

# MAIN LINE TODAY

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FRONTLINE

## Issues | by J.F. Pirro



## Keeping the Faith

With little fanfare, Exton's Dan Monahan has found a measure of closure for victims of clergy abuse.

He's 67 now, but Dan Monahan was once an altar boy serving Roman Catholic masses in rural Connecticut. At his small church, Father Y (the only name he knew the priest by) was revered. "We were told that he was God on earth," says Monahan, who's now a personal injury lawyer in Exton. "And so we were indoctrinated."

During one mass, delivered in Latin, Monahan wet his pants rather than abandon the altar. "Don't worry," the priest told him. "We'll clean it up."

Now, after more than a decade of disclosure after disclosure involving sexual abuse among the clergy, Monahan reflects on the cunning, programmatic behavior among those in purple garb. "It was like there was a playbook," he says.

"They picked on kids whose fathers were alcoholics, or whose mothers were overly devoted. They gave boys chores—ways we could help. It was like they were all given a manual on how to groom."

These days, Monahan's firm is a first stop for victims of clergy abuse. The deluge began in 2010 with a client who was violated in grade school at Bryn Mawr's St. Aloysius Academy for Boys, then again

by a counselor at Malvern Preparatory School. Both abusers were named offenders among the 63 priests identified as suspected pedophiles in the initial grand jury report in 2005 that excoriated church leaders in Philadelphia. But they couldn't be held criminally accountable because of the state's 30-year statute of limitations.

Initially, Monahan could only represent a fifth of the 100-plus victims who approached him. He's licensed in Pennsylvania, where 90 percent of the inquiring survivors had been abused. All but three of the 19 cases he took on were dismissed due to the statutes, though he unsuccessfully appealed two. Just four cases were less than 30 years old. "You know you're being assaulted at 10, 12 or 13, but you don't know that you've been diseased until 30 years later," he says.

Clergy business went dormant for Monahan until the fall of 2018, when the church took measures to provide some sort of financial recourse, regardless of statutes. Monahan represented more than three-dozen Pennsylvania clients who fell within the compensation programs of the Philadelphia Archdiocese and other religious organizations.

The archdiocese's Independent Reconciliation and Reparations Program was limited to cases involving only priests. The last case had to be filed by Sept. 30, 2019, and settlements range from \$50,000 to \$500,000. Amounts differ based on the type and frequency of abuse. Though victim response wasn't as substantial as Monahan expected, most have been satisfied that the church acknowledged their plight, listened to their story and provided compensation without a trial. "Some didn't want to pursue it further because it meant more detailed statements, medical records, putting it together and

submitting it to [a Washington, D.C.-based archdiocesan mediator]," he says.

Monahan anticipates another round of more universal compensations similar to those of the Augustinians, Oblates and Jesuits, who included lay abusers in their programs. "The thing with sexual abuse claims, it's not a broken leg," Monahan says. "There's an embarrassment factor and a huge reluctance to come forward because they, in part, blame themselves."

Two of Monahan's cases led to no compensation at all. In one, it could only be documented that the eventual priest wrestled with the "abused" without sexual activity. Among his three Main Line victims, two aren't stable enough for interviews, Monahan says. The third local client had been frustrated that Monahan couldn't get him "a piece of flesh" in two opportunities. So he represented himself, eventually winning a large IRRP settlement.

Raised in Narberth, the victim prefers to remain anonymous out of respect for his well-established parents. In 1971, the year he was admitted into the Archdiocesan Boy Choir of Philadelphia at age 7, he maintains that he was raped by a deacon he never saw again on an overnight ski trip to the Poconos. After the assault was reported, he was run around in "funny circles" by archdiocesan reps asking questions like, "Do you like boys?" Others endorsed homosexuality, saying that "he could always become a priest."

He was tested and pressured, and meetings were arranged to keep him quiet—"all under my father's watch," he laments.

At one meeting called by then-Archbishop John Cardinal Krol, he was ushered into a basement area of the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul. Krol offered the boy a blessing and put out his ring for him to kiss. He said that he'd

"heard about trouble from me, and that if I cause more trouble, I'll find myself in trouble in more places."

Thrown out of both Lower Merion and Archbishop Carroll high schools, he became a resident at the Bridge, an addictions recovery school in North Philadelphia. "I had nothing," he recalls. "I went from being the smartest kid in a really bright family to being a disgrace to my family."

Eight of Monahan's 40 reconciliation clients are still pending determinations. Five are victims of the same priest. Two of the 20 rejected their offers. One is filing suit in New Jersey under its newly approved window legislation.

It hasn't been easy for Monahan to walk away from his own ingrained religiosity. His parents were educated and buried Catholic. His mother and an aunt volunteered for Dorothy Day in her Catholic Worker Movement in New York. Still, his dad grew more cynical as he aged. "I'm not religious anymore either, though it once served an important function," he says.

Monahan has had to hone his ability to identify hoaxes, and he believes there are more victims who haven't come forward. Meanwhile, legislation to reform the statutes could come to a vote, proceed to the governor, and appear on the ballot for Pennsylvania voters this year. "In the Catholic schools today, how many are populated with religious figures? It's a disappearing demographic—that's the irony," Monahan says. "The church was so reluctant to take the high road, deliver a more moral attitude about was obvious sin, get in front of it, admit it, and compensate for it. Instead, the church fought it and defended perpetrators. Now people don't even go to church. They've lost their religion." **MLT**