

Survival Guide for Abuse Victims

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by Gene Thomas Gomulka • ChurchMilitant.com • June 2, 2022

Cracking the cover-up code



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The 1997 movie *The Rainmaker* bears a striking resemblance to how Church leaders often treat abuse victims and their families.

The film is a legal drama about a leukemia patient who died because his health insurance company failed to honor the terms of his policy, defrauded his family and refused to pay for life-saving treatment. Likewise, Church leaders and their high-priced lawyers attempt to intimidate abuse victims, buy their silence and prevent them from filing suit.

I have documented Catholic clerical sexual abuse since 1991, when I was deputy chaplain of the U.S. Marine Corps and served on the Inspector General team.

In the past 31 years, I've encountered an arsenal of cover-up tactics often used by diocesan officials. Abuse victims and their advocates can be empowered by recognizing common ploys used to sideline their complaints.

Common tactics include:

Silence

When someone reports abuse, it's common for their complaints to go unanswered. The people receiving the abuse complaint simply remain silent. This tactic is all about plausible deniability. Unless one can prove that someone was truly informed about a particular matter, the informed party can deny knowledge of a predator's behavior.



Ex-cardinal and homopredator Theodore McCarrick

Keep in mind, however, many prelates denied being aware of ex-cardinal Theodore McCarrick's decades of homosexual predation.

Abuse reports are best sent via certified mail or delivered by a process server. Victims should also retain a copy of all communications sent to Church officials.

Stalling

Attempts on the part of abuse or reprisal victims to have their cases resolved within the Church are often doomed. Bishops and priests often keep abuse claims under wraps lest their own sexual misdeeds or cover-up of predation be exposed.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops tasked Msgr. Jeffrey Burrill with the bishops' response to sexual abuse, only for Burrill himself to be accused of serial homosexual misconduct.

Pope Francis' 2019 document *Vos Estis Lux Mundi* laid out an internal framework by which bishops must investigate fellow bishops accused of sex abuse or cover-up.

But where's the transparency? Documents have yet to be released to the public regarding Bp. Nicholas DiMarzio's investigation into Buffalo's Bp. Richard Malone, or what led New York cardinal Timothy Dolan to clear DiMarzio, his self-proclaimed "friend," of multiple sex abuse allegations.

The Vortex: Where Is He?

Many abuse victims feel they were revictimized in diocesan "safe environment" offices, which often handle abuse allegations. Victims often find the safe environment coordinator is intent on stalling the case or gaslighting them into believing they have no credible case worth pursuing.

Bishops and priests often keep abuse claims under wraps.

Compromised coordinators who tell victims, "We are still gathering evidence" or "We haven't had time to look into your case," often attempt to delay abuse reports — especially when the statute of limitations may be running out. These officials hope victims will grow tired of the process and give up pursuing their claims, even if it means victims leave the Church and guilty predators remain in ministry.

Victims should preempt stall tactics by first reporting their abuse to civil authorities. Also, seek an attorney, remain informed of your right to file a case in court and be mindful of statutes of limitations.

Referral to a Psychologist

Some dioceses will refer victims to sketchy diocesan psychology "experts." These psychologists will then misconstrue what victims report or convince victims that what they experienced doesn't actually constitute abuse.

In other cases, seminarians and priests who report abuse experience reprisal, such as by being told they have to undergo a psychological evaluation. In these situations, the goal of seminary officials or bishops is to intimidate and prevent victims from pursuing their reports.

Many whistleblower seminarians and priests are unjustly canceled through dismissal from the seminary, removal from ministry or by being stripped of their faculties.

Whistleblowers and victims should keep in mind that compromised Church officials have a documented reputation of using psychologists to gaslight them and compel them into silence.

Phony Investigation

Accused bishops may retain a lawyer or diocesan "investigator" who, while being under the sway and in the pay of the accused party, is tasked with heading an internal panel responding to an abuse or cover-up allegation. In many situations, neither the victim nor the witnesses are ever contacted or interviewed. Members of the panel who are handpicked by the bishop himself are often there to rubber-stamp the "findings" of the accused party's defense attorney. These types of internal "investigations" are doomed to fail.

Such was the case in the diocese of Springfield, Illinois. Then-bishop George Lucas retained a defense attorney to whitewash allegations that Lucas and his alleged homosexual lover, outgoing North American College (NAC) rector Fr. Peter Harman, engaged in a homosexual orgy in the presence of seminarians.

Spotlight: Illinois Orgy—The Rome Connection

Prelates like Lucas often retain their own defense lawyers to declare whether they committed or covered up misconduct. It would be like President Bill Clinton tasking one of his own lawyers with investigating whether he was doing anything inappropriate with a White House intern.

Harman is now facing these allegations in an ongoing lawsuit. That comes after a truly independent, highly credentialed former special agent in charge (SAC) of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) discredited the Springfield internal panel in multiple sworn statements.

If the attorney appointed to head an internal panel has conflicts of interests, victims should demand before agreeing to any interviews that he be replaced with an impartial sex abuse expert who has no fiduciary ties to the accused party. Victims should prepare their

own detailed written report describing their allegations so the facts cannot be adulterated by an internal panel. Victims should also consult their attorneys about coming forward in the media to recount their abuse, a step that may make it harder for dioceses to ignore victims and witnesses.

Keeping Accused Priests in Ministry

According to the USCCB, priests who are accused of abuse are to be removed from ministry pending the results of an investigation. The parishes and places where they served are supposed to be informed of the allegations, and people who may have knowledge of similar abuse on the part of the accused cleric are supposed to be nudged forward. But bishops often fail to do this for fear that other victims will come forward and substantiate the original complaint.



(L to R) Cdl. Timothy Dolan and Fr. Thomas Devery

This happened in the New York archdiocese after Church Militant and SNAP reported that Cdl. Dolan kept in ministry his accused former director of priest personnel, Fr. Thomas Devery, and for nearly five years hid a sex abuse allegation from parishioners and school parents.

After the allegation against Devery hit the media, a second victim came forward with a new allegation against Devery, who was forced to resign.

Church Militant has reported that Washington, D.C. cardinal Wilton Gregory has been "hiding" accused predator Fr. Adam Park in a parish rectory after he resigned in disgrace as NAC vice rector. It remains to be seen where the Springfield (in Illinois) diocese will stash

Fr. Peter Harman, the outgoing rector. Harman is accused in an ongoing lawsuit of committing sexual misconduct and of covering up Park's predatory behavior.

When a diocese attempts to hide sex abuse allegations or keep an accused predator in ministry, exposure in the media can pressure that diocese to confront these accusations and the fallout derived from covering them up. Victims might consider contacting reliable investigative reporters such as Charlie Specht at WKBW in Buffalo, David Hammer at WWL-TV in New Orleans and Christine Niles at Church Militant. These talented and dedicated reporters have produced hard-hitting news reports that have led to action and, in some cases, the resignation of disgraced Church officials.

Deceptive Public Statements

Abuse victims describe being revictimized by biased Catholic media who have ties to powerful allies within the hierarchy. These reporters fail to contact corroborating witnesses, avoid asking accused clerics probing questions and uncritically print responses by the accused that are misleading or downright false.

According to A.W. Richard Sipe (the late psychoanalyst) and Thomas Doyle, J.C.D., it is not uncommon for dioceses to cover up sexual abuse by publishing deceptive euphemisms such as "Father has an area of difficulty," "Father engaged in youthful horseplay" or "Father has been reassigned to a special project."

Abuse victims describe being revictimized by biased Catholic media.

Victims or their attorneys can request that advocacy, whistleblowing and media groups investigate, publish articles and raise awareness about abusive and duplicitous behavior. Such organizations include Church Militant as well as the Survivors Network for those Abused by Priests (SNAP); Roman Catholic Faithful; Coalition for Canceled Priests; MacKillop Coalition; Gaylord Diocesan Watch; The Angry Catholic; Birmingham Diocesan Watch; Survivors of Childhood Sex Abuse (SCSA); Road to Recovery; Clean the Church; Ruth Institute; BishopAccountability.org; and Complicit Clergy.

Threatening to Countersue

Victims and their families may also find themselves intimidated and threatened by lawyers representing the defendants to discourage them from bringing suit or pressure them into dropping a suit that was already filed. In other cases, Church officials insist victims attend meetings in chancery offices without their lawyers. At these meetings, vulnerable victims can be manipulated, misled or coerced into withdrawing complaints.

Victims should be aware of their rights to have their counsel present and should demand that meetings be held outside of Church property at neutral sites. Victims should never attend meetings with diocesan personnel without accompaniment. Meetings with diocesan

officials should be recorded with each party's consent, and victims or their counsel should take and retain detailed notes documenting all conversations about abuse allegations.

Motion to Dismiss the Suit

Lawyers representing abusive defendants may proffer reasons for a judge to dismiss the lawsuit. Their hope is to shield their clients from a damning discovery process where evidence of their guilt will be revealed.

While judges welcome clerical abuse cases involving children, some judges shy away from abuse cases involving seminarians and other vulnerable adults that often deal with homosexual predation (and not pedophilia or ephebophilia). Even some district attorneys have been known not to prosecute homosexual priests accused of abusing or harassing other adults for fear they may lose votes from members of the LGBTQ community.

Even if a judge allows a victim's case to be heard, these cases often become the target of undue interference by Church officials. Men like New York's Aux. Bp. John O'Hara — or compromised Catholic reporters — may try to sway the presiding judge or pressure witnesses not to testify.



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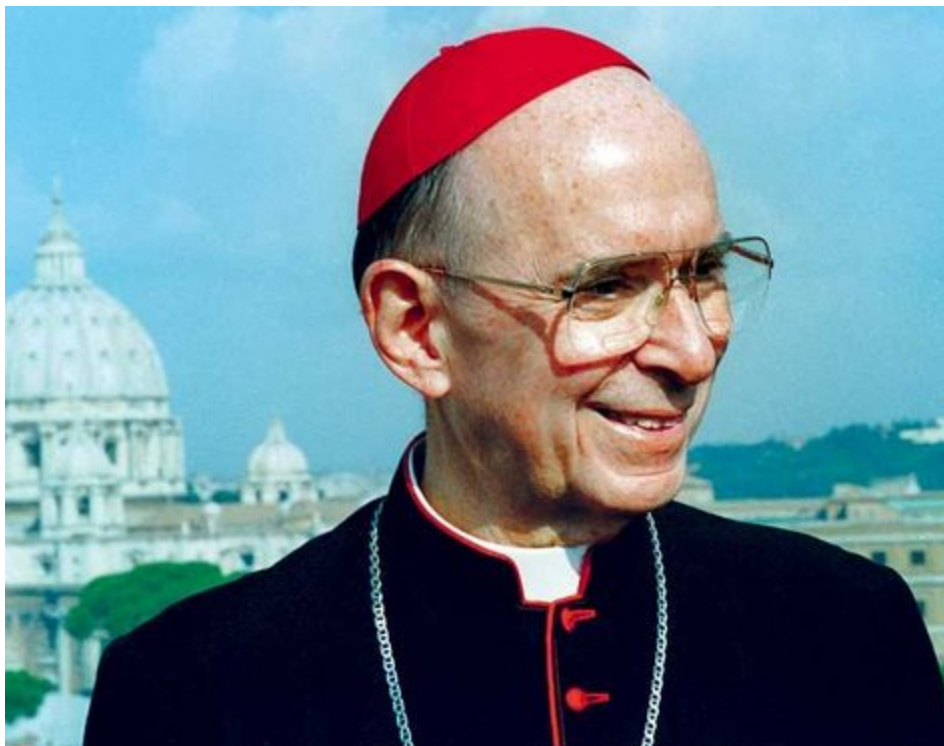
Vatican Seminary Leaders Fall Amid Devastating Testimonies

In Argentina, after Fr. Julio César Grassi was found guilty and sentenced to 15 years in prison for abusing a boy in a refuge for street children, then-cardinal Jorge Bergoglio hired a defense attorney and commissioned a secret study aimed at coercing the appellate judges to reverse the sentence of the lower court. The underhanded tactic failed, and Grassi's sentence was upheld.

While victims do not have control over whether a compromised judge assigned to their case will intentionally overlook critical facts, victims should retain attorneys who specialize in prosecuting clerical sex abuse cases and who are well-versed in litigation against Church officials' empire of deceptive attorneys. Advocacy groups may be a resource to help victims find experienced counsel.

Settlements

If the plaintiff's lawsuit survives the defendants' motions to dismiss, he may be invited to settle the lawsuit out of court. The defendants will often attempt to have the settlement completed in a manner that ensures his guilt does not come to light. Defendants will sometimes hire a public relations firm to make it appear that the allegations were unfounded or that the plaintiffs retracted their claims, as happened in the case of accused cardinal Joseph Bernardin.



Cdl. Joseph Bernardin

Victims and their lawyers should understand that dioceses are terrified of discovery, a fact that gives the aggrieved leverage with the diocese in the quest to achieve transparency and accountability. Victims' attorneys should consider not only financial compensation to relieve

a victim's losses and need for treatment, but also non-monetary demands that force dioceses to take action to prevent anyone else from being abused by an accused cleric.

Conclusion

While media have exposed numerous clerical abuse cases involving children, these same media are far less inclined to report on the increasing number of abuse cases involving the homosexual predation of seminarians and vulnerable adults. Vatican officials and bishops across the country fear the ongoing sexual predation and cover-up lawsuit against Cdl. Dolan and NAC seminary officials has the potential to become a landmark case for exposing the strategies behind which accused clerics have hidden for decades.

Anyone wishing to support efforts to apply legal protection to seminarians who are routinely victimized by these cover-up tactics is invited to contribute to the [Save Our Seminarians Fund](#).

Gene Thomas Gomulka is a sexual abuse victims' advocate, investigative reporter and screenwriter. A former Navy (O6) Captain/Chaplain, seminary instructor and diocesan respect life director, Gomulka was ordained a priest for the Altoona-Johnstown diocese and later made a prelate of honor (monsignor) by Pope St. John Paul II.

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