

A Survivor's Perspective on Talking about What Happened

(name withheld by request)

In the Dubuque Telegraph Herald, on March 7, 2003, a major diocesan leader, Monsignor James Barta commented on the lawsuits against priests who were sexual predators. One Dubuque survivor became incensed at his remarks and wrote the following editorial response. She demonstrated great courage by the offered inclusion of her name to the article. The name is withheld from this web-based newsletter for her protection.

As a person who experienced clergy sexual abuse as a young child, I would like to respond to Monsignor James Barta, who was quoted in the Telegraph Herald on March 7, 2003 as saying, "What good does it do to talk about the sins of priests who are dead?"

A direct answer to his question: It puts a public name to the terrors I fight weekly in church settings. It demystifies those terrors and lets them be assigned to one man rather than a generic group of men "ordained by God." I no longer have to first struggle through a fog of negative emotions about myself, other people, and the world, but am able to see clearly the goodness in people who are not this man or those who knew and condoned his actions.

It tells me in the deepest parts of my being that he was wrong in what he did and society as a whole will not tolerate it. Rather than feeling cast out by a society that embraces this man, it welcomes me back.

It tells me I was not singled out because of some flaw in me. It tells me this man also injured others in the same way and that they also bear the scars and continue the same struggle. It tells me that my life matters as much as that of the person who did this.

Perhaps what I find most important, it allows me to release all of this. I need no longer carry the memories in solitary isolation inside myself. They are now a matter of public record and can be seen by anybody. The memories may now reside in the past.