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## Abuse Survivors Optimistic after Meeting with Officials

By Tracy Robinson  
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MANALAPAN -- Some sexual-abuse victims who met with acting Attorney General Peter C. Harvey and Kathleen McChesney of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops say yesterday's meeting was a start, but they stress more changes should be made to protect children from predators.

"We heard commitments today for action, and those are welcome, but we will continue to push for more," said Mark Serrano, director of the Mid-Atlantic Region for SNAP, the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests.

Those commitments included Harvey saying he will hold Catholic clergy in the state accountable and McChesney saying she will aim to include victims in the process of her review, Serrano said.

Victims are looking for civil and criminal statutes of limitations to be lifted, so that more predators can be prosecuted for their crimes, Serrano said.

Some people, like the Rev. John P. Bambrick, pastor of St. Thomas More Roman Catholic Church here, said some good came from the meeting.

"I think it was a watershed moment," Bambrick said about having regional SNAP leaders meet with church and state officials.

"Those of us who have been involved in the movement for over a decade, this is the moment we dreamed about," Bambrick said.

Last year, Bambrick went public with allegations of being molested by a priest. Bambrick, now 38, says he was molested when he was 15 by the Rev. Anthony Eremito, who was then saying Masses at St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church in Keyport. Eremito has denied Bambrick's accusation.

Other positive points included Harvey's promise "to use any means in his authority to prosecute those who have committed crimes against children," Bambrick said.

"Believe me, if we have evidence, we are going to act on it," Harvey said, urging victims to come forward.

"Predators are careful, and the more information we have, the better we are able to pursue them, set traps for them and give them opportunities to reveal themselves," he said.

Bambrick also was encouraged that the state will seek agreements with other churches and organizations like the memorandum of understanding signed by New Jersey Catholic Conference in December.

Harvey said the memorandum is just one effort on the state's part.

Disappointments of the day included the fact that five area bishops did not attend the meeting, Bambrick said. The Diocese of Metuchen sent a representative. Bambrick said that neither clergy nor representatives from the Trenton, Paterson, Newark or Camden dioceses were present.

"Why were no bishops here?" Bambrick asked. "None of them could come to face this important issue?"

Another issue discussed was what consequences clergy will face for not complying with the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. The policy was approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in June to address the sex abuse crisis in the Catholic Church, Bambrick said.

"Consequences for bishops who fail to comply? There are no consequences," Bambrick said.

McChesney said that starting in June, all United States dioceses will be required to undergo an audit to make sure they are in compliance with the charter.

The Catholic bishops organization also will commission two studies, one on the nature and scope of the problem of sex abuse of minors by clergy and another on the causes and context of the crisis, she said. To work on the first study, the USCCB has chosen the John J. College of Criminal Justice, but a contract has not been signed yet, she said. The consequences for noncompliance with the charter will be noted in the public report to be issued following the audits, according to McChesney.

Before the report, the USCCB will look into reasons for noncompliance and try to determine if additional training, personnel or clarification could assist in gaining compliance, McChesney said.

"The idea is to get them to comply," McChesney said. "If not, it goes into the public report."

But knowing that the report will be public could be an impetus for less information to be unveiled, Bambrick said.

"How truthful are they going to be, because they have to protect themselves?" he asked about some clergy who may have committed crimes, covered up crimes and obstructed justice related to past incidents of abuse.

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