

Widespread shock, disgust at PA abuse report

A friend in Erie texted Kevin-John Jobczynski when Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro released the grand jury report on sexual abuse in six dioceses in the state.

Jobczynski, a professional artist in Florida, didn't immediately read it online, but when he did, his emotions ran rampant.

"For that miniscule half-second, you scroll through the names, and you feel elated," he told Our Sunday Visitor. "Then very quickly, in the blink of an eye, your face is burning and then you start shaking. I felt violently ill."

His girlfriend came into his art studio when she heard him screaming. He knew seven of the priests who were identified in the investigation in the Diocese of Erie. Three of them had sexually assaulted him, and when he searched for the names of two more who had done the same, they were not on the list.

Five priests. From fifth grade through high school.

Jobczynski's girlfriend comforted him, but he asked her to leave.

"I didn't want her to be a witness to my screaming, yelling and the angry things I was going to say," he said. Jobczynski moved on with his life but is no longer a Catholic. He still considers himself a Christian, but he left the Church when he was 18 and never looked back.

Shock and disgust

The grand jury report released on Aug. 14 lists 301 priests whose abuse of children was corroborated by reports from years

past and by diocesan documents that kept track of the crimes. For the most part, the priests were moved around and no criminal charges were filed.

Attorney General Shapiro said in the live press conference that there were more than the 1,000 known victims, and it was expected that more would be coming forward.

Indeed, within 24 hours the state hotline was logging calls from many others claiming to have been sexually abused within the Catholic Church.

Response to Pope's Letter

After the release of Pope Francis' letter regarding sexual abuse in the Church (see Page 3), Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro, author of the recent grand jury report, issued a statement on Aug. 20:

"Pope Francis' powerful letter acknowledges the painful truth that had been hiding in the shadows in churches throughout Pennsylvania and appropriately focuses on the survivors who have suffered for too long. ...

"The pope has long been a fighter for the defenseless. As he notes in his letter, actions and sanctions to protect children and hold abusers and those who cover up abuse accountable have been 'delayed.'

"It is my hope that, following the Holy Father's words and teachings, Church leaders in Pennsylvania will cease their denials and deflections and now fully support the grand jury's recommendations so that survivors have the opportunity to obtain justice and ensure this type of widespread abuse and cover-up never happens again."

Jobczynski, 49, didn't tell anyone about his assaults until he was 29. He feared that no one would believe a boy saying terrible things about beloved priests.

The report rocked both the hierarchy of the Church and the people in the pews. Shapiro didn't hold back on some of the

details that were so disturbing that Terry Hess, 70, of Erie, couldn't bear to watch the entire press conference.

"I was really disgusted to think about how long this has been going on and was kept a secret," she said. "I knew quite a few on the list and one was a pastor at our parish, Sacred Heart, and the other ones I knew were very well liked." But, she added, they "went from one church to another" and were in the school system.

"When you go to Catholic school all your life, you're taught that priests could do no wrong," Hess said. "My non-Catholic friends are absolutely shocked, but I say that I am absolutely disgusted. No one should have to suffer like those kids did, and nobody should be treated like that."

Let down by authority

In the Diocese of Greensburg, Ronald Murphy of Latrobe didn't know anyone on the list, nor did he have any bad experiences during eight years of Catholic school and many years serving at Mass.

"My heart aches for the boys who were violated by such men and I pray that their faith is restored," he said. "Men in a position of authority let us down, but they are just men. Our faith needs to be in God, not in a priest. When predatory evil stalks this body of believers, many people leave the Church and their faith behind. But sin is of man and not of God. His love is still there. His healing is still there. We must eliminate this evil, but in no way should we eliminate God."

Monica Galley of Greensburg knew two listed names. They were close friends to her parents, and one concelebrated her father's funeral Mass.

"I'm angry, and I'm extremely sad that this happened," she said. "But we have to remember that this is not exclusive to the Catholic Church." She added, "I understand that many will

not be able to move on, and I will keep them in my prayers.”

‘Things have to change’

Jack and Gloria Hollock of Butler in the Diocese of Pittsburgh are Eucharistic ministers at St. Paul Church, and, years ago, their three sons were altar servers. They weren’t surprised to find one familiar name on the list, but were surprised to see another.

“They just moved them around, like pieces on a puzzle board,” she said. “It’s sad, and it angers me. Maybe it’s time for priests to be married. I don’t think it’s natural for all these men to be single. I’m sure that they were sincere when they took their vows and they meant it then.”

Her husband is upset about the cover-up. “This has been going on for years and they didn’t try to correct the problem,” he said. “Some people are now going to say, ‘OK, that’s it,’ and move on from the Church. But diehards like us will stick it out and pray. Things have to change.”

Margie Stefanko lives in the Diocese of Greensburg but attends Corpus Christi Church in McKeesport, where she grew up in the Diocese of Pittsburgh. She didn’t know any names on the two lists but called the abuse and cover up “shameful actions of men who have gravely sinned.”

“Yes, I am ashamed that they have put our Church in such a bad light, and I suppose I am angry and greatly disappointed in the Church that I so love,” she said. “But this did not shake my faith in Jesus.”

Maryann Gogniat Eidemiller writes from Pennsylvania.