

# Awareness of abuse offers chance to aid victims

By Pat McGowan  
Catholic News Service

FALL RIVER, Mass. — Growing awareness of pedophilia offers an opportunity for the church to make a long overdue correction — emphasizing the needs of those who were sexually molested as children — according to the new director of a hospital specializing in the treatment of psychologically troubled clergy and religious.

Abuse victims, courts and the media are "prophetic voices calling for action" on this subject, remarked Father Stephen J. Rossetti, recently named director of programs at St. Luke Institute in Suitland, Md.

"We as a church community should have a preferential option for the needy" — in this case individuals sexually molested as children, Father Rossetti said during a parish adult-education class at a Fall River parish last month.

A licensed psychotherapist with a doctorate in ministry, Father Rossetti, 41, was ordained a priest in the Diocese of Syracuse.

He noted that the Fall River diocese had taken "the brunt of the current national concern over the sexual abuse of children by priests."

In December the Diocese of Fall River reached a financial settlement with 68 people who said they were sexually abused by a former Catholic priest, James R. Porter. Porter, 57, also is accused of having molested children in Minnesota, where he resides, and in New Mexico, where he was sent for treatment while still a priest.

Father Rossetti called the Porter case an opportunity for the diocese to "show the world and the country" a good church response to abuse revelations.

Father Rossetti has spoken throughout the nation on the topic of child sexual abuse and the church. He also edited and contributed to the book *Slayer of the Soul*, a study of sexual abuse and the Catholic Church.

His new employer, St. Luke Institute, is one of the leading U.S. hospitals specializing in the treatment of clergy and men and women religious who suffer substance addictions, eating disorders,

sexual behavior problems, depression or other psychological problems.

Father Rossetti said the church has a "long way to go" in terms of its response to individuals sexually molested when they were children. He said parishes should have "people specializing in the area of child sexual abuse."

But he said the current outbreak of news on pedophilia offers the church a chance "to correct something that's needed correction for 2,000 years."

The priest called it a positive development that abuse victims met with several bishops during the U.S. hierarchy's meeting in Washington last November.

The bishops will discuss the topic again Feb. 22-23 during a two-day session in St. Louis. Also participating will be other church leaders, researchers, abuse victims, priests being treated for abuse problems, and experts on various dimensions of the problem.

Father Rossetti said sexual abuse of children stems from perpetrators' mental disease. A perpetrator, he said, often is psychosexually underdeveloped, feel-

ing a sense of power with regard to children while finding it difficult to relate to other adults.

During the parish education session, he distributed a booklet "Sexual Abuse: The Church Responds," which describes the average child molester as a well-educated, young, middle-class, married man. In treatment, Father Rossetti said, therapists try to develop in the abuser an appropriate sense of his own power in normal relationships.

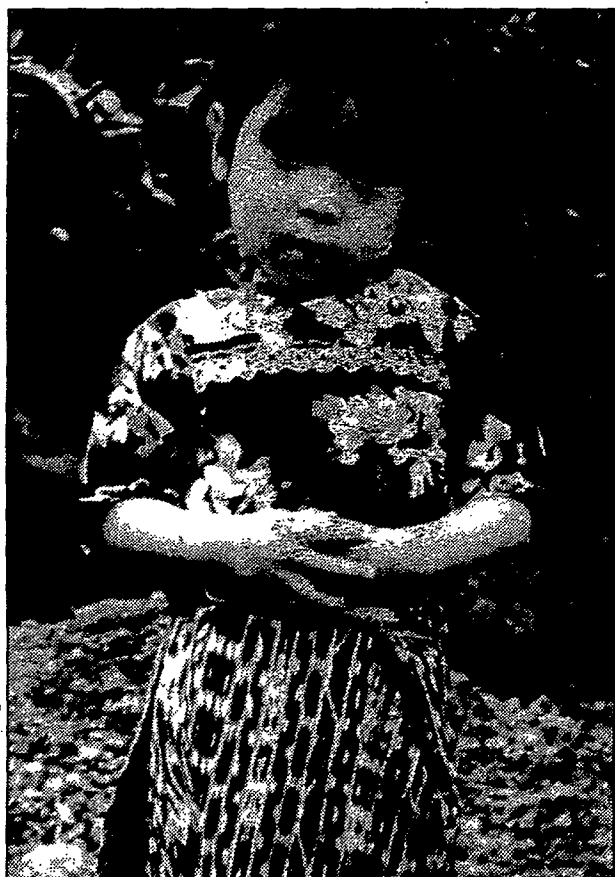
He said it is more difficult to effect change in pedophiles — those attracted to young children — than in those attracted to teenagers. But pedophiles can be taught to manage their feelings, he said.

The real trauma of child sex abuse is its violation of trust, Father Rossetti said, adding that "The world becomes an unsafe place for the child."

The booklet he distributed urged calmness, speed and thoroughness in dealing with such cases. It called for establishment of permanent diocesan review boards, providing pastoral care to involved parishes, scheduling parish education programs, and establishing guidelines for ministers dealing with children.

"We are not lawyers," the booklet says. "We are ministers of a gospel of healing. We should bring that sensitive and compassionate gospel touch to this situation," it says.

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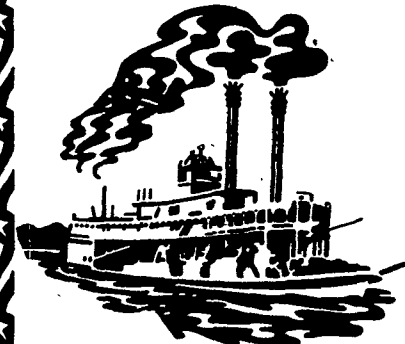
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