

# DIOCESAN NEWS

## Local priest-abuse victims speak out to help others

By Jennifer Ficaglia  
Assistant Editor

Two local men who say they were abused by priests as children are speaking out about their ordeals in hopes of helping others who have had similar experiences.

Peter Saracino of Phelps said he was abused by a religious-order priest more than 40 years ago, when he was 7 years old. Although he had blocked the abuse out of his mind at the time, he said memories of the ordeal began surfacing once he reached adulthood.

"There are memories that are so heinous that it stops you dead in your tracks," Saracino said.

Once he began remembering the abuse, he sought the help of a therapist and a Geneva-based Sister of St. Joseph, who has served as his spiritual adviser for nearly 13 years. The therapy and spiritual advice has helped him work through issues resulting from the abuse, but he credits his ability to get through the whole situation to the power of God and Jesus in his life.

"There's no way out of this without Jesus," he stressed.

For the past 12 years Saracino has been involved in such national victim advocacy groups as Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests and Victims of Clergy Abuse Linkup. He has also been involved in starting a local peer support group for anyone who has been abused by clergy or religious from any religious denomination. The group is co-facilitated by Saracino and Edith Mann, an abuse counselor for 15 years and director of Rape & Abuse Crisis Service of the Finger Lakes.

Saracino said he has long heard victims' stories of sexual abuse by priests. He becomes angry as he hears more and more of those stories — many of which include the church ignoring the abuse or covering up the abuse — and he wants to let people know what the church has done and how its handling of instances of abuse has negatively affected victims. He also strives to validate other victims' experiences, letting them know it's OK to have feelings of anger and that they will eventually get to a different point in their lives.

"What motivates me to do this and what motivates me to heal is the anger," Saracino said, noting that anger must be channeled positively to effect change.

Saracino said he has five things he wants to see done: He wants protection and support for victims; protection for children, families and communities; a means for abusive priests to be held accountable and responsible for their actions; support for priests of integrity; and an acknowledgement that priests who abuse teenagers and vulnerable adults are just as dangerous as



Bob Roller/CNS

David Clohessy tearfully describes the pain victims of clergy sexual abuse suffer. The executive director of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests addressed the U.S. bishops during their meeting in Dallas June 13.

priests who prey on children.

"I think it behooves all Catholics to demand of the church the same things I'm demanding, because their children could be next," he said. "It's not just an ethical issue, it's a crime."

Rick Cira of Pittsford agrees.

Cira said it was 36 years ago that he was abused at age 13 by a priest whom his parents knew and had invited into their home on several occasions. He never told anyone about the abuse until three years ago when he saw a television news program that mentioned his abuser by name. It was then that he sought therapy to help him work through the issues of abuse.

At first he said he was angry at his parents' "blind faith" in the Catholic Church, which he believes in part created the environment for the abuse to occur. He said if his parents had had a deep relationship with God that extended beyond the liturgies of the church, they would have had the spiritual confidence to recognize that the abusive priest was not exhibiting proper behavior toward him.

"The church historically had led people to church instead of leading people to faith," he remarked.

The fact that the abusive priest "leveraged his collar" and was viewed by his family as an authority figure also contributed to the abuse, he added.

But Cira says he is past that initial anger, and has been able to forgive his parents as well as the priest who abused him. He has

been able to do so, he said, because the first precept of Christianity is forgiveness, and judgment should be left to God.

"When I started praying about it is when the peace actually came," he said. "Whatever happened in the past I have put behind, and we have to move on."

Both men agree that the Catholic Church must make changes to better protect children and support victims, but they differ on how to accomplish this.

Because pedophilia and ephebophilia (sexual attraction to adolescents) are mental illnesses, Cira said it is important to make distinctions among various instances of abuse by priests rather than combining them under one umbrella. He also said those who use the current sex-abuse scandal to start talking about other church issues — such as homosexual priests — take the focus off the protection of children and the support of victims. Dredging up the mistakes of the past and beating the church up for them won't solve the problem, he added, because what happened in the past cannot be changed. Instead, he said he believes in forgiveness and looking toward the future.

"Any positive change comes through an evolution, not a revolution," he said. "The church has got to change how they're doing things. The first order of business is this (U.S. bishops' meeting)."

Saracino, on the other hand, said the church must look at its past mistakes in order not to repeat them, and doesn't blame people for using the sex-abuse crisis as a

means of introducing dialogue on other church issues.

"This is stuff that has to be addressed," he said. "You have to expose (the church's past mistakes) as a way of moving forward."

Saracino is also skeptical about how much good will result from the U.S. bishops' meeting.

"It was progress to be sure, but 10 years ago these same bishops made other promises, and many of them simply turned out to be words and not action," he said. "Talk is cheap; action is priceless. I want action behind 'I'm sorry.' Then I can move on."

He does agree with some of the bishops' initiatives, including the requirements that dioceses report all accusations of the sexual abuse of minors by priests to civil authorities and establish outreach programs for those who have been abused. He applauded the bishops' decision to do away with confidentiality agreements in legal settlements, which he sees as gag orders for victims.

"Sexual abuse robs an individual of their voice. Gag orders reinforce the robbery," Saracino said.

Yet he takes issue with the fact that no sanctions were created for bishops and cardinals who have shielded abusive priests. In order to allow abuse victims to heal and trust again, bishops and cardinals guilty of shielding abusive priests must step down, he said. And the notion that priests who have abused may be sent to live in a monastery for a life of prayer and penance does not set well with him; he called this option "merely a change in locale" rather than a barrier or obstacle to future abuse. He added that the bishops also failed to address abuses by women religious, as well as sexual abuse of the elderly, women and vulnerable adults.

Cira has a different take on the bishops' meeting.

He applauds the bishops for seeing the need to remove abusive priests from active ministry. He also agrees with the requirement that dioceses establish outreach programs for those who have been abused, viewing this as a means of helping abuse victims return balance to their lives.

"Our collective goal now should be to create the environment that incubates a spiritual balance and human healing," he said.

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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The support group for survivors of sexual abuse by clergy or religious meets every other Wednesday at the Geneva office of Rape & Abuse Crisis Service of the Finger Lakes, 150 Castle St. The next meeting is from 7 to 9 p.m. July 3. Those who would like to participate must contact co-facilitator Edith Mann prior to attending a meeting. She may be reached at 315/536-9654, yates@racsfl.org or P.O. Box 624, Penn Yan, NY 14527.

## Obituary

### Msgr. William Roche; former schools superintendent and pastor

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

Msgr. William M. Roche, the former superintendent of diocesan Catholic schools and pastor of three diocesan parishes, died of cancer at age 79 on June 21, 2002, at the St. Joseph Convent Infirmary. He had lived in California since 1989, returning to Rochester just one week before his death to enter hospice care at the infirmary.

Msgr. Roche was born in Corning and grew up in St. Vincent de Paul Parish. He worked for Ingersoll-Rand Co. from 1941-42 and then engaged in a four-year hitch with the United States Navy, serving as a communications officer.

From 1946-48 he was a publicist for Union Carbide Corp. in New York City. He entered St. Bernard's Seminary in 1948 and was ordained in 1955 at Elmira's St. Patrick Church by Bishop Lawrence B. Casey.



He was assistant pastor at Ithaca's Immaculate Conception Parish from 1955-56 before moving into education administration. He was assistant superintendent of diocesan schools from 1956-59 and then served as superintendent for a 10-year stretch beginning in 1959. Msgr. Roche was a frequent contributor to educational journals and often spoke at Catholic and public school events throughout the country. Also during this period, he was made a monsignor by Pope Paul VI in 1966.

"He was very forward-looking as a superintendent of schools. He was talking about the need for centralization of schools long before it became a reality," said Father Robert Kreckel, pastor of St. Mary of the Lake Parish in Ontario. Father Kreckel gave the homily at Msgr. Roche's funeral Mass

June 25.

In 1969 Msgr. Roche returned to parish ministry, as pastor of St. Catherine of Siena in Ithaca. He moved to the pastorate at St. Mary's in Canandaigua in 1975, staying until he became pastor of St. Anne in Rochester in 1982. Msgr. Roche served at St. Anne until moving to California in 1989, and retired in January 1990. Father Kreckel noted that Msgr. Roche remained in active ministry during retirement, serving at veterans' hospitals near his residence in Redwood City.

He was also a licensed air pilot for many years. Father John T. Walsh, a retired diocesan priest, said he and Msgr. Roche both belonged to the National Association of Priest Pilots and would make many trips together to such locales as the Thousand Islands. Father Walsh recalls in particular the time they flew to Toronto on St. Patrick's Day — for lunch. Because they were flying,

they refrained from drinking alcohol.

"We had a ginger ale at one of the restaurants. They probably thought we were nuts," said Father Walsh, who preached at Msgr. Roche's vigil service June 24.

Father Kreckel said Msgr. Roche's piloting was symbolic of a priest who had many interests and enjoyed exploring new things: "Bill was a risk-taker. If he thought it was the right thing to do, he'd do it."

Father Kreckel further observed, "I think Bill's greatest quality was, he made friends so easily and engaged people in conversation and friendship."

Msgr. Roche's funeral Mass was held at St. Anne Church, with Bishop Matthew H. Clark presiding. Interment was at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery.

He is survived by a sister, Patricia (Phineas) Roche-Kuhl; six nieces and nephews; seven grandnieces and grand-nephews; and many cousins.