

Dr. Leslie Lothstein of the Institute for Living, Hartford, Connecticut, Interview with Katherine DiGiulio, June 17, 2002, published in National Catholic Reporter, August 9, 2002

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Church in Crisis

Interview of Dr. Leslie Lothstein by Katherine DiGiulio

The following interview was conducted on June 17, 2002, for "Crossroads Magazine," a weekly television show produced by the Office of Radio and Television of the Archdiocese of Hartford.

Dr. Leslie Lothstein is the Director of Psychology at the Institute of Living, part of Hartford Hospital's Mental Health Network. He has been at the Institute of Living for 16 years. Before that, he was at Case Western Reserve University in Ohio. Lothstein estimates that he and his colleagues have treated 600 Catholic priests, 100 Protestant ministers, 1 rabbi and about 50 women religious who come from all over the world -- South America, Europe, Guam, Philippines, China, Ireland -- for various psychological disorders. Lothstein spoke with Katherine DiGiulio, a writer and producer at the Office of Radio and Television.

What have you treated priests for?

Not everybody comes here because of a sexual issue; they come here for psychiatric treatment because of serious medical-psychiatric problems that they're having. Many of the priests that we treat have severe psychiatric disorders (bipolar illness, major depression, anxiety disorders) and medical disorders including obesity, diabetes, and hypertension. These problems accompany the stress related to their very complicated job. The job of a priest is 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and the demands made on them by the laity are

enormous -- often with no privacy, no private life and a life basically of hard work and hard hours.

Isn't that also the case with ministers and rabbis?

I'm not sure that 24-7 doesn't apply to other clergy, but what's different is that they don't go to a lonely place to live by themselves or to have the illusion of community with two or three other men who live in the house but none of whom talk to each other, eat with each other, watch TV together or even drink together, which is a very difficult type of life. And if you look at the statistics on celibacy, it's an interesting issue. Richard Sipe in his book on celibacy and the priesthood did a study of about 1300 Catholic priests -- he's a former priest himself -- and he maintains that 2% are genuinely celibate, 18% are struggling with the issue of celibacy and 80% are not celibate. That doesn't mean they're having sex all the time or are active, but they're not celibate. The issue of celibacy is a process, its not a given, so using the term "celibate priest" sometimes is a misnomer.

The number of priests you've treated suggests that psychological problems beset priests more than other clergy.

I don't know if that's true. It is estimated by the Interfaith Sexual Trauma Institute in Collegeville, Minn., that about one in every three faith communities in this country has a religious leader who has crossed a sexual boundary, violated a sexual boundary or who has engaged in sexual conduct which is illegal or at least unprofessional, immoral and spiritually defunct. And which has ripple effects through the entire faith community. The issue, though, is that in the Catholic priesthood, boundary crossing has been associated with minors more so than with any of the other religious denominations, such as Protestantism, or Judaism. It doesn't mean that Protestant ministers don't have sexual activity with children, but the structure of each of the Protestant denominations is quite different, so when a minister acts out with a teenager or with a child, they are immediately identified, and suspended if not thrown out of ministry. If they find another ministry that's really an independent decision because there's no hierarchical structure in some Protestant sects. Or in some of the Protestant denominations like Methodist, Congregational, Episcopal, Presbyterian, which have a hierarchical structure, they have leaders who know who the sexually errant individuals are and they keep them from functioning in other congregations. The same is true in Judaism -- if acting out occurs, the rabbi's on his own. The problem for the Catholic priesthood is that the definition of a priest has been very unique.

How so?

It's a theological distinction, which creates a canonical theological relationship to god, to Jesus. In Protestantism or Judaism the minister or the rabbi is just a teacher; anyone in the lay congregation can get up and say the prayers and the appropriate blessings, and read the liturgy for marriage or death or for any kind of celebration. But the priest in the Catholic church has a very special role, which is why it was so interesting when [then-Bishop] Edward Egan made the argument when he was being sued in the diocese of Bridgeport that priests are independent contractors. There was a cartoon in the *Hartford Courant* that depicted the general feeling. Would Jesus describe himself as an independent contractor? I don't think so.

It's because of the accountability and the structure of the Catholic church that we certainly hear more about boundary violations and boundary crossings when sexual misconduct occurs, and the statistics are more available to the general public than they are with the other denominations. But I can assure you, you can go on Internet sites like "Black Collar Crime," and there's a whole book dedicated just to Protestant clergy who have sexually abused. Generally what happens, though, when Protestant and Jewish clergy sexually cross boundaries, they do it with adult women, during some type of pastoral care. The husband has died, someone comes in with a bad marriage, there's domestic violence. A boundary starts being crossed through hugging, touching, meeting late at night, and then the boundary is violated when sex occurs. That can be very disruptive to a faith community, incredibly disruptive.

So Catholic priests cross boundaries more often with minors?

What's more common for a Catholic priest is a relationship to teenage males. But the second level of crisis that no one's discussing, but we've certainly seen it a lot in our caseload, is Catholic priests who violate boundaries with married women, and so you have a double sacrament that's being violated here, the sacrament of marriage. We've had several priests who've gotten women pregnant and we've had priests who have gotten women pregnant who had abortions, all of which goes counter to Catholic theology and certainly if you're a priest, they go counter to that part of your life in an exponential way. But the issue here is really with minors. That's what's attracted so much attention. I think if the hierarchy had responded in a much more appropriate way by not shuffling these men around and then lying to the laity by saying, "We've dealt with the problem, you'll no longer see the

priest,” when what they really meant is we’ve moved these men, you don’t see them because they’re not functioning in that area. That’s very similar to what they do in the educational system. The Catholic church is not alone in these issues; all institutions when there are unions involved, or other issues involved, move people from one segment of their work to another. This is not just a Catholic issue.

Is there more sexual abuse overall in the Catholic church than in Protestant churches or synagogues?

Nobody has statistics on those issues. What we do know from a book published by Philip Jenkins called *Pedophile Priests* is that the incidence of pedophilia is no different among Catholic priests than in the general population. The technical definition of pedophilia is having sex with a prepubescent child and that’s a mental disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders for psychiatry and psychology. So if you have sex with a child under 13 or who is prepubescent, that’s called pedophilia. The real issue in the Catholic church when it has to do with minors is that age group between 14 and 17. In Connecticut law, anyone under the age of 16 is considered a minor, so a sex crime has been committed. The younger the minor, the more serious the punishment, but there is no diagnosis or mental disorder for having sex with a teenager.

What about ephebophilia?

Ephebophilia is a term that applies to that subgroup of minors who are teenagers. It’s from the Greek, it means love of teens. But it’s not a diagnosis. It doesn’t appear in DSM-IV. When it occurs, it’s what we call a non-paraphilic sexual disorder if it has compulsive traits to it. By non-paraphilic I mean a sexual compulsion or addiction that is not diagnosed by DSM -IV. It’s just simply illegal. And it’s immoral, unprofessional. These are children; their minds haven’t developed yet. In the state of Connecticut, a 15-year-old is considered incompetent to enter into informed consent.

So there is more of this going on than hardcore pedophilia?

It’s very rare to see a priest who’s having sex with a prepubescent child. When that occurs that’s when you get the sensational cases you’ve read about, the John Geogan case, where there are dozens if not hundreds of victims. In those cases, the Porters, the Geogans, you have not only 100 plus victims, but you have victims of either sex, it could be boys or girls, it could be young children or older children. These are very damaged individuals, who are psychiatrically very

disturbed. They have very serious personality disorders (they're often labeled as psychopaths) and possibly brain abnormalities. This is a core group of very dangerous predators. They are certainly rare amongst Catholic priests, but anyone who's a parent - I have three children - knows that one incidence of having sex with a child is enough. How many murders do you have to commit to be called a murderer? Maybe you're not a predator in the sense that the community is endangered by your presence, but you've endangered one person and their family and your faith community. I've seen enough victims of priest sexual abuse, including priests who have been abused by other priests when they were younger, and the pain is enormous, it just doesn't go away. So the numbers games played now by the American Conference of Catholic bishops is interesting to me, but I think it's irrelevant. Whether you do it once, twice or 100 times, anyone who has sex with a minor should not be doing a public ministry.

What is the profile of a priest who commits sexual abuse?

There are some issues that a large number share in common, but there are also very unique issues because many of the priests we see are not necessarily involved with minors but with other types of paraphilias, including exhibitionism, gender identity disorder (one priest underwent a sex change), sexual masochism and sadism - who beat people. We've had a number of priests who were sexual fetishists, who got into fetishism with individuals, and we've had some who have gone beyond that and gotten involved in some rather exotic, kinky type of sexual behavior, including cruising, where they've had hundreds if not thousands of sex partners (often found among some gay priests who cruise age-appropriate males), or where there's compulsive masturbation that goes on ten, fifteen times a day. These are not problems that may affect the church in terms of a story on the front page, because sometimes there are no victims. Sometimes there are victims. Then we've seen a large number who get involved in compulsive womanizing and some who have several children by different women. In the sixteen years I've been here I've only seen a handful of men who've actually been genuine pedophiles, when you use that term correctly. It's not used correctly in the lay literature or even the professional literature at times. But when it's used correctly you very rarely see a pedophile.

What do you see?

Generally, the social ecology of seminary training for Catholic priests isolates them from women, so you have an all-male society in which a hierarchical structure is very profound, in which the people at the top share traits of invincibility,

invulnerability, omnipotence, omniscience. You have young 14-year-olds in a minor seminary; then they move into a major seminary, and they've had no contact with women. Often these men have been told by their own mothers that women are dangerous, that they have been selected by their mothers to become the priest for the family. They have a very close relationship with their mothers. They're heterosexual but they fear women, dread women, are terrified of women. It started early in their childhood, when their mothers told them, "You're going to be a priest, that's your vocation, stay away from women, you have to be careful, women are dangerous; they may want to marry, get pregnant, have a family." So these men are brought up in a culture that's antisexual and misogynist. Then they enter the seminary, which is patriarchal and hierarchal. They are infantilized by their teachers, by the bishops and cardinals, who evoke a role of invincibility, invulnerability, omniscience and omnipotence. There's this lure to power. So these men are basically segregated from society, they don't date, so they don't develop the kind of experience that teenagers develop, in terms of normal dating patterns, whether with the opposite sex or the same sex. They don't develop the kind of psychosexual maturity they need to deal with their own urges and inner experiences. So there's no attempt or chance to experiment through dating, through meeting people, through having relationships that go on for a while, for learning about love, about what it's really like to deal with another person's needs. They're treated as very special and in fact their celibacy is treated as the most special thing ever. But nobody talks to them about sex. I have very rarely met even newer seminarians - in fact the newer ones are so conservative they don't even want to use the word "sex" or talk about it - who have been given courses on what intimacy is about, what your life is going to be like as a priest, how you're going to deal with the loneliness, long hours, and lack of friendships.

What's interesting to me as a psychologist is that I often hear priests and nuns say that they were told when they were in formation that they couldn't have "particular friendships." "Particular friendship" is a code which means, "We're nervous you're going to develop into a homosexual." But all of us need particular friendships. I need male friends; you need to have female friends. It has nothing to do with homosexuality. It has to do with developing the capacity to relate to people of the same sex and the other sex in an intimate way that's not sexual, people that you can play with, hike with, ride a bike with, play games with, drink with, buddies. Priests don't have this, they have no access to this, they're told that any relationship you have with anyone that gets too close, we're going to disrupt it and break it apart. That's counterintuitive to everything we know about healthy psychology. So not only

are these men told they can't be intimate, but they can't even have friendships. What happens is that many of these men grow up psychosexually immature and they don't have a depth of understanding of relationships, and all of a sudden they're ordained and have power.

So when does sexual acting out occur?

It occurs sometimes just after they're ordained, in the first two years after ordination. Often their first assignment is terrible. They're sent into a parish with an older priest, who's empty inside, who's alcoholic, diabetic, who feels threatened by this younger person, who's loathe to become involved with the young people in the congregation because they're too noisy, too rambunctious, their needs are too great. He will often immediately put the younger priest into ministries with the youth. All of a sudden the younger priest's world is different, he's surrounded by kids who are not going to be nuns and priests, who are dating, having fun, having pizza parties, playing video games. All of a sudden, the lack of psychosexual emotional development in these priests emerges as a kind of regressed state, so they're with kids, the excitement is invigorating, the energy is vital, and they get involved with it. And you start to see the imprudence, the poor judgment. They start doing things that make no sense, like inviting the kids up to their rectory room to have a party, going camping with them, going to their house to be with them. All of a sudden they're teenagers. This doesn't excuse their behavior, but there's no role model of a senior pastor who says, "Cut it out, what are you doing? That's not how you're supposed to do it." The pastor's not available, although sometimes when pastors do speak up they're ignored.

Seminarians say they are being taught about sex.

What are they being told? Who's teaching them? I'm not teaching them. Where are they learning from? What happens is there are two narratives of sexuality in this culture, one is the disease HIV/std model and the other is that it's sinful and you shouldn't do it, the abstinence model. They don't work.

Some are calling this a gay issue and are scapegoating gays.

It's horrible. But if the church wants to protect itself, it will find itself in the same position as in the McCarthy era when Roy Cohn, McCarthy's attorney, was anti-homosexual and died of HIV. That's what's going to happen. 40% of the Catholic priesthood all the way up to the top are gay. We have 3% of people who are molesting minors. It's not a gay issue. As long as anybody in our society or religion is either

marginalized or scapegoated, we all are, even if we don't know it. As a clinician I can tell you that the gay priests I treat are having sex with age appropriate men. They may be violating their celibacy, but not with children. Data are that most pedophiles are heterosexual, but you also have a small group of gay seminarians that act out with some of the teenage boys. But so are heterosexuals. As I said before, if you have a young child raised to fear, dread and be afraid of women, and he's suddenly thrown into a group of teenagers, well, his mother never said it was wrong to have sex with men. I've seen so many heterosexual priests have obligatory sex with teenage boys because they can't get them pregnant. There's a whole group of heterosexual priests having sex with teenage boys because they can't get them pregnant and the teens can't threaten their priesthood because they can't marry them.

It sounds ludicrous, but we have a professional program for professionals and clergy. They're very smart people and most of what they do is driven by unconscious forces, so you have very smart people doing very silly and dangerous things that smart people shouldn't do.

You were talking earlier about acting out with married women.

When you look at the acting out that's been made public, it's with male teenagers. What hasn't come out yet is all the married women in the church who've had sex with priests. That's another huge scandal. The women have too much to lose. Since they're married, they would have to discuss it with their husbands, their families, so it's a secret. I had one priest from another state that was discovered only when someone noticed that some children going up for communion looked just like him. Then the whole thing came out.

The bishops in three cases I can think of wanted to pay off the women so they would not even acknowledge that the child's father was a priest. They wanted the priest to leave the relationship and have nothing to do with the child. It seems to me as an adult, a psychologist, and a parent that having fathered a child they have a responsibility, and my psychology is, "Look, you tell me how much you want to be a priest and how much you value your priesthood, but here you've had sex with this woman and she has a child. Do you know what this child's life is going to be like? I don't care what your interest is in being a priest. Think about what this child's life is going to be like, growing up and at some point knowing that he is a bastard as a result of a priest having sex with his mother and he won't acknowledge it because he'd rather be a priest than be the child's father." I said, "Take responsibility, grow up." In the case of one person, he did, he left the priesthood and is

taking care of his children. I think that's wonderful. There's another group of men who come into the priesthood, who are more mature and leave the priesthood to get married. The priesthood is not simple, if you have 100 priests, you have 100 different fingerprints of sexuality.

Whether it's with children or adults, sexual abuse by a priest, as you said, has devastating consequences.

And the victims of Catholic clergy sexual abuse are a bit different from the victims of Protestant sex abuse, Jewish, or Hindu sexual abuse. The difference is that the role of the priest puts the priest in close connection with Jesus and with god. And what you hear from the victims - and I've heard this from priests who have been victims - is that they feel that their soul has been murdered. It's soul murder, soul murder, and they can never get over the guilt and shame of what their responsible role was - why was I chosen, how did this happen to me, and can I ever be reconnected with god?

Now you don't hear this with other religions so much unless you have a victim who over-idealizes a minister or rabbi because they're just teachers, they don't have that role.

A sexual abuse victim often feels abandoned by God, even if she or he was not abused by a priest.

True, but the issue of soul murder comes up with the victims of priest sexual abuse. When I first heard that, when people first described it to me, and it set in, the horror of it was awful, because your spiritual life is the most important part of your life, your internal life, because it connects you to the deepest parts of yourself, and if you feel your soul has been murdered, how are you going to relate to other people, how are you going to love? How are you going to stay alive?

In society in general - one out of three girls are abused. Are the statistics for boys about the same?

It's true, one out of three girls. The statistics for boys are less well known, but they're probably close to the girls'. It used to be that girls were abused by people that they knew and boys were abused by strangers. But boys are now abused by people they know, like their coaches. There was an entire edition of *Sports Illustrated* in 1999 just on coaches who sexually abuse. We've run workshops here at the Institute on teachers who sexually abuse.

If you read history carefully, you see that these issues have been with us forever. We're just acknowledging for the first time that children have rights. Children have never had rights

in any society until recently. They had no voice; there was no narrative to speak up on behalf of their own injuries. They weren't believed. Almost every victim I've evaluated who was abused by a Catholic priest, when they finally told their parents, was slapped. They were told they were lying, that "priests don't do that, how dare you lie." It's double victimization. History says that these issues have been with us a long period of time. Some of the history is pretty tawdry. The history of the papacy is not pretty. Many popes had sex with adults, children and teenagers. Orgies were not uncommon with some popes. When you review this stuff, you realize it's not new. It's just that we're more aware of it.

Some from Rome are calling this an American problem.

That's nonsense. I can tell you that in Ireland alone two years ago - Ireland is a small country - 90 priests were sent for evaluation both in Ireland and abroad. One of the Irish bishops impregnated a Connecticut citizen who bore a child. It's a major health issue.

If you just look at Poland, France, Belgium, and Austria, they had cardinals and archbishops who were forced to resign. It goes right to the heart and system and structure of the church. I think that the institutional structure of the Catholic church has to look and see what about its structure leads to this type of behavior. It's complicated by many things. The church has been patriarchal, it's been misogynist, there's been no room for women except for Mary. I was invited to a think tank in St. Louis (sponsored, I believe, by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops), where there were about 15 nuns, 15 priests and 3 lay people, two psychologists and a psychiatrist. What was incredible to me was the voice of the women - powerful, brilliant, far exceeding anything I had heard from the cardinals and bishops I spent time with in Washington D.C. (during a 5-year period when I was regularly invited to discuss the issue of how to deal with priests who sexually abused minors) who had no clue. I had to raise the issue, as a non-Catholic: before we talk about when to return a priest to ministry, what about the victims? There was dead silence. At the think tank, the women took over. They were CEOs, physicians, theologians. For a couple of days there was a vibrant, dynamic tone to the discussion. Everything sounded right to me, everything I was working on clinically, dealing with in my work here, they were right on target with. So the meeting ended, and it was summarized and written up and we all got copies. I read it and thought, that wasn't the conference I went to. They totally deleted the female voices and the conflictual issues raised. All they did was simply list some of the problems that were being discussed and made no mention of the real substance, which had to do with thinking about a female clergy, a married

clergy, celibacy as being optional, redoing the entire structure of the American church to give it an identity and the sexual abuse victims. The Roman part of the Roman Catholic church seems to be the last vestige of the Roman Empire, in every sense of the word: in its spectacle, garb, pretense to power, which has nothing to do with spirituality and religion. It has to do with political structures from a bygone era.

It's not a U.S. issue, it's not an American issue. It's a world issue. If you just look at South America and see the flocks of people turning away from Roman Catholicism to the Pentecostal faith because it has more personal meaning. People want faith structures that represent their inner experience to God and to spiritual life; they don't want to deal with patriarchal structures that inhibit their ability to relate to God. Things are changing. Eventually there may be a schism that will create a new voice, a new narrative for sexuality that Augustine cut off, a narrative for women that Augustine cut off. I have to tell you, I have a near Ph.D. in philosophy and I have studied all the old masters. I loved reading St. Augustine, but the effect he's had on our world view concerning sexuality has been difficult.

We have to have a culturally healthy narrative for sexuality that goes beyond sin and disease because if you don't have a narrative for sexuality you wind up being either an abuser or being abused. And it's not a Catholic issue; it's a cultural issue. I bear the same stamp of Augustine on my soul [laughs] being non-Christian as any Christian does, because we are deeply influenced by our culture. So we need to have a narrative that allows us to relate to each other as human beings. That type of shift will mean a shift in the whole seminary experience of creating these psychosexually immature, developmentally arrested men. I read in a document a few days ago that in 2000 there were less than 400 Catholic priests in the United States under the age of 30.

Did the bishops go far enough by removing offender priests from ministry?

Some bishops have been extremely protective of their flock. The majority of bishops -- two-thirds -- have been more protective of the priests who abuse than the parishioner who has been abused. But anything that protects the safety of the community is important. Priests who abuse minors need to be under supervision and treatment for the rest of their lives, and not in public ministry. While the Charter for the Protection of Children addresses these issues, it does not go far enough in identifying and punishing bishops who have conspired against victims of clergy abuse. Moreover, there should be no internal church review of accusations against a priest that takes

precedence over allowing the legal processes of society to undertake their review according to the law.

And for priests who abuse minors what hasn't been taken away from them and what may increase, are their loneliness, their isolation, their urges, which may lead them to more acting out. Some priests like Porter appear to have a psychopathic character structure; they try to make others believe they are reformed and no longer a risk to children. These are sexual predators; thus, supervision may mean electronic monitoring, it may mean constant surveillance in terms of a probation officer making home visits, going to the rectory. Where are these men going to live, how are they going to function? Will they have cars and be able to move around the community? All this needs to be addressed as a public safety issue. Some people have argued that it's best to keep the priests in the church because at least you'll have oversight over them. That's true, you do have oversight over them and if the argument goes once a priest always a priest, then even defrocking and laicization doesn't really, canonically, take away a person's priesthood from what I understand. In the past bishops have assigned some priests to hospital ministries believing they would not be able to abuse children. However, one priest who was a hospital chaplain dressed as clown and sexually abused the children he ministered to.

The hardest part is dealing with the older priests who may have allegations dating back 20 and 30 years, and they're in their late 60s to early 80s. What are they going to do? There's no money, there's no retirement plan. You're going to have people who are on the street. On the other hand, the counter argument is, who's paying for it. Every Catholic going to church who reaches out and gives money is paying what probably amounts to \$50,000 a year for maintenance. When you look at the health benefits, it's about \$50,000.

It's a complicated question depending on the age of the priest, the responsibility of the priest, the canonical issues that have to be decided. But the laity also has to decide how their money is being spent. It is estimated that over a billion dollars has already been spent to pay out legal fees and health care costs for priests who have been sexually abusive towards minors, and that's probably the tip of the iceberg. A billion dollars is more than the gross national product of some countries. That money could have been spent to keep Catholic schools open, to keep Catholic programs throughout the US that could be of benefit to parishioners. The laity has to have some understanding of how their money is being spent.

The analogue to this would be, if a layperson committed a similar type of crime, they would not have the generosity of an

institution paying for them the rest of their lives. They would be on their own. There is a movement today to make some of the hierarchy, e.g., Cardinals Law and Egan, responsible for conspiring to move clergy around and not protect their parishioners and minors. If they were not clerics they would probably be in jail today.

Really?

Think about a secular model. If you withhold evidence, if you are an accomplice to a crime, what would happen to you if you weren't a cardinal or an archbishop? One of the European archbishops was sent to jail for a similar type of situation where he knew that a priest had been guilty of molesting minors and he conspired to keep it silent and keep moving the priest around, so he spent time in jail.

All religious institutions require some degree of infantilization of their parishioners, it doesn't matter what the religion is. The more infantilization that you have, the less likely you will take agency for yourself, take responsibility, so then things happen to you. The more open we are about these things, the more agency we have, the less infantilized we are and the more mature we are. We have to be mature about these things. These are important decisions, these are our children. If children are not important to you, and they're just simply objects, we can't have a conversation. The Connecticut General Statutes say it's more important for me to protect children than to guarantee the confidentiality of my clients around the issue of child sexual abuse. While privileged communication and confidentiality are important for psychotherapy, as a psychologist I also have to think about public safety. I tell all my patients about that right from the outset.

What about the whole issue of confidentiality when it comes to treating people who have a disease?

My two major mentors were Fr. Jack Kiely, who was an absolutely wonderful priest and a spiritual guide for me, and Fr. Jim Gill, a Jesuit and a psychiatrist, who's been my teacher. When I went to them with this issue, I said, "I don't understand. I know if a person has a compulsive sexual problem, if they go into the sacrament of reconciliation and confess this, what they are basically saying is, 'I have cancer of the liver,' and a priest can't absolve you of cancer of the liver, or if I say, 'I have a brain tumor that's making me act out sexually,' how can I be absolved if I have a disease? If I go on the assumption that anyone who has a compulsive sexual disorder and molests children and minors, has an illness, that's a psychiatric disorder, no different than diabetes, lung disease

or cardiac disease. So how could a priest absolve them? From my standpoint they can't. Fr. Kiely and Fr. Gill said the only way you can give true reconciliation to someone who shares that type of behavior is if they agree as part of the process of healing that they self-report themselves, they acknowledge that they're child molesters. They acknowledge who their victims are, they acknowledge they have a non-curable illness and they are going to act out again. If the priest promises not to act out again that has to be treated as a wish not a reality. There is no cure for compulsive child sexual abuse. They can't make that promise. So a true act of contrition to get reconciliation for a child molester is, they have to agree to turn themselves in to the police, report themselves to DCF [Department of Children and Families], to get into treatment for sexual disorders, and make restitution to their victims in whatever way possible. You can hear a confession, but to give absolution a person has to truly understand what wrong they've done.

I've educated two dioceses in Helena, Montana, one in Michigan, given a workshop in Ohio; I've talked to the entire Bridgeport diocese, where 300-plus priests came. You educate people. Priests need to be educated. If they hear something in a confessional what do they do with it? What Fr. Kiely told me is, he would not absolve somebody if they said, "No, I'm not going to do that [self-report]." He would say to them, "I can't absolve you of your sin. The only way you can be absolved is if you show true understanding and recognition of what your sin is about, and you have an illness, and unless the illness is treated you will do it again and again. And all you're going to be doing is returning here and making statements like, 'Forgive me for I have sinned.'" It's more than a sin - it's an illness that needs to be treated.

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