

Group wants to address nun abuse

Jerry Filteau/CNS

WASHINGTON — Saying it has more than 100 members who were sexually abused by nuns, the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests has asked the Leadership Conference of Women Religious to hear from abuse victims during the annual LCWR assembly in August.

More than a dozen SNAP members held a press conference July 13 outside LCWR headquarters in Silver Spring, Md., followed two hours later by another press conference outside the headquarters of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington.

In Silver Spring they delivered a letter addressed to Sister Carole Shinnick, a School Sister of Notre Dame and LCWR executive director.

David Clohessy, SNAP executive director, said the two main points in the four-page letter were:

- A request for time on the agenda of the Aug. 19-23 LCWR assembly in Fort Worth, Texas, for one or more victims of abuse by nuns to address the leaders of women's religious orders.

- The start of "a dialogue around prevention and healing", between LCWR leaders and SNAP members.

The letter said men and women who were sexually abused by nuns as children "constantly cope with the severe lifelong consequences."

"We have over 100 people in SNAP who were victimized by nuns," Clohessy told Catholic News Service. He said a number of them met other victims of nuns for the first time at the national SNAP gathering in Denver this June.

Sister Annmarie Sanders, LCWR communications director and a Sister of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, received the letter for Sister

Shinnick, who was attending an LCWR executive committee meeting out of town. Sister Sanders told CNS later that she sent the letter on to Sister Shinnick, who "will take it into consideration."

The two who delivered the letter to the LCWR were Steve Theisen of Hudson, Iowa, and Landa Mauriello-Vernon of Hamden, Conn. Both said they had been sexually abused by a nun when they were children.

At the USCCB headquarters SNAP members asked Mercy Sister Mary Ann Walsh, a USCCB spokeswoman, to deliver a letter to Msgr. William P. Fay, USCCB general secretary.

Enclosed was a copy of the letter to the LCWR and a cover letter asking that the bishops "take a much more dedicated and passionate position to protect children, teenagers and vulnerable adults from rapists and molesters who hide behind and are protected by the myriad religious orders of women and men."

Sister Walsh later confirmed she had delivered the letter to Msgr. Fay.

The day after the SNAP actions, former nun Eileen M. Rhoads entered an Alford plea in Virginia Beach, Va., to charges that she molested a 10-year-old student 35 years ago when she was a nun teaching at St. Gregory the Great Catholic School in Virginia Beach. She was a member of the Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

An Alford plea means the defendant does not admit the acts but admits the prosecution could likely prove the charge.

Civil lawsuits accusing Rhoads of sexually abusing students in Catholic schools have been filed in Virginia and in Pennsylvania, where she taught in the 1970s.



Reuters/CNS

Sudanese flee Darfur

A Sudanese mother hugs her baby July 2 at a refugee hospital in eastern Chad, near the border of Sudan's Darfur region. Pope John Paul II called for greater protection of the people there and sent a special Vatican envoy to the region.

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