

Policing the future church

With the Feb. 27 release of the John Jay study along with the report of the National Review Board for the Protection of Children and Young People, American Catholics are reflecting on the causes of sexual abuse of minors by clergy and are stunned at the extent of the mismanagement of this problem by church officials over the years.

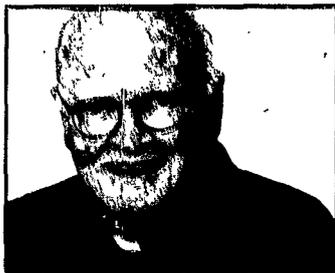
This will surely generate a series of "what ifs?" in the minds of parishioners and, in turn, trigger thinking about structural adjustments to prevent a repetition of past mistakes and reduce the probability of any child ever again being victimized by any priest.

What if every parish council, like every hospital board of directors, had a credentialing and quality assurance committee? Its job would be, among other things, to review the credentials and personnel files of any priest about to be assigned to a parish.

He would be reviewed and rated by this committee before being accepted for ministry. For this screen to work, the confidential personnel file would have to be up-to-date. And the diocesan bishop or provincial superior would have to cooperate and abide by the credentialing committee's decision.

If that "what if?" were a functioning reality, the probability of a priest predator being shuttled from parish to parish would be zero.

What if a bishop or admitting provincial felt obliged



Father William J. Byron, SJ
Looking Around

to know the sexual history of every candidate for admission to a seminary? This is admittedly intrusive and invasive of the privacy our culture prizes. No candidate would be forced, however, to continue, or even to begin to participate in this conversation, but the conversation should take place. Psychosexual health, like physical health, should be considered essential for admission to a seminary.

What if every bishop had an annual one-on-one accountability conversation with every priest in his diocese? It is obvious from revelations associated with the sex abuse scandals that many bishops simply did not know their men. They did not know their strengths and weaknesses, their fears and hopes.

It is also obvious that some of the priest-perpetrators were not open to their bishops; they dissembled, hid, lied and knowingly violated sacred trusts. Were bishops "too busy" with administrative matters to attend to the men under their jurisdiction? If so, would a

scheduled, annual or semi-annual, one-on-one conversation of accountability close these gaps and provide a measure of safety for potential victims in the future? Without mutual trust, this won't work.

What if every diocese awaiting the appointment of a new bishop received public notification similar to the traditional publication of bans of marriage? Names of those under consideration (usually three) would be announced from every pulpit in the diocese from which they entered the seminary, the diocese where they currently serve and the diocese to which they are being proposed for service as bishop. If this disclosure practice were in place, a man with a sexual misconduct skeleton in his closet would have to be uncommonly ambitious to run the risk of public embarrassment to himself and the church.

What if diocesan and presbyteral councils really worked? What if the clergy accepted the fact that the parish is a "family-owned business" and all family members have a right to be kept informed on how the business is doing?

Enlightened criticism like that which came our way Feb. 27 can bring about structural adjustments, which eventually will mean safer children in a healthier church.

Father William J. Byron, SJ, is a columnist for Catholic News Service.

Challenges 'heroism' of senator

To the editor:

The Feb. 26 issue of the *Courier* ran a column by Antoinette Bosco of Catholic News Service, regarding political ads entitled "Season for raw lies, misrepresentation is here." In it, she states her "long-time friend" former Senator Max Cleland is a Vietnam War Vet "who lost both his legs and one arm in battle." She is angry about a 2002 political ad, which she believes portrayed him as not patriotic. Actually, the ad in question relates to Senator Cleland's refusal to vote for the Homeland Security bill, not his Vietnam service, which was honorable and heroic. Ms. Bosco then states from now on she "shall be ever on the alert for raw lies."

Speaking of "raw lies," doesn't Ms. Bosco know that her "long-time friend" Max Cleland didn't really lose his legs and arm "in battle," as she claims? According to the *Boston Globe* and many other newspaper accounts, he admits that he lost them in the division assembly area on his way to drink beer with his buddies during a non-combat mission. He was getting off a helicopter, noticed a grenade on the ground and picked it up as it exploded.

In Cleland's own words: "I didn't see any heroism in all that. It wasn't an act of hero-

ism. I didn't know the grenade was live. It was an act of fate."

If Ms. Bosco is searching for lies and misrepresentation, she can find them in her own columns. Is she a bad journalist who didn't check her facts? Or does she know the facts but decided to mislead her readers?

Robert Fritz
Evergreen Circle
Walworth

BOSCO RESPONDS: Mr. Fritz is absolutely correct when he called former Senator Max Cleland's Vietnam service "honorable and heroic." Cleland's book, *Strong at the Broken Places*, shows how this man, a strong lover of his country, volunteered in 1967 to go to Vietnam, unlike some others of his age and survived the devastating siege of Khe Sanh.

When his tour of duty was almost over, he was asked to send a radio relay team to a division supply area, needed to improve communications. His book relates that he was back on the helicopter when he decided to stay to work personally with the team and later have a cold beer with his buddies. So he jumped to the ground and was watching the chopper lift off when he looked down and saw a grenade. It exploded as he went to pick it up, and he lost both legs and an arm.

Mr. Fritz no doubt accurately quoted Max Cleland saying this "wasn't an act of heroism." This veteran says many things with lighthearted humor. When I interviewed him back in 1989, he told me, "I don't think of myself as handicapped, but just severely inconvenienced!" How many, in his situation, could say that!

Flag absent in churches

To the editor:

On the front page of the Feb. 26 *Courier*, the flag of our nation really stood out. What a beautiful sight! When entering most non-Catholic churches, our flag stands out. Again, I will repeat; what a beautiful sight.

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