

COURIER-JOURNAL

SOUTHERN TIER-AUBURN GENEVA

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Experts: Treatment Can Help Sex Offenders, Victims

By Martin Toombs
Southern Tier Editor

Corning — Sexual offenders should be treated more like alcoholics and less like criminals, two experts on the subject said at a workshop for professionals at St. Patrick's School, May 21 and 22.

Those who commit sexual offenses against children don't do it for sexual reasons any more than alcoholics drink because they're thirsty, A. Nicholas Groth said during a break in his session May 22. Those who commit sex offenses must learn to control their compulsion, and, like alcoholics, it is a lifelong battle in which they probably will never be able to claim complete victory.

"Victims can be treated," Dr. Suzanne Sgroi said during a break in her session the preceding day. "offenders can be helped." But, she added, some may never be safe, and therefore must be controlled to protect society.

The speakers, who have published a book together titled "The Sexual Abuse of Children and Adolescents," addressed 132 professionals from Chemung, Schuyler and Steuben counties at the program, sponsored by the Committee for Information on Human Sexuality. Billie Glossner of the Corning Family Service Society noted that some applicants were rejected for the advanced

workshops because they lacked preliminary training. Included in the workshop were nurses, mental health workers, school personnel, police officers, lawyers, and staff members from many local agencies.

Ms. Glossner commented that the workshop grew from the requests of local social workers for assistance with the sexual abuse cases they are seeing in their work.

Dr. Sgroi is an internist, and has served as program developer for the Sexual Trauma Treatment Program of the Connecticut Department of Children and Youth Services. Groth is director of the Connecticut Department of Corrections' Sex Offender Program at Somers State Prison.

Dr. Sgroi said that she concentrated her efforts on the workshop's first day with how to treat the child and the family involved in sexual abuse.

But her first advice is that professionals be willing to believe that sexual abuse takes place, and make an active effort to see if it exists in their clients. She suggested that many adults seeking treatment for a variety of emotional ailments, including sexual dysfunction, are undiscovered sexual abuse victims.

Success in the field is still hard to measure, she said, due

to the newness of the focus on treating sexual offenders and victims. She described a program in San Jose, Calif., which appears to be working by intervening before legal proceedings have started, and keeping the families together. The entire family is treated; the threat of criminal action is used to keep the offender in the program.

Sexual offenders are those who abuse power, she said, and use sex to fill other needs. Counselors must look for what is causing the root problem, she said, and help the client gratify the need constructively.

While often it is assumed that the abuser is a man, and the victim a girl, boys also are abuse victims, Dr. Sgroi said. In the case of same-sex abuse, the abuser is not always homosexual; she added that homosexuals are not more likely to be abusers than heterosexuals.

But when speaking about statistics, the researchers only know that they don't know. Sexual abuse wasn't usually identified a few years ago, and the growing awareness of it doesn't mean that it is a new problem. Dr. Sgroi said that they have no idea how widespread sexual abuse is.

A purely punitive response to sexual abuse is futile, she said, as abusers are not going to react to punishment, and a prison term may actually increase the problems which

originally caused the abuse. Instead, the threat of legal action should be used to force treatment.

Similarly, Groth noted his concern for the sexual offenders who are placed in the general populations of state prisons. Often abused themselves as children, that abuse will continue in prison, and the offender's situation will worsen.

He favors separate in-prison facilities for sexual offenders as being "preferable to mixing them in the general population of prisoners."

The offenders are "emotionally troubled," but not mentally ill, he said, and while apparent progress can be made in the prison setting in which he works, the need for support and treatment extends beyond release.

But such support outside the prison is practically nonexistent. He related a case of one prisoner who asked him where he could continue to get the support he knew he needed. Groth said that he simply didn't have any place to send him.

In the field for 16 years, Groth said that he is both "encouraged by the progress" being made, and "discouraged by the greater need" he sees. He noted that he's happy to see increasing media coverage of the problem, as that results in more understanding, and in more victims coming forward.



Special Ordination

Father Paul McCabe places his hands on Dennis Bonsignore during his ordination to the priesthood at Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Elmira, May 23. Father Bonsignore worked at Lourdes, where Father McCabe is pastor, for the past two years, first as a deacon candidate, and then a deacon intern. The ordination was the first in more than 25 years, and only the second ever in the Southern Tier. The following day, Father Bonsignore celebrated a Mass of Thanksgiving at his home parish, Holy Apostles, Rochester, and on Saturday, May 30, he offered another at Our Lady of Lourdes.

St. Mary Our Mother To Dedicate Organ

Horseheads — The pipe organ in St. Mary Our Mother Church will probably always be known as the Notre Dame Pipe Organ, but the century-old instrument will be blessed and consecrated as the St. Mary Our Mother Pipe Organ at 4 p.m., Sunday, June 7.

Father David Fedor, who was instrumental in having the organ given to St. Mary Our Mother, will give a dedicatory recital, which will follow the short blessing ceremony.

Father Fedor was associate pastor at St. Mary Our Mother in 1977 when he made the arrangements for the organ to be donated by Notre Dame University for installation in the parish's new church, then in the planning stages. He is now associate

Breakfast Scheduled

Elmira — St. Patrick's Women's Club will have its annual Communion Breakfast Sunday, June 7, at Pierce's Restaurant, Elmira Heights, following the 9:30 a.m. Mass at St. Patrick's Church. The speaker for the event will be Father David Gramke, chaplain at the Elmira Correctional Facility.

Information and ticket reservations can be obtained by contacting Rita Sartori, 732-9026; Jane Callahan, 734-8051; Ange Sgro, 733-0533; Marguerite Backes, 734-8308; or Betty DeBlasio, 733-6292.

The breakfast is open to all women of the Elmira area.

pastor of St. Stephen's, Geneva.

The organ was installed in Notre Dame's Sacred Heart Church in 1875, and contained some 2,500 pipes, some as long as 19 feet. A donation for a new organ made it possible for the university to donate the large instrument for the new Horseheads church.

The parish's new church was consecrated Nov. 10, 1979, and the organ installed a year later. The organ was completely rebuilt and redesigned by the Berkshire Organ Company of West Springfield, Mass. The pipes were revoiced and the entire tonal scheme of the organ was modified in keeping with the best standards of organ building and that it might better serve the parish.

Father Fedor's recital will include music by Marcel Dupre, Johann Sebastian Bach, Louis-Nicolas Clerambault, and Maurice Durufle. A reception will follow.

Food Pantry Growing to Serve Valley

By Martin Toombs
Southern Tier Editor

Waverly — A filled theater Sunday, May 17, in Sayre, Pa., was a "huge success" for the food pantry based at St. James Parish, Waverly.

Patricia Redman, head of the St. James Human Development Committee, reported that more than 1,000 items of food were donated as the admission price for the showing of the "Benji" film "Oh, Heavenly Dog."

The event was a stepping stone to the continuing growth of the St. James food aid effort into a valley-wide program which already has involved 11 valley parishes.

During March and April, the food pantry responded to 43 calls, distributed approximately 800 pounds of food, and spent another \$165 on perishables to aid families without enough to eat. The effort assisted 77 adults and 97 children.

The movie event came at the suggestion of the theater owner, Sid Freedman, with the cooperation of many others. Merchants in the valley communities of Sayre and Athens, Pa., and Waverly were asked to contribute, and school children from St. James School, Epiphany Catholic School, Sayre, and the

Christian Life School, Waverly, made posters promoting the event.

The movie "food-raiser" was another in a series of events in the pantry's growth which Mrs. Redman doesn't see as coincidental.

The pantry started two years ago, she said, and started slowly. At one point they were rationing their small food supply, but they decided to forget that, and just take care of the needs as they were presented, and let the supply take care of itself.

It did. She delivered food to a family in West Sayre one day, and, seeing the need for continued counseling, contacted the Sayre Christian Church nearby and told them of the family.

"That minister called her back, asked about her group's effort, and invited her to speak before local parish groups and the valley Rotary. As a result the pantry has 'been growing ever since,' she said, with parishes contacting her to ask how they can help, or sending checks. The pantry also has gotten support from several other religious and community groups.

Mrs. Redman doesn't take credit for what has occurred; "it's a beautiful thing to see the way the Lord's going

before us," she said. She called what has happened "like throwing your bread upon the waters," and getting back seven-fold.

Some local clergy and others ask if the families being helped "are really needy," Mrs. Redman said. While noting an isolated case of a person who tried to take advantage of the pantry, she said that the people really are faced with not having enough to eat. "If they say they don't have any food," she said, "I don't see how you can say no."

The pantry also has been aided by the Southern Tier Community Food Bank, which has been operating in Elmira since earlier this year. Mrs. Redman said that they have gotten supplies from the regional bank several times, especially once earlier this spring when they were low.

The pantry usually gets a call each day, she said, with the pace picking up at the end of the month. Most of those calling have no transportation, she said, so "I go ahead and deliver it."

Those receiving the food get something else as well. Mrs. Redman said that she takes the opportunity to provide the people with the word of God. She tells them to go to Church to thank God

for the help, she said, and looks for openings to draw the families into a religious life.

She noted that she spent several years away from the Church, returning 12 years ago following a bout with cancer. While she doesn't expect everyone to believe as she does, she said that she feels sorry for those who don't know "what He can do with your life."

The next step for the pantry is a location in Waverly outside St. James Parish, so it will be regarded less as a parish program, and more as a community effort. Mrs. Redman said that she has looked at a couple places for the pantry, which she already has named. Noting the Old Testament story of the wise planning made possible when Joseph warned of the coming famine, she hopes to name the pantry's new location "Joseph's House."

Festival This Sunday

Elmira — The St. Cecilia's Parish annual bazaar will be Sunday, June 7, from noon until 10 p.m. on the church grounds. International foods, games, and music will be available. A chicken barbecue will be served in the church hall. There will be no admission charge.

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