference between the two.

He closes the letter with this insight,

Somehow, I believed that contacting you regarding Father...would "end" this for me. Unfortunately, this is not so. I am beginning to realize that there is nothing in this world that you, or anyone else, can do to end my having to live with this experience. It has affected my life in countless ways, and I can see that it always will. It has brought me grief, hatred and disgust, and has made me feel as though I am twenty-four going on eighty. It is because of the intensity of my feelings that it is so important to me to be sure that Father never sexually abuses a person again. No one should experience such a thing if it can possibly be prevented.

There was no reply from the Diocese to this letter. Four months later the victim tried again to prompt the Diocese to respond to his concerns. (Grand Jury Exhibit 56). A month later he received a response from the Diocese that included the correspondence from *Priest M* that had been promised. In the letter, *Priest M* thanks his superiors for their, "openness and understanding" (Grand Jury Exhibit 57). The official Diocesan position with respect to *Priest M* is clearly spelled out in their response:

I did not respond to your letter of September 2, 1980 because at the time of my interview with Father (name omitted), I was not able to confront him with specific names and/or situations in order to protect your anonymity, as you had requested. Since you are unwilling to accept Father's word to me, I will make no further request of Father about this matter unless you are willing to allow me to use your name and more specific information in requesting the further proof that you wish regarding the spiritual direction and counseling program which he has indicated.

A person's program of spiritual direction is a very confidential matter. It is often the case that the spiritual director also serves as the person's confessor, and as such, the seal of confession is a most serious obligation on the part of the confessor. Your own professional experience as a psychologist has made you very familiar with the confidentiality of a counseling program, and the necessity of the patient consenting to the release of such information.

You mention in your letter that you feel that others may have been involved. I do not believe that I have sufficient proof that this is the case, and if such a serious charge is to be made, I would have to confront Father (name omitted) with such specific charges, which I do not have.

I have pursued this matter in this fashion because of your own wish for anonymity, which I fully intend to honor unless you choose otherwise, and because I have Father (name omitted) assurance to me, verbally and in writing, that he has undergone counseling and has sought spiritual direction, and is continuing to do so.

Since I continue to regard this as a confidential matter, may I request that you mark any further correspondence "Personal".

This letter struck the victim as disingenuous. If, as Diocesan officials claimed, they were only willing to accept that *Priest M* had sexually abused one person, the victim wondered just who's anonymity they were trying to protect. He wrote to the Diocese again expressing concern that none of his requests, especially the notification of *Priest M's* new Diocese, had been followed up on. While he was confused as to reasons the Diocese required, this he agreed to allow the use of his name. (Grand Jury Exhibit 58)

Two months later the victim received a curt reply to his correspondence. (Grand Jury Exhibit 59)

Based on the information which has been made available to me, I feel that I have neither the right nor the responsibility to bring this matter to the attention of the Diocese in which Father is serving.

I am grateful to you for bringing this matter to my attention. I do not feel that any additional action is necessary at this time.

The victim wrote back and explained that over the next few weeks he would determine whether, “it is my right or my responsibility to contact Father (name omitted) superiors in Florida myself. I will then proceed according to my own decision and conscience.” (Grand Jury Exhibit 60)

Within two months the victim decided that he would write to *Priest M's* superiors in Florida on his own and notify them of this priest's sexually abusive past. He told the Bishop in Florida that his goal was only to spare another victim from the horror of sexual abuse and he felt it was imperative for *Priest M's* superiors to be aware of his problems. 6/7/02,p.43) A week later he heard from this Bishop thanking him and reporting that he , “would keep it in mind in our personnel placements”.(Grand Jury Exhibit 62) The Bishop confirms that he was unaware of the situation until he received the victim's letter. Despite his request that the Florida Bishop keep him informed as to any action taken with regard to *Priest M*, he never heard from him again .

A year later the victim learned that *Priest M* had returned to the Diocese of Rockville Centre and was assigned to a parish. He wrote a letter to the pastor of the parish outlining *Priest M's* history of child abuse. (Grand Jury Exhibit 63)He received no response so a couple of months later he wrote to him again. There was no response to this letter either. (Grand Jury Exhibit 64)

When *Priest M* returned to the Diocese after his years spent in the Midwest, he was assigned to a parish with an elementary school. The pastor there testified that he never saw *Priest M's* personnel file. He knew that *Priest M* had returned from an assignment out of the Diocese, and admitted hearing rumors of sexual abuse. However, he did not make any inquiries concerning these rumors. As with other pastors, he was unaware that a psychologist had treated

Priest M at the request of the Diocese.⁵⁸ He did acknowledge receiving a letter postmarked from out of state indicating the sexual abuse of a child by *Priest M*. He did not speak to *Priest M* about it.⁵⁹ The pastor stated he felt that he could totally trust the Diocese and believed that the priest had already been screened and approved by them.

Priest M was transferred to another parish after six years. The pastor did not notify *Priest M's* next pastor of the letter he had received alleging sexual abuse. He felt that he would be tarnishing *Priest M's* reputation by passing on this information.

Priest M's new pastor told the Grand Jury that he had not been given *Priest M's* personnel file to review and was given no historical information concerning him. He did speak to the previous pastor, but no information was provided concerning sexual abuse. He too, had no knowledge of the psychiatric evaluation performed on *Priest M*. When he later learned about the sexual abuse, the pastor contacted high-ranking Diocesan officials and complained that he should have been advised about this priest's background.

For the next six years there was no contact between the victim and the Diocese. Working, to provide for his family, became his primary concern. For a time he also felt that he had done all that he could to warn the Diocese about *Priest M* and to prevent further children from being victimized.

⁵⁸ Grand Jury Exhibit 21F is dated April 5, 1982 and is a memo to the Director of Priest Personnel. It discusses the need for a psychological report of *Priest M* before his return to the Diocese of Rockville Centre.

⁵⁹ Grand Jury Exhibits 52-67 are correspondence between one of *Priest M's* victims and the Diocese of Rockville Centre, the Diocese of St. Petersburg in Florida, and a pastor of a Diocese of Rockville Centre parish where *Priest M* first served upon his return to the Diocese. A reading of this correspondence indicates that the pastor was contacted twice concerning the past allegations of sexual abuse. Despite these allegations, this pastor testified that he trusted the Diocese in their placement of *Priest M* at his parish and did not advise anyone of the correspondence. In fact the second correspondence specifically asks the pastor for a response to the initial correspondence, a response that never was written.

In the late 1980's the victim met with a priest in Virginia who had written extensively on the subject of clerical sexual abuse. They discussed *Priest M* and the response of the Diocese to the notification that he had sexually abused children. This priest was friendly with a Monsignor in the Diocese of Rockville Centre and offered to call him to re connect the victim with someone who might be interested in helping him.

The victim was aware at this time that *Priest M* was still active in a parish in the Diocese of Rockville Centre. Some time passed and the victim heard nothing so he decided to call the Monsignor himself. No one returned his phone calls. Eventually, the priest in Virginia called to relate that he had been able to speak to his friend in the Diocese of Rockville Centre, and he had been told that *Priest M* was on medication to control his sex drive and that the Diocese was keeping an eye on him.

Distressed at hearing this news the victim decided that he had two options; he could either sue or embarrass the Diocese. Since he knew that the statute of limitations on any civil or criminal action had lapsed, he decided that he would embarrass them. First, he told his family about what had happened to him

He met with the editors of Newsday but could not convince them to write a story. He also hired a private investigator to locate *Priest M*. He was assigned to a parish in Suffolk County and living in the rectory there. Ultimately, the victim decided that he would write an open letter to the parishioners, and hand it to them as they left church after Sunday mass. With the assistance of his father and two brothers, that is exactly what they did. (Grand Jury Exhibit 65, 66) His letter not only detailed the sexual abuse but his failed efforts to get the Diocese to take some responsible action with respect to *Priest M*. There was some media coverage of the event.

Not surprisingly, he heard from Diocesan officials immediately, In fact, the Monsignor who he had been referred to by the priest in Virginia, made the first call. He was very angry. The call led to a meeting and resulted in the removal of *Priest M* from the parish. *Priest M* was asked to provide a list of his victims and did. The victims worst fears were realized, that is, *Priest M* had abused children for two years after the victim had first complained to the Diocese and fully six years after his own abuse had stopped. Although he had the will to prevent this from happening he did not have the means. The Diocese of Rockville Centre had the means but not the will.

For his efforts, the victim never received an apology, an acknowledgement of Diocesan wrongdoing or an offer of help.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ After the victim had begun his interaction with the Diocese he contacted his boyhood friend to see if he too had been abused by *Priest M*. He found out that he had also been a victim. The friend contacted the Diocese and spoke to a Monsignor who told him he could not help him.