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Conference Gives No Comfort

Bishops' Conference: Victims Have Little Faith a Zero Tolerance Policy Will Be Approved

By Steve Israel
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If the Catholic Church had removed the Rev. Edward Pipala when it first learned he sexually abused a boy, more than 50 children would have been saved.

If the church had acted when a parent first complained about the Rev. George Boxelaar, two dozen boys who say they were sexually abused by him would have been saved.

So when you ask some of the more than 85 victims of sexual abuse by Orange County priests what they want from the bishops' conference in Dallas, they speak as one: "Zero tolerance."

"How many murders does it take for a murderer to go to jail," asks a man who says he was abused by Boxelaar, who served at Holy Cross Church in Centerville and Our Lady of the Scapular in Unionville. "Sexual abuse of a child is a murder of innocence. It should be one strike and you're out."

The sister of one man who says he was a victim of the Rev. Francis Stinner goes one step further. Stinner served in St. Mary's Catholic Church in Port Jervis and taught at John S. Burke Catholic High School in Goshen.

"Any suspicion, any hint of abuse, immediately should be reported to the police and the priest should be removed," she says.

And the bishops who knew about the abuse and did not remove the priest should be arrested, they add.

"It's aiding and abetting a crime," says a victim of Pipala, who served at St. John the Evangelist in Goshen and Sacred Heart in Monroe.

But these victims and their families hold out zero hope the bishops will adopt a zero tolerance policy.

They know it took 15 years - and lawsuits against the church - for the Archdiocese of New York to remove Pipala. They know it took at least 13 years, several complaints and threats of legal action for Boxelaar to be sent from the country.

They know it took a newspaper story for the archdiocese to remove Stinner from serving in a parish with children.

And they know that Bishop James McCarthy brought Stinner back to serve Mass at his Westchester church - after an archdiocese investigation confirmed Stinner sexually abused several boys. That's the same McCarthy who just resigned after admitting he had sex with women.

"They think the propagation of the Catholic Church is more important than saving the people injured by the church," says one victim.

"I have no faith anything will come of these meetings," says a man whose parents reported his abuse by Boxelaar five years before he was sent away. "Each time they meet, they fall short."

One man says he recently called the Archdiocese of New York to report his abuse. He made the call after the archdiocese said it would respond to complaints.

"But," he says, "I'm still waiting for a call back."

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