



Mary Isabel Steele welcomes you to
**ALL SHALL BE WELL:
ONE WOMAN SURVIVOR'S STORY
OF CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE**

In 1984 I was forty years old. I was dealing with many spiritual and emotional issues when I turned to a priest who was an assistant pastor in my Roman Catholic parish for pastoral counseling. Instead of helping me, he sexually exploited and abused me. He betrayed my trust. His behavior was unprofessional. He was guilty of sexual misconduct, repeated sexual boundary violations. In legal terms, he and his superiors were guilty of a breach of fiduciary duty. What they did changed the course of my life in many ways forever. Struggling to understand what had happened and to recover, I wrote a book. I published it myself. I have created this site just to tell the story of my clergy sexual abuse. Click on the cover of my book to begin reading.





ALL SHALL BE WELL: ONE **WOMAN** SURVIVOR'S STORY OF CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE

by **Mary Isabel Steele**

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<http://w3.tvi.edu/~misteele> a website sampler

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ALL SHALL BE WELL: ONE **WOMAN** SURVIVOR'S STORY OF CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE

by **Mary Isabel Steele**

Dedication

I wish to dedicate this story to:

**Our Lady of Guadalupe, Patroness of those oppressed by the institutional church,
who has shown herself to truly be a loving mother to me**

**Father Mike, who inspired my finding my voice as a writer and my learning desktop
publishing**

Father Mike's community who have added the word "stonewall" to my vocabulary

**Corinne Taylor, who midwifed this story as I have lived it, teaching me to believe in
myself and listening to me on the phone as much as my mother would have if she'd
been able**

**John, my brother, who loves me and who gave me the computer on which this was
written**

**Thomas Keating, O.C.S.O., who taught me not only how to pray centering prayer
but also the value of humiliation**

**All those who have supported me and Father Mike with their prayers and their
listening over the nine years we have known each other.**

**I am choosing to typeset this using the type face CHICAGO since both Father Mike
and I were born in Chicago in 1944.**

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First Edition printed under the title

In April of 1984, I was sexually abused by the assistant pastor of my Roman Catholic parish. I was sitting in his office counseling about my painful childhood when he said to me, "I'd really like to go to bed with you, but I think it would destroy us both." A year and a half later, he propositioned me again. As part of my healing, I wrote a book about my experiences. My book is out of print, but it is now posted in it's entirety here.

The online edition is in Arial/Geneva type.

Text in red has been added to the internet edition.

Internet Edition
April 5, 2000

**Women Make Up Stories about Priests Who Refuse To Go To Bed with Them:
One Survivor's Story of Clergy Sexual Abuse**

First Printing December, 1992

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ALL SHALL BE WELL
moved to its own web site on
1/26/03.

PREFACE TO THE 1993 EDITION

Nine years ago today I was sexually abused by a Catholic priest to whom I'd gone for pastoral counseling. He didn't rape me. He never even touched me. He said, "I'd really like to go to bed with you, but I think it would destroy us both." Just those words, along with his second proposition and many, many lies have colored every day of my life since. This is the story of my abuse and my recovery to date. It has been written over a period of four and a half years. It includes, fiction and non fiction, poetry and prose. Those who have tried skipping around reading snatches here and there in earlier editions report it has made no sense to them whatsoever. I do highly recommend reading it beginning to end, as it was written, in chronological order.

Many who have read the earlier edition found, no matter what order they read it in, it made little sense to them. It is a story about incest and about forgiveness, two little understood topics! It contains some of Father Mike's lies and double messages, things I have never been able to understand! It is also a story of God's grace. Years ago I learned that a reader's response to my writing is usually more about her or his own journey than about what I have written! I pray you may be able to understand what I've written and that you find it a gift.

**Mary I. Steele
Albuquerque, New Mexico
April 12, 1993**

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[1988](#)



This was the very first thing I was able to write about my abuse. It is fiction. I never asked to sit in the priest's lap, and he didn't talk to me about prayer, but telling the story was a sign of my decision to heal. Four years after he had propositioned me, I was still not able to name him or to specify his "bad words."

Note that it is not a story about a man and a woman. It is a story about a little girl and a father figure. I had transference for the priest. I regressed to feeling like a young child in his presence. Our relationship was **not** one of equals.

1988

"MIMI GROWS UP"

Once upon a time there was a little girl who called herself Mimi. She had a papa who loved her, but because of problems he had experienced, Mimi hadn't gotten all of the love she needed from him, and she spent a lot of time looking for another papa. She really was pretty small; she was much too young for a boy friend. She needed a papa's love to help her grow up.

One day she met Gabby. He looked like a papa. At first he acted like a papa. When she was scared or sad, she'd go to him and he'd reassure her she was a good little girl. Mimi grew to love him and his wonderful hugs. One day when Mimi had gone to Gabby for reassurance, he said some bad words to her. She got scared and angry. She didn't feel safe with Gabby any more. She was afraid that maybe it was her fault that he'd said the bad words to her. She didn't dare tell anyone, but her pain was too terrible to hide. Mimi couldn't sleep. She couldn't play. She worried a lot. She cried and cried.

Mimi's moma had been dead a long time, but God sent her a new moma, Cori. Cori loved Mimi. Mimi told Cori what had happened. With Cori's help, Mimi realized that it wasn't her fault that Gabby had said bad words to her. Mimi admitted to herself and to Cori that Gabby had hurt her. She let herself feel angry and sad. She shared her feelings. She figured

out she had to change so Gabby couldn't hurt her any more. She was able to forgive him! Eventually Gabby was able to tell Mimi he was sorry he had hurt her! They became friends again!

On Father's Day Mimi went to see Gabby. She said, "Gabby, would you please let me sit on your lap? I am just a tiny little girl, and I need a papa to hold me."

"I was just going for a walk," Gabby explained. "Will you come with me? There is something I want to explain to you." Mimi took Gabby's big hand and they walked down the street until they came to their parish church. Gabby explained on the way, "Mimi, I know you feel your papa wasn't able to love you enough. Do you know that as much as my papa loved me, I feel the same way? In fact most people, big people as well as little people, feel that way." They went into the church, greeted God, and sat next to each other in the front pew.

Mimi whispered to Gabby, "I feel as if there is a hole in my heart! I want you to make it not hurt so much."

"There is a hole in your heart, Mimi," Gabby replied. It is a very large hole. In fact, it is so large that I could never fill it for you, Mimi. If all the good papas God has sent into your life took turns holding you and playing with you every minute of the rest of your life, it wouldn't be enough to fill up the hole in your heart. That hole isn't there by accident, nor is it a curse. God put that hole in your heart. Only He

can fill it!! Do you know how?"

"No, teach me!" Mimi implored.

"O.K.," Gabby responded. "Jesus said that whoever sees Him sees the Father. Jesus called God, 'Abba,' Our Good Papa. He is the One who can fill up our hearts. Whenever this hole in your heart hurts, you can sit still and close your eyes. Imagine Jesus holding you on His lap. Say the words 'Abba, I belong to You.' Let's practice right now!" So both Gabby and Mimi closed their eyes, imagined Jesus holding them very lovingly on His lap, and quietly repeated the words, "Abba, I belong to You," for several minutes. "How do you feel now?" Gabby asked when at last they opened their eyes.

**ABBA,
WE
BELONG
TO
YOU!**

"The hole in my heart doesn't hurt!" Mimi smiled. "Thank you for teaching me how to sit in the lap of my Goodest Papa!" And with that she hugged him, waved to God, skipped out of the church, ran back to Gabby's house, jumped on her bicycle, and rode away singing.



"THE MEETING"

Judy had not seen Dr. George for over ten years. It had been ten years since he had moved his practice out of state. She had lost touch with him until last month when a mutual acquaintance of theirs mentioned to her that he was coming to town and would be visiting his old partners. Judy had left word at the office that she would like to see him. He had called her this morning. All day long Judy had been able to think about little else besides their meeting.

As Judy walked through the doors of the office building she knew so well, a flood of old memories swept over her. Fourteen years ago this month she had met Dr. George as if by accident. She had been in quite a bit of emotional pain one day and simply gone down the listing of psychiatrists in the phone book calling every number until she had gotten him to agree to see her that very afternoon. Over the next few months, Judy had seen him several times and transference had taken place. He was someone she could trust, she thought. Then it happened. One day she was quite upset. She called for an unscheduled appointment. He had agreed to see her. As she sat in his office sharing with him painful memories of growing up in her alcoholic family, he spoke those words to her, "I would really like to go to bed with you, but I think it would destroy us both." The words had nearly destroyed her. When she went to see him the following week, he was not there. She found out he had checked himself into an alcoholism treatment program.

After writing "Mimi Grows Up", I gave a copy to Father Mike. He smiled. I felt some closure, but the next day, while I was meditating, another story wrote itself in my head. I spoke it into my tape recorder and then sat at my computer and typed a copy. I still could not say a priest had propositioned me so I made my perpetrator a psychiatrist.

"Hello, Judy!" It was Dr. George coming into the waiting room to greet her. He didn't look too much different than he had ten years before. His hair was beginning to gray, and his face had a few more wrinkles.

"Hello!" she said, and hugged him. They proceeded down the hall to the office she knew so well.

I was able to say he was an alcoholic.

"I asked for this meeting because I still have some unfinished business with you," Judy told Dr. George when they had taken a seat.

"What is that?" he asked.

"Before you left town, we were reconciled," Judy replied. "But there were two things I never told you that I still need to say."

"Tell me," Dr. George encouraged.

Judy looked Dr. George in the eye and said, "I forgive you for lying to me. You lied to me more than once. The lie that hurt the most was the one about coming to my house for dinner on my birthday. You told me not to tell anyone you were coming. Something about that didn't seem right to me. I drove over here one night as you were locking up the office. We stood between the double glass doors and talked. I asked you again why I wasn't supposed to tell anyone you were coming to my house for dinner on my birthday. You repeated the same reason you had given before that you couldn't have dinner at the home of all your patients; so you didn't

As I read it now, I marvel that I had so little understanding of professional boundaries that I agreed to let him come to my house by himself instead of wondering why he insisted I keep it secret that he was coming!

I was able to explain how his lies and inappropriate behavior had hurt me.

want me to mention it to anyone. Dr. George, it was several months before I figured out the real reason you wanted me to keep your coming over to my house a secret. You finally admitted to me that you had intended to get me in bed that night. That lie hurt so much because of the betrayal. When my intuition told me there was something not right about your words, I listened to your authority instead of my inner wisdom. Part of you was trying to help me grow up, but part of you was not helping me at all. I do forgive you."

"Thank you," said Dr. George. "What is the other thing you need to say?"

"I need for you to know how deeply I was hurt that night you came to dinner. You never laid a hand on me. You never said an inappropriate word. You even thanked me for the meal, quite a memorable event at that time when you never said "Thank you" to me for anything. However you did manipulate the conversation insuring that we talked only of superficial things. Your leave-taking felt rejecting even though I had known that you had to leave right after dinner. Doctor, before that evening, I was in the habit of having someone over to dinner about once a week. For the next year and a half, it was all I could do to feed myself. When my niece came to town for a week, I was able to fix her breakfast one morning. It was several months after that, nearly two years after you came for my birthday, before I again invited a friend over to share a dinner I had cooked."

Dr. George looked at Judy and saw the pain in her eyes after all these years. "I am deeply sorry for all the ways I hurt you," he said. A cross still hung on the wall between the two chairs where they sat. Dr. George knelt down in front of it and continued, "Please forgive me."

Judy got out of her chair and knelt beside him. "I do forgive you," she said. "I was the one who hammered the nails into Jesus' hands. His words were 'Father, forgive her, she does not know what she is doing.'" Both of them wept openly for several seconds. Judy reached over and traced a cross on Dr. George's forehead with her thumb. She kissed her fingertips and lightly touched them to his cheek. Then she got up and went down the hall to wash her tear-stained face.

When she returned, Dr. George was still on his knees. She helped him to his feet and said, "Since I didn't have to work today, I baked a loaf of bread. Would you stop by my house later and let me share some of it with you?"

"I would like that very much," the doctor replied as he showed her to the door.

Later as they ate a piece of fragrant homemade bread at Judy's kitchen table, she remarked, "Someday I will learn how to forgive as Jesus did."

"What do you mean?" inquired Dr. George.

"After His resurrection He didn't ask any of His disciples if they realized how deeply they had hurt Him," replied Judy. "He only asked Peter, 'Do you

I'd just attended a scripture workshop, led by a member of Father Mike's own community, where the priest had emphasized the significance of "breaking bread" with someone. I put that in the story to signify my struggle to forgive.

love me?' I asked you that question ten years ago."

"So you did," said the doctor. "Perhaps my answer didn't sound entirely convincing at the time. I do love you very much, Judy, much better than the first time I spoke the words 'I love you' to you. As I have grown older and wiser, I have come to realize how deeply you love me. Your prayers and your forgiveness have made a big difference in my life. You are often in my thoughts and prayers even though we have not seen each other all these years. Thank you for your friendship, your love, and your prayers, which I know you say for me. Do you still do wood carving?"

"Yes, I do," said Judy.

"Before I go, would you let me see some of your recent work?" Doctor George asked.

With a big smile, Judy replied, "You really have learned to love yourself and me! I was hoping you would ask. I just finished a carving which I would like to give to you. It is of a little girl holding her father's hand with Jesus standing behind them embracing them both."



I gave Fr. Mike a copy of "The Meeting" and arranged to sit at the same table with him at a parish Fourth of July potluck. I prepared a dish and brought it to feed him. But he said little, and for weeks I felt as if there must be more I could do to get closure.

At the library I came across a children's book about a boy who learns respect. I checked it out and left it in the parish office for Fr. Mike to read. He looked quite ashamed the next time I saw him, but still he said nothing.

"THANKSGIVING"

Today was Father Pat's forty-fourth birthday. He was looking forward to celebrating with Marie, whom he had invited to the 12:00 o'clock Eucharist at which he would preside. He was surprised when there was a knock at the door at about 10:30 and Marie was standing outside his door. She held a children's book under her arm.

"Happy Birthday!" she greeted him. "May I come in? I brought you a gift."

He led her to the parlor where she took a seat on the couch.

"Please sit beside me so you can see the pictures," she invited as she opened the book she had brought. He sat beside her as she began reading aloud the story about a small boy who lived on a farm with his pets. This boy was too young to help yet with chores; he spent his morning feeding the ants he kept in a jar and counting cars as they came down his road. When he saw a hummingbird building a nest in the mailbox, he was fascinated by its ability to hover and change direction unlike any other bird he had ever seen. He thought about its being small enough to keep in his pocket. He tried to capture he bird in the mailbox, but it got squeezed as he closed the door and fell to the ground. The boy was frightened. He would have done anything to make the hummingbird OK again. He took it to his big sister and asked her to nurse it back to health. The sister protested that it was too late; the hummingbird was dead. The little

boy insisted he loved the bird; he had not meant to harm it. His sister asked him how he'd like it if a giant bird swooped down and carried him off, even if it loved him! She pointed out that not all creatures want love. Some want respect. The boy buried the bird and vowed to never try to catch another. He let his ants go free. That afternoon his sister brought him a puppy. He played with it very carefully asking the puppy what it wanted to do. That night when his parents asked him his dog's name, he told them he would call it Bird as a reminder of the important lesson he had learned that day. His sister was very proud of him!

As Marie finished reading the story, she turned to Father Pat and said, "The reason child abuse by a spiritual leader is so evil is that when the child breaks through denial that s/he has been abused, her/his life hangs in the balance. Society condones very little expression of anger. To be angry at a spiritual leader is tantamount to being angry at God, a real taboo. Unable to express the anger which is the natural part of any grieving process, the child turns the anger inward. The child struggles with the decision whether to live or suicide. In many cases, the child dies, if not from a violent, final act, then from a slow torturous death by overeating, poisoning by alcohol, nicotine, or some other drug, or by careless driving or some other 'accident.' Although you never touched me, you propositioned me twice. You had been my counselor (and my confessor!). I had transference for you. I was emotionally three years old when I sat in this office four years ago and shared my soul with you. I wanted you to be a good father

to me. Some times when we met after you had propositioned me, you smiled and said, 'Hello.' Other times you passed me without even looking at me! I probably could have endured either one or the other, but I felt very crazy due to your intermittent reinforcement. Nearly two years after you propositioned me the first time, I went to you trying to get free from my emeshment with you. I must have said something like, 'I just want to be friends.' You replied, 'Sometimes I think we could be friends if only we went to bed together. You know, you could just say that you'd be home at 2:00 p.m., and I could come on over.' Father Pat, I was so hurt by those words I repressed them for nine months! When I did admit to myself that you had propositioned me a second time, I felt very angry. I became very depressed. I could not sleep more than a few hours a night. I experienced a lot of physical pain from my lack of sleep. Getting out of bed was the hardest thing I did each day. I kept blaming myself: what had I done that a Priest would say such words to me? Day after day I just wanted to be dead. For weeks, my life hung in the balance! I knew that I had access to a loaded gun at my brother's house. I thought often about blowing my brains out on altar of your church! When I got down to planning when I'd do it, I would get frightened and call someone. I remember two of the times I called the Suicide Prevention and Crisis Center in the middle of the night. On both of those occasions I found people able to listen to my anger. I pounded on my bed, screamed obscenities, and was finally able to sob, getting to the intense grief underneath the anger. Those nurses who took the crisis calls saved my life!

I did go to the mass he celebrated in thanksgiving and for all who had prayed for us. After, I wrote "Thanksgiving" telling of my struggle to come to terms with my abuse.

First I gave Fr. Mike a copy telling him it was a gift given with much love Then I put it together with the first two stories and made fifty copies of my trilogy. I mailed them to all the people on my Christmas card list. The abuse was no longer a secret!



Trying to teach high school students while severely depressed had not worked!
One of my vice principals had placed me under evaluation and had consulted my therapist during the spring term. I wrote this to her just before starting the fall term.

You agreed to celebrate Eucharist today to thank God for all the healing and forgiving S/He has done in us. We also have many people to pray for: those who have helped you to attain sobriety, those who have listened to my feelings, and all of those who have prayed for us. Please also remember to thank God that I am alive today! Father Pat, please don't ever hurt anyone else the way you have hurt me. The next person might not know as much as I do about sharing feelings or be as successful as I was in finding people able to listen; you might have to say that person's funeral Mass.

"We have much to give thanks for!" Father Pat agreed. He and Marie hugged each other with tears streaming down both of their faces. Then Marie left to find a seat in the church while Father Pat got vested for the thanksgiving celebration.

August 16, 1988

Dear E_____,

This summer I have been faithful to three hours of mediation nearly every day. After I said, "Good-by!" to you, I took two weeks of Scripture classes. One was a storytelling class. I had no intention of writing a story, but at 11:00 P.M. the

night before the class ended, I sat down at the computer. "Mimi Grows Up" wrote itself. I took a copy to Fr. Mike, and thought I would then be able to get to work on changing me. The next day when I sat down to meditate, "The Meeting" insisted that I write it down! I did. I shared it. I "broke bread" with Fr. Mike. I tried again to focus on me. While looking for a copy of THE VELVETEEN RABBIT to read on tape as a birthday gift for Fr. Mike, I came across the story of the boy and his pets. I wrote part three of The Trilogy (I'd also been listening to a marvelous set of tapes on codependency.). I took the book to him and asked him to read it. He acted contrite but declined to verbalize responsibility for the ways he had hurt me. In an attempt to help him confess, I confessed to him that I was guilty of hurting my students. He made no response, but as the days passed, I became more and more uncomfortable; I could not own that I really had. My counselor said that the only evil I am capable of is believing myself capable of evil. More and more, I am coming to believe she is right. Lying is evil, whether it is refusing responsibility for one's actions or accusing oneself of wrong one did not do. Try as I might this summer, I cannot believe I am guilty of abusing my students emotionally.



After working through my feelings, I eventually shared "Thanksgiving" with Fr. Mike as my last loving effort to help him accept responsibility for what he had done to me. He had said he'd

celebrate Eucharist for those who had supported us, but he had put me off for a month. He tried again to side-step the issue. I would not be conned or put off; I was very loving but also very persistent and very courageous about insisting he be honest. He set the day. We did celebrate thanksgiving to God for all who have prayed for us and brought healing in our lives, including you. This chapter of my life is at last closed. I have said "Good-by!" to him. I know an immense peace, the greatest of my life. Today is the best day of my life so far!! I am ready to begin my twenty-second year of teaching with great energy, enthusiasm, inner peace, and also great care that I not say anything inappropriate to my students.

You asked me a question just before we left my counselor's office last June about how much might I be able to accomplish if I didn't need to meditate. I'm not displeased with the answer I gave you. However, I wish to add to it. I want to ask you whether someone might not have asked Helen Keller what all she might have accomplished if she had not been blind, deaf, and dumb. I want to tell you that my brother finished his dissertation and his Ph.D. This summer. Although I have no initials to put after my name, I know I am at least as pleased with what I have written (not that it is great literature, I understand!) and the project that I have completed as my brother is with his. It is about closure, forgiveness, and reconciliation in my life and in the life of the Priest, but it is more. It is about peacemaking in the world by beginning with my own heart.

It is about Mimi growing up to be the intelligent, attractive, capable, courageous, self-assured, precious, generous, wonderful, loving, loved, articulate, strong, gentle, joyful, compassionate, honest, holy, patient woman with intact boundaries she is meant to be (a lot like you!).

I invite you to rejoice with me!!

I hope you had a terrific vacation. I'll see you next week.

Love,

Mary

[home](#)

[book dedication](#)

[1989](#)



At the beginning of the summer of 1989 I attended a writing workshop in Taos. I wrote "The Hug". As the summer progressed, I wrote more and more.

1989

THE HUG

She stood up to go. He stood. Without words, they moved toward each other. They stretched out their arms each encircling the other's shoulders. They stood close. Being nearly the same height, there was no strain on either of their parts. There was no grasping, no clutching, just a close, warm embrace, beyond words, that lasted well over a minute, pressure applied with fingers and hands and arms, warmth, reassurance, nothing sexual, yet an exchange of deep love, the resolution of a five year struggle, the promise of an eternal friendship. It was too wonderful. She would have been happy to stand there like that all day, but slowly, with a silent prayer, "I give him back to You, God," she lessened the pressure on his back, felt fully his pressure on hers, then his release. They each took a step back. They smiled at each other. She said, "Thank you," and walked out the door.

GOD'S HUG

**God hugs me.
God's arms are warm and gentle,
encircling, protecting, steady.
There is no strain, no pulling back.
God's hug I do not have to break, to leave.
God does not grow tired of hugging me.**

**"Remember, Mary, my arms are always around
you."
God's hug is an eternal embrace.**

TASTE OF SILENCE

Today I tasted silence.

**Seven hours
I sat with eyes closed,
mind empty of all thoughts.**

**I spoke no words,
exchanged no glances.**

None were needed.

Today I tasted silence.

It is sweet.



GOD'S LOVE

**We swim
in an OCEAN
of God's LOVE!**



THE PURPLE FLOWER

**Dear God, You know those lovely, big purple flowers
You caused to grow down by the creek?
I picked one and took it to my daddy.
It was so pretty! I wanted to make him smile.
"Put it on the table," he growled at me.
"I'm too busy to look at it now!"
I did what he said.
When I came back, the flower was dead.
So is my heart!
God, who killed my daddy's heart?**



LIKE PETER

**As long as Peter kept his eyes on You, Lord,
He was able to make his way across the water.**

**We, also, have rough seas to cross,
on our way to You.**

**This task of ours is beyond our powers.
We simply MUST remember to keep our eyes on
YOU.**

IN YOUR HAND, IN YOUR HEART

**"How can my teacher be so mean?" the student asks
when told to journal every day.**

**"But I want to rest and play!" another complains as
homework is assigned.**

**With their limited experiences, they do not
understand the need for practice now**

In order to master the lessons they must know to

graduate.

**How little I differ from my students, Lord!
"Why won't he thank me?" I have railed
Until I learned his concern has been to shield me
from my pride.**

**"How could You permit me to suffer so, being
propositioned by a Priest!" I've cried.**

**As we sit opposite each other slowly building trust,
forgiveness, peace,
He shares with me how thoroughly You taught him
restitution.**

**It is no accident he is able to listen to my pain
And to make amends to me the way no other incest
survivor's perpetrator can!**

**How carefully, lovingly, thoughtfully You mold the
clay we are**

Potter, in Your gentle hands.

**You want so much to get us ready for our coming
Home to You.**

**You do, indeed, hold us in Your Hand, in Your
Heart.**

IF

FOR MICHAEL

**If I trusted you with something precious,
Would you cradle it in your hands a while,
Warm it gently close to your heart,**



Stroke it tenderly with your fingers?

**If I trusted you with a fragile treasure,
Would you hold it carefully,
Look at it lovingly,
Care for it as if it were your very own?**

**If I trusted you with me, my self,
Would you promise to speak truthfully,
To be present fully,
To return me to myself unharmed?**

I ASK YOUR FORGIVENESS

**Michael was playing in the park
With his new radio controlled airplane.
What fun it was to skim the brow of the hill,
To circle trees!
He hadn't had it long, was not yet a master pilot
When it flew right into me, wounding me.
"I am sorry I hurt you," he assured me.
"I do forgive you," I answered back.**

**Yet, years later, as we sat talking,
I rolled up my sleeve revealing a scar.
"This is where you hurt me,"
I said, pointing to the old wound.
And my words**

left a scar

on Michael's heart.

GOD, PLEASE FORGIVE MY DADDY

God, please forgive my daddy.

He says and does cruel things to me,

But he doesn't mean to.

Someone hurt him when he was just a little boy.

He has scars on the inside

no one can see.

God, please forgive my daddy.

He has no idea

how much

he hurts me.



THE GIFT I WOULD MOST LIKE TO GIVE

If I had unlimited resources and could give any gift to anyone

I chose, I would give Mike the gift of knowing he is loved and

lovable. How would I go about it? I'm not sure. I think it might

take a long time. I think it might take lots of small, thoughtful

signs of love. I'm sure it would take patience and persistence.

Let's see, I could send him a red rose every day for ten years.

Or I could arrange a ride in a hot air balloon. Would he really

like a Rolls Royce? No, all those things are too easy to ignore,

to brush aside. How do you give another person love?

If I could give Mike *any* thing, I'd give him the gift of tears and

hold him in my arms each day until he'd cried out all the pain

**that blinds him to that ocean of God's love in which
he swims!**

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1990

INCEST WITH A HAPPY ENDING

Incest is a terrible crime that severely traumatizes the victim for years if not for life. The essential element is breach of trust. A trusted person, whether parent, older sibling, member of the extended family, surrogate parent, religious authority figure, or therapist uses his or her superior role to force inappropriate sexual behavior on an infant, child or client. The messages the victim receives are "your body belongs to me not you" and "you have no right to your feelings" and "might makes right". Usually secrecy, coercion, and fear play important roles in the incestuous relationship. Victims are threatened, "If you tell, something terrible will happen to you, to me, or to other family members." A few incest victims murder. Some attempt or succeed at suicide. Most spend years in denial, depression, or both. Often by the time the victim is able to remember the incest, the perpetrator is dead. If the perpetrator is still alive, confrontation is seldom advisable; the response may be denial or further victimization. Almost never is the victim's reality validated or forgiveness sought. Restitution is extremely rare. It is, therefore, with great pleasure that I am able to share with you this true story of incest which has a happy ending!

During the spring of 1984, I went to Father Mike several times for counseling. He had shared with me he was an alcoholic. I was working on issues from

my alcoholic childhood. One evening as we sat in his office, he said to me, "I would really like to go to bed with you, but I think it would destroy us both". I was shocked! I had trusted him to be a safe adult with whom I could share the woundedness of my childhood. At the emotional age of three, I was uninterested in a sexual relationship! He had said he would hug me in the Confessional and in his office, but not in public; he had told me not to tell his brother Priests that he hugged me, as if there were something shameful about hugging someone! I was hurt and confused. I knew what he had said to me was inappropriate. I was codependent enough to fall into the trap of believing that I should "protect his anonymity" by not telling anyone.

I did discuss what he had said with a friend who was a professional counselor and an inactive Priest. He confirmed that Father Mike's words had been most inappropriate. I went to Father Mike and confronted him. All I remember of that meeting was his silence. A week later he signed himself into treatment for his alcoholism. When he returned, he would walk past me without looking at me or speaking. I was experiencing disrupted sleep patterns. This went on for months. Finally, I asked to see him.

When I asked him about his behavior, he said that he was not supposed to counsel me any more. When I asked why he hadn't told me, he said he was afraid he would hurt me.

During the months that followed, I was unsuccessful at relating to him simply as my parish Priest. I asked



This photo of red maple leaves was my Christmas present to Father Mike in 1984, the year he first propositioned me.

him to celebrate Eucharist for a special occasion; he was rudely abrupt. I felt deeply hurt and made sure we did not see each other at all for the next few months. When I finally tried to talk to him about it, he claimed it was all a misunderstanding. I asked if I might give him as a Christmas gift a photo I had taken; he accepted and promised to offer his Midnight Mass for me. I was overwhelmed that a Catholic Priest would offer his Midnight Mass for me. I was emotionally enmeshed. I asked him to celebrate Eucharist for my birthday. He suggested he come to my house for a private celebration with just the two of us. He did, but his conversation and behavior were quite stilted. Later he admitted to me that he had intended to have sex with me that evening! We tried having no personal communication. When I went to him to tell him I felt insulted by the fact that he was treating me as a sex object and that I wanted to have a spiritual friendship with him, he propositioned me a second time!

The words the second time were, "Sometimes I think we could be friends if only we went to bed together. You know. You could say, 'I'll be home this afternoon at 2:00,' and I could come on over." I turned down his offer in spite of my strong desire to be friends! I lived in denial for the next nine months. I spent the summer meditating three hours a day. At the end of the summer when someone said to me, "That man propositioned you," the scales fell from my eyes. I felt anger. I tried to confront him, but he was too frightened to see me. I experienced powerlessness. I spent several weeks battling suicidal

thoughts. Early one morning I called my counselor telling her I was unable to get out of bed. She said, "Mary, a three year old cannot seduce an adult." I knew she was right and that I had been emotionally three years old when he'd propositioned me. The world tilted back into place! I discovered Terry Kellogg's article "The Healing Power of Forgiveness" and began the process of learning how to forgive. I spent two weeks at Christmas meditating three hours a day. It was just about a year after he had propositioned me the second time that Father Mike was able to say to me, "I am sorry for all the ways I have hurt you," but he was still drinking and once again signed himself into treatment.

For the next year and a half, each of us was busy with our own inner work. Once he had a year's sobriety, he stopped trying to avoid me saying that he was available when I needed to talk about what had happened. Because he is a very gifted Confessor, I prayed for the miracle that we might resume our Confessor-Penitent relationship; God answered my prayers. During the summer of 1988, aided by the fact that I was again meditating three hours a day, I wrote THE TRILOGY, putting on paper for the first time what had transpired between us. In Part One, "Mimi Grows Up," I hinted. In Part Two, "The Meeting," I disguised. By Part Three, "Thanksgiving," I was able to state plainly! I shared each part as I wrote it. By the end of the summer Father Mike celebrated Eucharist thanking God for all the healing that each of us had experienced and for all those who had been praying for us. This act was an admission of guilt, a sign of his sorrow, and

an act of reparation. It brought me great peace, but we were not quite finished. In another year each of us had grown enough that he was able to say to me the words, "I am sorry I propositioned you" and also to express sorrow for all the times he had not been honest with me. We have spent the past several months struggling for mastery of our respective goals of honesty and detachment. With some measure of these, we are at last parting spiritual friends. The details of the parting are in my memoir "ADIOS."

**+
ADIOS**

On Easter Sunday I promised chocolate to God in thanksgiving for all the healing God has done in me and in Father Mike, in thanksgiving for the fact that we have been Eucharist to each other, and as a prayer that, as we part, we might be Eucharist to all those whom God will send into our lives.

On Holy Saturday I had left a stole I'd made for Father Mike in his mailbox. When we greeted each other after Eucharist on Easter, he wished me peace and joy. He did not mention the stole. That night I called him and asked, "Do you know I love you?"

He replied, "Yes."

"How do you know?" I pressed.

"From the things you say and from your gifts," was his response.

"On a scale of one to ten, how much do you think I love you?" I risked.

"A nine," was his reply.

"Thank you!" After some moments I added, "Did you find the stole?"

"Yes."

"Will you take it with you to San Francisco?"

"Perhaps." Then after a few seconds he added, "It is already in my suitcase. Thank you for the stole and for the Easter card."

"I gave you another gift at Eucharist today you don't know about yet," I said. Then I told him about the chocolate. He did not say "Thank you".

When Father Mike returned from San Francisco, he found a note from me which repeated my gift of chocolate. This man, who in six years had not even sent me a Christmas or birthday card, when he sat down to talk, said, "I brought you a present! You may hate me. I brought you a box of Ghirardelli chocolates. I know you like chocolate."

After a long pause, I responded, "Thank you. Since I won't be eating them, I'll have them for a long

time!"

The following week Father Mike came to dinner at my house, the first time he had visited me in five years. He brought the box of chocolates. "If you change your mind, you will have some good chocolate to eat," was his comment as he placed the box on the altar in my meditation room at my request.

The next day I sent him a message, "I promised God that I will not again eat chocolate as a prayer for you. I made this promise during the offertory of Eucharist. I put it in writing and gave this to a Priest. If I wanted to find a Canon Lawyer somewhere to dispense me from my vow, I suppose I could, but I can't imagine why I would want to! When we sit across the heavenly banquet table from each other, someone will come up behind you and whisper in your ear, 'Mary never ate chocolate after the Easter of 1990. She offered it to God as a prayer for you.' You will look at me and say 'Thank you.' I'll smile back, 'You are very welcome!'"

As we sat talking a few days later I blurted out, "You have been a priceless gift to me!"

"And you to me!" was his heartfelt response.

On the morning of the Monday before he left, I delivered a bouquet of roses for his breakfast table on my way to Eucharist. At noon I asked to see him for the last time. We sat in his office. "You haven't thanked me for my gift of chocolate," I remarked.

"No," he confirmed.



This is the box of chocolates Father Mike brought me during the spring of 1989 after I had promised God that I would abstain from chocolate for the rest of my life as a prayer for him! The box remained on the altar in my meditation room, the chocolate uneaten, for years.

"Do you appreciate it?" I inquired.

"Yes," he responded.

"It is enough!" I said, gesturing "It is finished!"

We proceeded to the Reconciliation Room, where we had met. I knelt before him and shared Psalm 63. I confessed my failures to love and to be patient. I confessed my pride. He shared some wisdom from his own struggles. He asked me to say for my penance an Our Father focusing especially on the words "hallowed by Thy Name" as an act of thanksgiving. Then he placed his hands on my head and prayed the words of absolution over me. We stood and hugged for the last time. Tears were close. I daubed my eyes with my finger. I kissed my finger tips. Anointing with tears and the kiss, I traced a cross on his forehead. "Thank you for everything," he said.

I knew he did not want to hear "Good-by." "Have a good day," I said, utilizing the words he had used so many times to assure me of God's and his love and care. I turned and walked out. Late Tuesday night I left a chocolate muffin in a plastic bag tied to the handle of the truck he had loaded with all the things he was taking to his new assignment. I also stuck one last holy card in the window.

On my way to Eucharist Wednesday morning, I noticed that the truck was not gone, although the muffin and holy card were. I had picked two roses from my garden to take to school. I left one of these

in the door handle of the truck, and I got out a permanent marking pen. I wrote "I am loved." on the large side view mirror where he would see it every time he looked out the window! Then I went into church and sat by the gifts. At the offertory I carried the bread to the altar with the silent prayer, "Abba, I give Father Mike back to You."

This sun catcher was Father Mike's Christmas gift to me in 1990. We never discussed whether he chose a hummingbird because of the story I had shared with him about the boy who accidentally killed a hummingbird before he learned some creatures want respect not love.



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N.B. On May 25, 1990, Father Mike wrote the first letter I'd ever received from him. He began, "I feel I owe you an apology for not saying good-by to you." Our good-by was one of the best things we had done in six years, and he was apologizing for it!!!!!! I struggled to forgive him. Then I made the mistake of writing to tell him I had.

When he visited Albuquerque during February of 1991, he took me out to dinner and we spent several hours talking.

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1991

AMARYLLIS

Shortly before Valentine's Day, I stopped in Wal-Mart to buy a last minute gift for Father Mike. After I had paid for my purchase, I noticed a plant with pink blossoms near the garden section and walked over for a closer look. There were several plants, but upon closer inspection, none of them really interested me. I wandered down the aisle where I noticed two boxes with amaryllis bulbs. One box had its top partially open. I peeked inside. There was a green stalk curled around in the box. At the end of it was a bud. I opened the other box. I saw a stalk three inches tall with a bud close to opening. Neither of the bulbs had had any water or sunshine in many, many months. They looked so different from the bulb at my house I had been watering and talking to since Thanksgiving which had produced two stalks three feet tall and six breathtakingly beautiful blossoms eight inches across. I burst into tears right there in the store.



During the spring of 1991 Father Mike sent me a friendship bracelet which I wore until it fell off. He blessed this bracelet during his visit in the spring of 1992.

The boxes were marked down from eight dollars, but there were two more on another shelf. I didn't have the courage to open the other two. I didn't have twenty dollars to liberate them all. I found a manager and showed her the crippled amaryllis. She thanked me and promised to care for them. As I was leaving the store, I realized my tears were not for the bulbs but for all the children who grow up crippled by lack of proper nourishment, both physical and



emotional. Like all the tears we shed, my tears were for myself.

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THE CHILD

I am at a workshop. This morning one of the speakers led the group through an experiential exercise to get us in touch with the wounded part of ourselves. First she described a movie she had seen about an autistic child. Filmed over a two year period, a young woman therapist tried to contact a four year old autistic girl. Each time the therapist approached the child, the child would run away - on tip toes. The therapist mimicked her. When the child fluttered her hands, the therapist fluttered her hands. At one point after months of such attempts to enter the child's world, the therapist touched the tip of one of the girl's fingers with one of her own fingers, and, for just a moment, the girl let the finger tips touch before she ran away. Many more months went by. A moment came when the therapist was able to touch the palm of her hand to the palm of the little girl for a moment before the child ran away. The child had not looked at another human being all this time. She would avert her eyes and turn her head, but for the briefest part of a second, the therapist was able to establish eye contact. After two years of such work, one day as the therapist was

pursuing the child, the girl turned and threw herself into the arms of the therapist. Now, the therapy could begin!

We were instructed to reenact this progression by first walking around the room avoiding looking at or touching anyone. Then we were to touch only finger tips. The next step was to touch palm to palm. Finally, we were to hug each other warmly making full eye contact as we approached. I was unable to follow the directions. I sat in a chair doubled over with emotional pain, sobbing. I was flooded with memories of the physical and emotional abandonment I experienced at age one and a half. Others in the group courageously passed by touching me first with their finger tip and then with their palm. I kept sobbing. When someone came and leaned over trying to hug me as I sat in the chair, I was able to come up out of my pain enough to stand up and hug the person back.



I had several important thoughts from this whole experience. One woman who approached me was seemingly in even more pain than I was. I was able to pray for her asking God that my woundedness might enable me to very effectively channel God's love to her. I embraced my own woundedness and kissed it; it can be a source of healing for others. My tears are a blessing, the means God is using to heal me. Twice in the past I had wept as I listened to the story of a young man who, upon taking a job as an attendant in a mental hospital, chose to eat his dinner every evening in a rocking chair next to a patient who had not spoken to anyone in at least ten years. Even

on his days off he would appear and rock in perfect rhythm to her rocking. After several months of this, one night as he got up to leave, the woman said to him, "Good night, Tom" I realized that I was that woman. Father Mike's words "I pray for you several times a day", have penetrated my fear, hurt and isolation. I realize I am not alone. I believe I am loved. I know that God has always been with me. I feel only compassion for my parents who had experienced five miscarriages and the death of a baby born prematurely without being able to adequately grieve any of these losses. I rejoice at God's healing work in my life!

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MY SUMMER VACATION

Self mutilated. That's what I did this summer in Amarillo. I found an electric cord and hit myself with it on the back until I saw red welts in the mirror. Then I went out and broke off a branch of a tree. I sneaked it into my room sure that anyone who saw me would know what I intended to do. I stripped off all its leaves and tried hitting myself on the back with it. The physics was all wrong. It worked just fine on my thighs, however. I beat myself until the fronts of my legs were red with welts.

I enjoyed the pain. I enjoyed the sexual arousal that came with it. As I looked in the mirror I saw not a smile but a terrible grimace. The words I heard playing in my head were "Bad, bad, bad, bad girl." I was reenacting childhood abuse trying to "get it right this time". I was disappointed with the welts. I had no internal permission to draw blood. I had to stop. I knew as soon as the welts went away, however, I'd beat myself again. I was frightened at what I had done and at the realization I was powerless to stop. I was in the grip of a true obsessive compulsion.

I sought help. I called Father Mike, who had struggled for years to get sober. "I can only quit for myself, not for anyone else," he shared. "If I feel shame about what I've done, it only strengthens the compulsion to repeat my behavior. What works is the first three steps of the Twelve Steps. I admit I am powerless. I acknowledge my Higher Power can help me. I surrender the problem to my Higher Power."

The next time I wanted to hit myself, I toyed around with the thought. I discovered I could become sexually aroused just imagining hitting myself! I experienced no shame. I had to fight the urge to pull up my dress and show off my welts!

When I decided to try the first three steps, they worked! I prayed, "I can't stop this. You can; You can do ALL things . I'll let You stop me." My Higher Power was right there. The sexual arousal was removed. The compulsion was removed. I didn't hit myself. I put the cord back and broke the switch into small pieces and threw it away. I have



not hit myself since.

I did experience the desire to hit myself again. I let myself explore the feelings knowing I would not need to act on them. During several previous months I had been experiencing a twitching in my legs when I relaxed. Now as I lay on my bed remembering my father using a switch on my legs to punish me as a child, my lower body convulsed, and I realized the sexual arousal was caused by fear of being hit that had been stored in my body as sexual tension. Over a period of several hours of letting myself remember and convulse, I was able to release much stored tension.

Next, I lay on my bed and gently stroked my legs. When I lightly touched places where I'd been hit with a switch or a belt, my legs would twitch releasing more tension. Every time I prayed the first three steps, they worked, though sometimes I had to pray them several times in succession. In a few days I was completely freed from the compulsion.

After returning home, I took myself for a massage, some healing touch from another. I expected lots of tears and twitching. I experienced little of either, but after the massage therapist had finished and left me alone on the table, I reached down and gently touched my legs. I burst into tears. I was able to tell my Higher Power how sorry I was for self mutilating.

Earlier in the summer during a prayer for healing of memories, I'd gone back to age three remembering being switched on the legs by my father for "being

sassy". I realized then that I had not done anything deserving of being physically abused. My father was overwhelmed by his feelings about my mother's alcoholism. He had permission to express anger but no other emotion. I was just an easy target for his frustration. During the prayer I had imagined talking back to my father in the way no three year old would dare, telling him he was hurting me, I didn't deserve to be hit, and that he should stop. I had imagined Jesus walking up to my father and embracing him. My father had burst into tears. Seeing my father cry during this prayer experience was very healing for me. It removed some of my fear and released me from the need to act out his fear I have carried as anger. I had been able to tell my father I forgave him for physically abusing me. My summer vacation was not boring! It was a time of much inner healing for me.

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1992 Part A

PRIVATE VOWS

I, Mary Isabel Steele, desiring to make some small return for the infinite Love given to me, offer myself and my life to my Lord, Jesus Christ. I promise to live the rest of my life in the Christian Community according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in poverty, consecrated celibacy, obedience, nonviolence, and stability. I trust that God, Who has given me the grace and desire to make this offering, will also give me the grace to fulfill it one day at a time.

I promise this before Vincent De Leers, my Spiritual Director, and Joel P. Garner, my Pastor, March 21, 1992, the forty-eighth anniversary of my Baptismal vows.



Mary Isabel Steele

Vincent De Leers, O. Praem.

Joel P. Garner, O. Praem.

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A STORY OF GOD'S MERCY

Healing takes a long, long, long time. When survivors of sexual abuse first get through their denial and start to remember and to feel the pain of their abuse, they want the whole thing to be finished in weeks or months. That isn't how it happens! Healing takes years. However, healing does happen. I would like to share my story because it has a happy ending, because it may give other survivors hope, and because it reveals God's Mercy.

My name is Mary and I am an incest survivor. My perpetrator was not a parent or other trusted family member but a member of the clergy. Eight and a half years ago I was propositioned by a Priest to whom I'd gone for counseling. I'd only seen him four times, but already I had transferred to him all my feelings for my father and my mother. Right in the middle of sharing with him details of growing up in my alcoholic family, he said to me, "I'd really like to go to bed with you, but I think it would destroy us both." Just these words, from someone in such a powerful position, whom I trusted so much, nearly destroyed me. I was shocked. I knew his words were inappropriate. He was a Priest! He had shared with me that he was an alcoholic. He had instructed me not to tell the Priests he lived with that he hugged me, although there was nothing inappropriate about our hugs. I felt I had to keep his words a secret, that I had to protect his anonymity!

Shortly after this incident, I did feel free to talk about what had happened to a counselor I'd just begun seeing. She did not understand incest. "You two are in love!" was her comment. She didn't know

how to listen either. I found a new counselor.

Father signed himself into treatment for his alcoholism. During the weeks he was gone, I started attending Twelve Step meetings for Adult Children of Alcoholics. I sent him get well cards and prayed for him. He sent me word that he was grateful for my prayers. When he came home, he walked right past me without even looking at me. I left town to attend summer school. But I couldn't sleep. I couldn't study. A counselor at the school said I sounded to him like the women he'd been seeing who had been remembering incest for a couple of years. I dropped out of school. As soon as I got home, I knocked on Father's door and asked him why he hadn't spoken to me. "I'm not supposed to counsel you any more, and I was afraid I'd hurt you if I told you," was his reply!

Six weeks later I asked him to help me celebrate a special occasion with a Mass. He said he was too busy, that he was getting ready to leave on vacation. Undaunted, a couple of days later I left him a note saying I'd be at the 5:30 p.m. Mass at which he was presiding if he would leave me an invitation with his secretary by 5:00 p.m. He left no note. I was crushed. I avoided him for several weeks after that. Just before Christmas I spoke with him again; we unsnarled our communication. I asked him if I might give him a Christmas present. He said I could. I told him I would like a spiritual gift from him. He said he would offer his Midnight Mass for me. I was ecstatic for weeks.

Father is especially gifted as a Confessor. Sometime during the months that followed, when I went to him to celebrate Reconciliation, besides confessing my sins, I told him I needed to hear him say he was sorry for his words to me during the previous spring. He did and the incest seemed behind us, but our communication continued to vacillate between terrible and wonderful. Often he would pass without smiling or saying, "Hello!". When he did, I immediately felt afraid. "What had I done to make Father mad at me?" I'd ask myself. Reading Jampolski's book LOVE IS LETTING GO OF FEAR was one of the things that was useful at this time. It helped me to figure out we needed to stop acting on our fear of each other. Another was my slow realization that I was projecting all my "father stuff" onto this Priest, not seeing him for who he really was. By now I was also attending three or four Twelve Step meetings a week.

That summer I asked to speak to Father just before he left on vacation. "I'll be very busy when I get back," he informed me. "I have to help the Pastor buy a new car." I sat in his church daily and wept, puzzling over his words that didn't make sense to me, but for the next five months I didn't attempt any communication with him. Finally, in October, I knocked on his door and said, "I'm sorry to disturb you, but I seem to need your help. What did I do that you are too busy to talk to me any more?" "You didn't do anything," he responded. "I'd been having sexual fantasies about you." I felt immense relief.

Just after Christmas of 1985, I called Father about

our garbled communication. When I stopped at the church, we talked. I just want to be friends, I insisted. "Sometimes I think we could be friends if only we went to bed together," he replied. "You know, you could say, 'I'll be home this afternoon at two o'clock,' and I could come on over." As much as I wanted to be friends with him, I told him, "No!" I must not have been incested as a child. My sexual boundaries are pretty good. It is my emotional boundaries that are damaged. I mentioned Father's words to a few people and then repressed them.

One meeting I remember well must have occurred at this time, though its date is hazy and not easy to look up in the over fifty notebooks I have filled with my journals but have never indexed. When I came in, Father, he asked if he might sit next to me and put his arm around me. I had no objection, but my response was to burst into tears. I explained that this reminded me of the hours I spent sitting imagining God's arms around me. Father asked if he might have a hug and a kiss. I replied that I'd be happy to hug him but that I would not kiss him. "I do not want there to ever be anything sexual between us," I said. "I wasn't thinking of a tonsil tickler!" he protested. "I'm sure you weren't," I responded, "but I'm not comfortable with any kind of kiss."

Over the years, our hugs were always wonderful. There was never anything sexual about them. Even when we'd talk for an hour and seemingly get nowhere, our warm embrace declared louder than any words that we did care deeply for one another. Always as our arms encircled each other's shoulders,

our hearts were united in prayer.

The summer of 1986 I was in so much pain I took no vacation. I had learned how to do Centering Prayer, a Christian form of meditation. Three hours each day all summer I sat in church asking God's healing. It was September before I realized Father had propositioned me a second time. I was riding along the bike trail with a friend when we came upon another Priest I knew from Adult Children of Alcoholics meetings. I stopped and asked if I should change parishes. "You are asking the wrong question," he replied. "That man propositioned you." It was as if someone had flipped open the blinds. I had words for what had happened. I got in touch with my anger.

I had been seeing my new counselor weekly. Now I made an appointment with one who had the reputation for being the incest expert in town. I asked her for a road map. I was in a lot of pain. I wanted to know where I was on the journey. I wasn't happy to learn how much farther I had to go! I told her I wanted to confront this Priest about his second proposition. She advised against it. "He'll just deny it happened or blame you. If you shame him, he'll go out and hurt some other woman." I didn't want any of those things to happen so I tried to just "let go".

I couldn't just "forget" what had happened. I made Father an audio tape and handed it to him, confronting him indirectly. On it I asked for a meeting and an apology. I might as well have been asking for the moon! He was capable of neither at

that time. Admitting my powerlessness in this situation didn't come easy.

I turned my anger inward upon myself. I struggled with suicidal thoughts. I couldn't sleep. I was finding trying to teach my high school students very difficult. One morning I called my counselor at 7:00 a.m. "I've been awake since 6:00 a.m., but I can't get out of bed," I reported. "I'm immobilized." She replied, "Mary, a three year old cannot seduce an adult." The world tipped back on its axis! I knew I had been emotionally only three years old when I had gone to this Priest for counseling. It wasn't my fault that he had propositioned me!! I got out of bed and went to work!

Sure that I wanted the sexual abuse to stop, I went to his superior. "Father propositioned me. I forgive him and myself," I said. "Healing takes a long time," was his only response. I went to my Pastor. His reply was, "Well, that is all behind you now," as he tossed his head and glanced over his shoulder. They didn't tell me it was my fault or transfer Father to another state, but I didn't feel heard. In December I told my story to the Archbishop. He listened. He believed me. He was concerned for me and for the Priest. He promised to talk to him. He promised to pray for us both.

I had said "I forgive him," but I was still far from forgiveness. I sat in silence praying Centering Prayer three hours a day each day of my Christmas vacation. I found Terry Kellogg's article "The Healing Power of Forgiveness." I made copies of it

and carried it with me everywhere in my journal. I read it and reread it. In it, he lists steps of the forgiveness process. As soon as I thought I'd made some progress, I'd go back to the article to see what to do next. I learned that although I had not caused the proposition by anything I had said or done, I was guilty of putting this Priest on a pedestal. I had given away my power to him. In order to ensure that he could never incest me again, I had to change. I had to take back my power, to stop seeing him as a father, an authority figure. Afraid of me, he had been unwilling to make an appointment with me. I went to him as he sat in the confessional. I let him hear me tell God that I was sorry I had given him so much power. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation I asked for the grace to change so he could not hurt me again. I asked for the grace to forgive myself and him.

After Christmas, I asked again to see Father. I requested that we meet in the chapel. I took him the gift of an icon of Saint Francis and Saint Clare. I assured him again that what I wanted was a spiritual friendship with him. He was able to say, "I'm sorry for all the ways I have hurt you." He had hurt me in a lot of ways, but it wasn't as explicit an apology as I wanted to hear. It was the best he could manage at the time. Still afraid of me, he asked, "How long is this going to go on?" I asked him to pray an Our Father with me and I departed. That spring he left town for another alcoholism treatment program.

This time Father was gone for six months. I didn't know his address. I didn't try to write. I did try to

get on with my life. The Pastor's behavior towards me was very cold. One Saturday morning I asked to speak with him. "Do you think I'm evil?" I asked when we'd sat down in his office. He immediately stood up and announced, "I have better things to do!" and walked out. I felt very angry. I turned my anger inward. I had suicidal thoughts. I decided that that parish was not a very healthy place for me. I joined a parish on the far side of town.

When Father returned home, I got word to him that I'd left his parish but not because of him. I added that the months he'd been gone before I'd left had been helpful to me because I hadn't had to wonder every time I approached the church door whether I'd run into him. I told him I hoped my absence would help his healing. I asked his prayers and assured him of mine.

Meanwhile, I was very busy with school. Dealing with the incest the year before had not helped my teaching at all. A vice principal had placed me under formal evaluation. She was observing my teaching every week and teaching me to write five-step lesson plans. Accepting the humiliation of this situation and struggling with my fears of authority figures took all my energy.

The parish to which I'd transferred did not prove comfortable. I moved again. But this wasn't "home" either. For the Easter Vigil of 1988 I went back to Father's parish. I'd been praying a lot to be able to forgive the Pastor. That night before the Vigil service, the Pastor would not even speak to me, but at

the Kiss of Peace, the Pastor and I were able to share the peace of the Risen Jesus from our hearts!

By the summer of 1988 Father had had a year of sobriety, and I had been removed from formal evaluation. It was time for us to resume our work of healing. I was again doing Centering Prayer three hours a day. Most of the boats going down the river of my consciousness had Father's name on them. In the past, letters I had written and shared had brought healing. I again turned to writing as a way of clarifying my thoughts and seeking closure. Over the summer I wrote three short fiction pieces about the incest. The first, "Mimi Grows Up," is about the good father teaching the little girl to sit on the lap of Jesus in prayer. It is truly a piece of fiction. I never asked to sit in Father's lap, and he never spoke to me about prayer. Yet, when I shared it with Father, he seemed honored.

The second, "The Meeting," came to me sentence by sentence one morning as I was meditating. When I got up, I spoke it into a tape recorder then sat down at my computer and typed it out word for word. I still couldn't say "A Priest propositioned me." I changed the perpetrator to a psychiatrist, but named the ways Father had hurt me. I set the story ten years in the future and gave it the ending I wanted to story to have with the perpetrator able to express his sorrow and his gratitude. He and the survivor break bread together as he admires her art work. (Father had never let me show him my photographs; later he explained he'd feared my offer was akin to the invitation "Come upstairs and let me show you my

etchings!') When I tried to explore the symbolism in this story with Father after I'd sent him a copy, his only response was, "I don't care to discuss it."

Several weeks went by. Finally a third story wrote itself. In this one I was able to use the word "Priest," and I quoted his explicit proposition. I changed his name and the sequence of events, but otherwise, "Thanksgiving" was very close to reality. I printed out a copy and placed it in a large green envelope. I took it to Father as he was hearing confessions. "I hope you appreciate this gift. I give it with great love," I said, handing it to him. On August 1st he did offer a Mass of thanksgiving, as the story said, for all who had supported us with their prayers and had been instrumental in our healing. I printed out fifty copies of what was now **THE TRILOGY** and mailed them to most of the people on my Christmas card list. The bad secret was public knowledge.

A little over a year after this, I was finally healed enough to sit down face-to-face with Father and say, "I need to hear you say the words 'I'm sorry I propositioned you.'" He was healed enough to be able to say them! It was two and a half years after he'd gotten sober again. It was two years after I'd begun praying Centering Prayer for two hours every day. At last I felt some peace!

The next month I went to Father and thanked him for propositioning me! I realized how much good had come to me out of our communication difficulties. I had learned how to give pain to God. I had learned more about forgiveness than I had ever

thought I wanted to know! I'd faced the pain of my childhood in an alcoholic family and experienced another layer of healing in relation to my parents and to authority figures. I had learned a lot about prayer. I had learned a little about humility I had discovered a writing talent which had been blocked the first forty years of my life. I have since realized that I have been called to a new ministry.

Before my experiences with Father, I had had people talk to me about their sexual abuse, but I had been able to listen only with my head. In the past few years several men and almost all the women I know have shared memories of childhood or clergy sexual abuse. Now I am able to listen with my heart. I have also become active in the Survivor Network as a writer, photographer, and ad salesperson. I am able to pray for perpetrators as well as for survivors. On at least one occasion I have been allowed to be a bridge between the two.

Another gift with the pain has been an increase in trust. It is clear to me that God has been present in all of this. I had just returned to the church a couple of months before I met Father. My faith is my most precious possession. Though leaving the Church has crossed my mind at very painful moments, it has not been an option for me. I had avoided alcoholics after all the painful experiences with my mother. Only through this Priest did I look again at my childhood. God didn't pick just anyone to help heal him. If I had been incested as a child, we likely would have ended up in bed together. If he'd ever yelled at me, I'd have abandoned the struggle. His patience and

courage were a match for my patience and persistence! I have also been gentle. Father had not heard an angry word out of me until this past January! And I, also, get credit for courage. Many, many of the times I asked to talk with him my hands were dripping sweat! We were carefully matched to do this work together.

Father has been sober for five years now. Without his sobriety, none of the other healing could have happened. For years I have been so grateful that every month on the day of his AA birthday I have offered my whole day to God as a prayer of thanksgiving and as a prayer for his continued sobriety. On Easter of 1990 I had made a private promise to God that I would not again eat chocolate, something I enjoy, and whenever I have had the opportunity to pass some up, I have offered that as a prayer of thanksgiving for all the healing God has done in both of us and as a prayer for our continued healing.

Many survivors these days are asking their perpetrators to pay for their counseling. I had told Father that I did not want money from him, but I did want his prayers. Over the years I felt free to ask his prayers for my intentions. He met with me whenever I requested, listening to me as I worked to unravel the painful snarl of our communication from the time when he was drinking. For years I had hoped we could somehow be friends, but I have come to understand that the power in our relationship was too unequal. Because we met in a pastoral counseling situation, a friendship between equals could never be

possible for us. We did develop a deep spiritual love for one another that will last for all eternity.

Father has been assigned to another parish miles away, but we have kept in touch. Just a year ago, he shared, "I think of you and pray for you several times a day." I'd been doing that for years. I was happy to learn that there was this mutuality to our relationship and delighted to realize that although I still often feel abandonment from my childhood, we are daily united in prayer. He was able to ask for my prayers saying that he really counted on them to sustain him in his ministry.

This spring we had a chance to visit. Father shared that in therapy he had remembered a comment made to him years before he met me by a counselor who did not understand celibacy. "I think that was a factor in my propositioning you. If you had accepted, I would have gone running down the hall." "I'm sure you would have," I agreed. "How grateful I am to have been an instrument of your healing." A month ago I was finally able to bring myself to ask him if he'd ever been guilty of any sexual misconduct with anyone else. He assured me that he hadn't, and I believe him.

God truly used us to do deep healing in each other over the years. I wish that God had already healed Father's writing block enough that he could share his version of this story as a companion piece. When Father does write from his perspective, God's Mercy to us both will be even more deeply revealed. It is with a prayer that all who read this might see God's

grace at work in each event of our lives, even the most painful, that I tell this story with the happy ending.

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1992 Part B

WHAT SURVIVORS WANT

Years ago after I had confronted my perpetrator, he asked, "How much longer will this go on?" He did not understand what survivors want:

- 1) the abuse to stop**
- 2) acknowledgment that the abuse happened**
- 3) acknowledgment by the perpetrator that the abuse was his/her fault not the fault of the one perpetrated**
- 4) the perpetrator to get treatment so others will not be abused**
- 5) at least payment for counseling so the abused one can heal**

My perpetrator and I got to forgiveness and reconciliation. This was possible because he

- 1) got sober**
- 2) got honest**
- 3) asked forgiveness for the specific acts of abuse of which he was guilty**
- 4) made restitution**
- 5) stopped abusing me**
- 6) got into therapy assuring me no others would ever be abused**

and lots of people prayed for us a lot.7/92

FROM MY LETTER OF 7/22/92

TO FATHER MIKE'S PROVINCIAL SUPERIOR

When I negotiated with Father that I wouldn't ask for money for my counseling but only his prayers, I was not aware that I really had an option. If I am really going to settle for no money, then I WANT THE FOLLOWING:

Written apologies from the Superior and the Pastor for not handling my disclosure better.

I want your community to add the petition "for all abused and all abusers" to some part of your daily prayers. This includes all abused children, victims of torture, battered spouses, etc., not only those abused or abusing in the church, though there seems to be plenty of those from reading the news these days!

I want your community to urge all members to read Rutter's book SEX IN THE FORBIDDEN ZONE... I want a workshop for your members that stresses the following points:

1) It is always the responsibility of the one in power to maintain sexual boundaries, EVEN if the one without power is seductive. (I NEVER WAS!)

2) To have sex with someone who does not know one is a member of a religious community is a violation of one's vow of celibacy, but to EVEN SAY "I'd like to have sex with you" to a woman or man who sees one as having the power of being a Priest or Brother is ALSO spiritual abuse SO SERIOUS IT CAN RESULT IN SUICIDE!!!! It is called INCEST, because of the betrayal of trust.

3) Seeing the same person/parishioner more than four times for pastoral counseling requires that the pastoral counselor be supervised, i.e. be seeing a professional counselor with whom one can process whatever personal issues are triggered by listening. Budget this under continuing education.

4) If, after making a commitment to be a pastoral counselor or spiritual director to someone, one has so many sexual fantasies about them one fears violating their boundaries and it is necessary to terminate the relationship, IT MUST BE DONE VERY CAREFULLY. One does not say, "I have to help the pastor buy a new car." One tells the counselee the TRUTH, though NEVER the CONTENT of the sexual fantasies. AND one arranges for the person to see someone else, never just abandons them.

Why am I having to reach Priests how to relate to parishioners? Why in eight and a half years hasn't some Priest or counselor shown me a list of your professional guidelines?? WRITE SOME!!!!!! PUBLISH THEM WIDELY!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Print them in parish bulletins several weeks in a row. Give copies to all new parishioners.

September 3,1992

Dear Chancellor:

I am writing at the request of Ms. Mary Steele...

She also requested that I pass on to you the total bill for her counseling. Our records show that between the dates of 4-17-84 when Mary first began her counseling with me and 8-12-92, the last session I held with Mary, her total counseling bill was \$4,803.60...

Much of Mary's counseling did center on experiences, issues and feelings about the priest in question. I have told Mary that it is difficult for me to put an exact percentage on the amount of her counseling focused on this issue but I have agreed that it was at least 50%.

As I mentioned in our meeting, Mary's pain and distress are quite real and are caused mostly by the lack of validation she has experienced in the course of this process...

Sincerely,

Corinne Taylor, M.A.

**+
"INCEST"**

"Mary, you used the wrong word when you wrote "THE STORY OF GOD'S MERCY".

"Which word?"

"You know. That word."

"Incest?"

"Yes."

Some people can't even say it. Others give me scowling looks. Still others simply don't understand. They grew up with Webster's definition: sexual relations between people too closely related to marry legally.

"If all that Priest ever did to you was proposition you twice, how can you call that "incest"?"

On April 12, 1984, (I just looked in my journal. I didn't have the date memorized; the words are graven in my memory.) I sat in a parlor of my parish rectory. It was about 8:30 PM. I was talking about the pain of growing up with an alcoholic mother. I was speaking to an assistant pastor, dressed in a Roman collar, whom I'd first met in the confessional. He'd been kind. He'd hugged me. He'd listened to me three or four times before in his parlor. He'd helped me celebrate my 40th birthday by presiding at a Eucharist at my house attended by my father, brother, and about thirty friends.

This man wasn't older than I; he's five months younger. He wasn't better educated than I. I have a master's; he has a bachelor's. He is intelligent, though, perhaps no more than I. But he was a PRIEST. I DID NOT SEE HIM AS AN EQUAL. I saw his POWER, his AUTHORITY. I TRUSTED HIM. I was sharing details of my life with this man I hardly knew because I believed he cared about me with God's Love. I thought he'd been trained to listen. I hoped he'd pray for me. He'd told me he

was an alcoholic. I hoped he understood the dynamics of an alcoholic family. I had transference for him, that is, I saw him as a father figure. I was vulnerable. I was feeling lots of emotional pain from the wounds from my childhood relationships with my father and my mother.

Out of a clear blue sky - that means I was not talking about any thing sexual. I wasn't thinking sexual thoughts. Having sex with this man had NEVER crossed my mind! - he said to me, "I would really like to go to bed with you, but I think it would destroy us both."

The second time Father propositioned me was a year and a half later. He'd been to treatment for his alcoholism, apologized to me for his first proposition and, although I was still projecting my unfinished father figure needs onto him and he was still projecting his unresolved sexual issues onto me (neither of us were clear enough to have possibly said these words at the time!), we had been struggling to relate. On January 3, 1986, again sitting in his parlor, I said to him, "I just want to be friends with you." The pastor had gone out of town leaving Father as acting pastor. He'd been drinking. He responded to me with, "Sometimes I think we could be friends-if only we went to bed together. You know, you could say, "I'll be home this afternoon at 2:00 o'clock,' and I could come on over."

On both occasions the Adult in me thought, "How inappropriate! That man is a Priest!" But it wasn't my Adult that was sitting in the chair talking to him.

It was the three year old Child in me, the part of me that looked up to him and trusted him and wanted his approval. Her response was to ask, "What did I do wrong?" It is the question that every child asks - when parents divorce or a parents dies - the child always assumes she or he is responsible. Why would a Priest, a religious Priest with a vow of celibacy, speak like that to me? Did I say something wrong? Was I immodestly dressed? Why won't he love me the way a good father should? WHY?????

When parents incest their children, they instruct them not to tell. This Priest had already told me not to let any of the Priests he lived with know he hugged me. He hugged me in the confessional and in the parlor, but he would not hug me at the church doors where Priests greeted parishioners after Eucharist. His hugs were not sexual, but for some reason, he was ashamed of them and he told me to keep them a secret.

He was an alcoholic. I knew little about AA, but I did know that one was not supposed to break an alcoholic's anonymity. Somehow the Child in me got all those things mixed up. I felt I shouldn't tell anyone what this Priest had said to me.

Rather than respect my vulnerability, this wounded Priest took advantage of it. He said words no counselor should ever say to a client, no Priest should ever say to anyone, certainly not a parishioner who had come in trust, seeking help. He had been drinking. His Adult was not present. It was his wounded Child that responded to me. My three year

old could not understand that for years. She saw a man in clerical garb who looked like a good father to her. She was exploited. The word for this exploitation is "incest."

The definition of "incest" read at every Incest Survivors Anonymous meeting includes "...verbal abuse...by any adult in a position of power who betrays the trust of a trusting adult."

9/13/92

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**THE PRIEST WHO COULD NOT TELL THE
TRUTH
A MYSTERY THRILLER BY MARY I. STEELE**

**This book is dedicated to Father Mike without whom
it could not have been written. October 1992.**

CHAPTER ONE

Father Gabriel bent low over the altar. Before him were the bread, wine and grape juice that would soon be changed into the Body and Blood of Jesus. His mind was full of distractions. Had his homily pleased the right people? The Bishop had sent him to this parish because of his bookkeeping experience. The debt on Saint Michael's Church was enormous. The previous priest had alienated so many parishioners that Sunday contributions had fallen way off.

As he began the litany invoking by name many of the greatest saints in heaven to join what was about to take place, a part of Father's brain registered an

unusual sound from the choir loft. "THIS IS MY BODY," he pronounced over the small, thin, white wavers of bread. As he raised the large Host for all to see and adore, a swinging object caught his eye. "Jesus Christ!" escaped his lips as he almost dropped the Host. Hanging by the neck from the choir loft was the limp body of a woman. Pinned to her short red dress was a sign so large even he, at the far end of the church could read it: CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE KILLS, FATHER GABE!...

UPON HEARING OF MY STRUGGLE FOR TRUTH AND JUSTICE, ONE PRIEST WHO HAS SUPPORTED ME OVER THE YEARS RECOMMENDED I READ ANDREW GREELEY'S BOOK CARDINAL SINS, AN EXPOSE OF CARDINAL CODY, AND WRITE MY OWN NOVEL. I STARTED THIS MURDER MYSTERY, BUT DECIDED TO CHANNEL MY ENERGY MORE POSITIVELY. (Ten years later I realize I did not understand what was happening well enough to write an expose.)

WRITING THIS WAS BETTER THAN ACTUALLY HANGING MYSELF IN FATHER MIKE'S CHURCH!!

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1992 Part C

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THE END AND NEW BEGINNINGS

I devoted the summer of 1992 to writing and reading about clergy sexual abuse in an attempt to get closure on my painful relationship with Father Mike. I learned about a Lutheran Bishop who brought healing to a congregation where a Pastor had sexually abused several women by listening to their stories, believing them, asking the Pastor to remove his name from the clergy roster, appointing a special Pastor for the Pastor and his family, arranging for the church to pay for the women's counseling, meeting with all the Pastors in the city to let them know what was going on, and first writing to - then meeting with to answer questions of - the entire congregation, breaking the secret and beginning the healing. I wrote an article about it. I read and reviewed two books, a pamphlet, and a magazine article. I watched and reviewed a video. I wrote "THE STORY OF GOD'S MERCY" and shared a hundred copies at a gathering of three hundred survivors of sexual abuse in Santa Fe. In Albuquerque, I attended the performance of Night Chant where survivors of sexual abuse told their stories in poetry, song, and dance. My brother sent me money to attend an ecumenical workshop in Denver, THE SECRET SIN: SEXUAL ADDICTION IN THE CHURCH, where I gave away another seventy-five copies of "MERCY."

From my reading and talking to people, I came across the concept of dual roles. Professionals are not supposed to have dual roles. A doctor does not practice medicine on a family member. A lawyer does not handle a case for a friend. A counselor is not to socialize with a client. Priests eat dinner with members of their congregation, but if two people meet in a counseling situation, modern ethicists agree they cannot become friends. I wrote to Father Mike asking him how this applied to us since we had met in the confessional and I had gone to him for counseling.

On May 1st, Father Mike had been given his first job as Pastor in a new diocese. Before, he had been sending me cards and gifts, leaving prayerful messages on my answering machine, and generally acting like a friend. After, he told me he was too busy to read my letters, didn't even say "thank you" for generous spiritual gifts I had sent him, and acted as if he were too important to have anything to do with me. I felt terribly rejected and confused. I was in a lot of pain. When I asked him on several occasions what was going on, he was vague and evasive. I had stuck out painful times with him before simply crying a lot and offering all the pain to God, but this time I kept insisting he tell me the truth about what was going on. I kept sharing with him how much pain I was in. Finally, on Wednesday, July 15th, we had a conversation that was memorable for its clarity. Father Mike said, "I have been sending you double messages because I have wanted your friendship, your letters and your visit, but at the same time part of me knew that to act as a friend

toward you was wrong." WOW! At last all the insanity of the previous eight and a half years made sense! While my counselor had said it was dishonest of him to not treat me as a friend, he had believed it was wrong for him to do so. He'd mentioned his indoctrination against particular friendships, but I had dismissed anything so archaic. We agreed to continue to pray for each other but to have no other communication than a Christmas card. What relief and peace and gratitude I felt.

I was busy mailing out over a hundred copies of "MERCY." I left a copy for the Archbishop. I learned that my archdiocese already had a policy on clergy sexual misconduct, and that disclosures by survivors of sexual abuse were being welcomed for healing! I told two close women friends both of who had been sexually abused by Priests in our archdiocese. One asked me to accompany her as she disclosed her abuse. I sat and observed as the chancellor listened to her story of being raped by a Priest. He believed her. He reminded her it was not her fault. He commended her courage for telling. He asked what she needed to heal. When she said she wanted a written apology and assurance that the Priest will get treatment so he won't abuse anyone else, he promised to contact the Priest's community. Then he reminded her she needed to look to her own healing. He asked if she had had counseling. When she replied that she had been in counseling for four and a half years, he urged her to figure out how much she had spent on it so he could see she was paid. He said she'd need more and invited her to return to her counselor with the assurance that he

would see the counselor was paid. Learning of the experience of my first friend, the second decided to go to the chancellor. I had already obtained an apology for her; she is now getting some of her counseling paid for.

I had some feelings about the fact that no one was offering to pay for counseling years ago when I was spending \$5000.00 to deal with my feelings about the abuse I experienced from Father Mike, but I decided what I really needed to finish my healing was acknowledgment from his superiors that they had not been properly trained to hear disclosures of sexual abuse when I had gone to them (His first superior had walked out and left me sitting in office after I told him because he "had to put the vegetables in the soup"!! Father Mike later told me this superior never even confronted him about it. Did any of them??! I wish I could write that they have written me heartfelt apologies and that we all are now living happily ever after, but, as you might guess, that is not how the story goes!

I remember as I was typing "MERCY" wondering just what the word "revictimization" meant. Now I know! The job of chancellor was being transferred to a new person. I felt so discounted by the first chancellor that I had a visualization of murdering the Archbishop (Believe that is scary for a woman who has taken a vow of nonviolence!) No one else was available so the Archbishop's secretary, who has not read Rutter's book and understands nothing about incest, talked to me; he told me, "It is all your fault. You should have known better. You should have

walked away.

The new chancellor called my counselor, but did not answer my letter for two weeks, leaving me thinking suicidal thoughts. He met with me and my counselor and promised to help me communicate with Father Mike's superiors, all of whom were ignoring me; however when he wrote the provincial a letter, he said, "Mary thinks she was abused." My response to that was to wake up my spiritual director, who suggested I sue, and my counselor in the middle of the night and to consider suicide more seriously than I every had before. I spoke to Father Mike asking him to help me finish this. He said three times, "You are scaring the hell out of me." He was concerned I would sue, putting his community out of business, or that the words "sexual abuse" would appear in his personnel file and he might be removed from active ministry. When I insisted I just wanted an acknowledgment of negligence on the part of his community, he said women make up stories of clergy sexual abuse when Priests refuse to go to bed with them!!!

I finally received a letter from the provincial. He said he had spoken to Father Mike, and although he remembers the counseling sessions we had, he never said anything sexual to me and is dismayed I would say he had. When I read that, I drove to a store to buy a gun so I could blow my brains out on his altar. God had arranged for the store to be closed! The sign in the window read, "Closed Monday (Labor Day) and Tuesday." I said, "O.K., God, I get the message!" I went and found a safe place to feel my

The Archbishop's secretary has since been removed from ministry for his own abuse of women!

feelings. AT 10:30 that night, I told my counselor, "I realize this letter is what I needed, if not what I wanted. It acknowledges the seriousness of the abuse I experienced (Pastors and provincials don't tell terrible lies without some serious reason, do they???). I laminated the letter and hung it on my living room wall with a gold ribbon right under the picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe where you may view it any time you come to visit. I also wrote letters to Father Mike, the provincial, and to the chancellor thanking them for the letter.

Although I am a person who learned years ago and knows in a very deep place FEELINGS ARE TO BE FELT AND NOT ACTED UPON, I came closer to acting on my feelings than I ever had before in my life these past two months. Pia Mellody says in FACING CODEPENDENCE that sexual abuse by a religious representative is an act of profound evil and that many "victims at some point hover between life and death in recovery wrestling with the question 'Am I going to make a decision to live or to kill myself?'" Because I am so good at finding people who know how to listen, and because I am not afraid to feel the pain, I believe I have passed this point. It has taken hours of sobbing and screaming. My nearly five year habit of Centering two hours a day gets much credit. I am grateful for all the prayers and listening with which others have supported me!!!

All is grace! As always, God has given gifts as God has allowed this new, terrible pain in my life. Since his second proposition on January 3, 1986, Father Mike had not said anything sexually inappropriate to

me. He had caused me a lot of pain by agreeing to be my friend after he had apologized for the second proposition, only to send me double messages because on some level he believed he should not be while at the same time he wanted to be my friend very much. Our relationship was never one of equals. He'd come to the phone when I called him, but mostly he listened to me. When I asked him questions, he'd say he was too tired to talk. He promised to write, but I only got letters from him every six months. Repeatedly I'd ask him if he wanted me to go away; his nonverbal behavior certainly seemed to communicate that, but he always insisted, "No, that isn't what I want."

Before he was transferred in May, he had read the long letters I had written him several times a week (with full knowledge and permission of my counselor and spiritual director), and no member of his community ever said anything to him about them! He'd given me a friendship bracelet, and last Christmas he sent me a plaque that says, "Friendship is God's most perfect gift." Then when he was named pastor in May, he wanted me to go away with no explanation! All that is ended! I have learned so much about emotional abuse, I don't think I can ever be in another emotionally abusive relationship again.

Before he became so frightened, Father Mike had thanked me for writing "MERCY." He said he could tell how much healing it had brought to me and that reading it had brought healing to him too. Years ago he'd agreed with me that the opposite of love is not hate but fear. I'm sad that he acted on his fear by

calling his lawyer when all I needed to end this happily were apologies. Yet, some part of me believes that the inner work that we did together has to have been beneficial to him, and I am grateful to have done him this service, even at so great a cost to myself.

When we "said good-by" in July, Father Mike had asked if he might send me a Christmas card every year, assuring me of his love and prayers. Now that his lawyers won't let him speak to me, he won't be able to do so. I was surprised that Mimi, the Child in me, was glad when she heard. "I didn't want him to. Too many times in the past he has hurt me promising me something then not keeping his promise. Now he can't hurt me any more!" The emeshment is definitely ended. Although I have sometimes acted on my fear, I am having trouble even respecting him. He smashed the pedestal I had put him on, and I see through his "priestly disguise" to a frightened, wounded child with no integrity.

I have also finally realized how wounded and dysfunctional his community is. Most communities these days are promoting healing of victims, not still protecting perpetrators. All my life I have avoided facing my oppression as a woman. I am no longer able to deny the sins of sexism and heterosexism as well as lies of clerics. Whenever possible now, I worship with women clergy.

I have been able to write letters to all those who have hurt me thanking them and telling how their oppression has benefited me. Today I retire after

having taught English twenty-five years for Albuquerque Public Schools. My plan is to enter my hermitage. I do so with a new, deep need to intercede for the terrible evil I have seen in the church and for all those harmed by clerical sins. I ask your prayers and promise mine.

10/30/92

December 8, 1992, Feast of the Immaculate Conception

Dear Friends:

JESUS CHRIST IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD, A LIGHT NO DARKNESS CAN EXTINGUISH! May He be born again in your hearts. May you be filled with HIS PEACE, JOY, HOPE and LOVE. May you share these gifts with all you encounter. May Jesus' Mother be yours. May this Advent and Christmas Season be a time of many blessings for you and for all in your hearts! (Non Christian friends, please translate these words into some that make sense to you.)

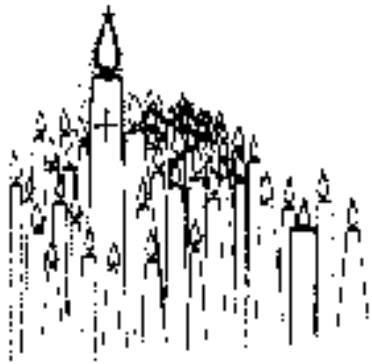
In recent years I have mailed Christmas greetings before Advent begin. This year I was in too much pain to do so. Today I can write because, by the grace of God, Father Mike and I just made peace. In October I had gone to the Archbishop and had asked him if he had learned anything since I'd disclosed to

him my clergy sexual abuse. Would he handle it differently today than he had six years ago? He was able to say, "Yes"! He told me he wanted my peace and my healing. I believed I needed apologies. I got nothing but silence. I went to a lawyer who told me, as a couple of others had, that I could not sue because the statute of limitations in New Mexico for personal injury cases is three years. "Would you write a letter saying this is so my perpetrator can apologize?" She wasn't comfortable with that but offered to write a letter to the Archbishop asking him to pay for my counseling, as he has for so many survivors. When I took the letter to the Archbishop, he said he believed I was abused and wanted to pay for my counseling. I explained it wasn't money I wanted. It was all he could offer.

These past two weeks I've vacillated between hope and despair. In better moments, I met with the 12 step group for survivors I started and tried to educate priests about all I've learned. I volunteered to be a Eucharistic Minister at UNM Hospital and to drive a regular route for Meals on Wheels. I've been able to cook for myself and to sleep through the night. At other times, fearing the Archbishop had lied to me too, I have been flooded with suicidal thoughts and missed celebrating Eucharist several days, including last Sunday. After crying and screaming a lot, I let go of the need for apologies. These men might be able to give me a piece of the moon; they cannot apologize! This morning I called Father Mike, whom I had not spoken to in months, since he went to a lawyer. I begged him not to hang up on me but to just listen. (Lots of victims are

recording conversations with their perpetrators. I knew he could not talk.) I told him how much pain I've been in since he lied about what he did. I told him I love him. I told him I forgive him for acting on his fear. If someone had threatened my being able to retire, I would have done the very same thing. I said I did not want his personnel file to say "sexual abuse;" I would not ask for the money. I asked him to say "Amen" to the Our Father. He said he could. We prayed together. I wished him a Happy Feast Day and said good-bye. Now it is finished! Now I can enter my hermitage. Please pray daily for all abused and all abusers. Thank you for all your prayers for me.

**Love and prayers,
Mary**



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DECEMBER 1992**

In my Christmas letter to Father Mike, I enclosed a note. One sentence said, "I have worked through my denial and no longer believe I am the first woman you propositioned; I pray I will be the last." Before he propositioned me, Father Mike refused to hug me in public. He told me not to tell the other Priests he lived with that he hugged me. One night he opened a desk drawer in the room where we were talking to see if there were any hidden tape recorders. After he had propositioned me, he said he was "capable of rolling on the floor with me." Having returned from

**JESUS
CHRIST
IS
THE
LIGHT
OF
THE
WORLD!**

treatment after the first time he propositioned me, Father Mike said he was not to counsel any women alone; I wasn't the only one he was not to counsel. When I spoke to the archbishop about my sexual abuse the first time, I would not name Father Mike. I didn't have to. When I told him my parish and what had happened, the archbishop spoke Father Mike's name!

Once Father Mike told me he had had a woman yell at him as he was coming out of church; he was afraid I, too, would embarrass him in public. I never asked him why she was so angry at him. Now I can guess! For years I asked Father Mike to tell me what the rules were, what relationship was appropriate and permitted to us. He didn't answer. Looking back I can believe that he has feared my suing him for nearly nine years. I had thought he had prayed not to hurt me again. Now I think he was being careful not to say or do or write anything that I could use to sue him! Ours never was a relationship of equality. I was very open and honest with him; he was not with me.

I also reassured Father Mike in my letter that I continue to offer to God any opportunities that arise to pass up chocolate as a prayer for him and as a prayer of thanksgiving for all the healing God has done in use. Several times in the past five months I have contemplated suicide, but I have never considered eating chocolate! He can feed me some when we meet in heaven.

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

On December 9, 1531, Our Blessed Mother appeared to Juan Diego with the following message:

I am a loving and merciful Mother to all who ask my help and trust me. I will hear their weeping and their sorrows. I will alleviate their sufferings, necessities, and their misfortunes.

When Juan Diego told Bishop Zamarraga of Mary's message, the bishop was courteous, but he did not believe him.

On December 10th, Mary sent Juan Diego to the bishop a second time. He was left waiting in the cold because the bishop had more important matters. Juan Diego was humiliated. He struggled to have the bishop believe him. The bishop asked for a sign that Juan Diego told the truth. On December 12th Mary again appeared to Juan Diego. Her message this day was this:

Do not be troubled or weighed down with any grief. Do not fear any illness, vexation, anxiety, or pain. Am I, your Mother, not the fountain of life? Are you not in the folds of my mantle? In the crossing of my arms? Is there anything else you need? I am the Immaculate Conception, the one who gave birth to God's Son, Jesus, conqueror of Satan, sin and death.

When Juan Diego returned to the bishop this day, the miraculous picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe

appeared on his tilma. The bishop fell to his knees before it.

This appearance of the Mother of God occurred ten years after the Spanish had conquered Mexico with much blood shed. She appeared to an Aztec craftsman and spoke to him in his native language. She addressed him as if he were a prince. Mexico City had become the center of Spanish power. Mary appeared ten miles outside the city insisting that a shrine in her honor be built among the conquered people. She sent Juan Diego to the Spanish clergy, who felt they had the truth. He was to convert them to the message of the Gospel! These actions restored hope and dignity to the native people, who had experienced so much oppression and dehumanization. A shrine was built. About eight million Native Americans became Christians in response to Mary's message.

Today the institutional Church faces a crisis of clergy sexual abuse. The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe might well remind the hierarchy that those whom the institution has alienated are the very ones who have the gifts needed for growth and reform: believe survivors, admit wrong doings, make amends, remember Jesus' example that power is to serve, not to be served. God hears the cries of the oppressed. Repent! Tell the truth. Stop living lies.

December 9, 1992

My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

May God's Peace and love be with you...

Abuse by a clergyman can have deep and disastrous results because it harms people's faith in God and their love for and their trust in one another. My heart goes out to all victims and their families. We really want to do what is right in helping those who are suffering to recapture peaceful and productive lives...

We are indeed members of one family of God and what affects one affects us all. We must begin the process of healing one another. Let us pray with great love for all victims and their families, for all who have been hurt because of this crisis...



I personally ask your forgiveness for all the hurt that has been suffered. And I especially ask forgiveness from the victims and their families who have been hurt the most...

**Sincerely,
The Archbishop**

THIS LETTER WAS READ AT ALL MASSES ON 12/12/92. I WROTE THE ARCHBISHOP THANKING HIM FOR THIS LETTER. IT MEANT A GREAT DEAL TO ME.



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1992 Part D

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THE NEXT CHAPTER

12/23/92

On 12/8/92 I had made peace, again, with the priest who had propositioned me, apologized in private, but then lied to his provincial (or at least permitted his provincial to lie to me about what he had done). I wrote about it in my Christmas letter and shared copies with everyone I could think of. On 12/12 I composed a leaflet for the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe drawing parallels between the oppression by the institutional church of native peoples in the 1530's in Mexico and of those sexually abused everywhere in the church today. With other members of the Alliance for Justice, I distributed these leaflets at the archbishop's Mass in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe on Sunday.

On Sunday I also went to the priest who had been my perpetrator's superior when I had reported his second proposition, the one whose response had been, "Healing takes a long time." He'd read my Christmas letter. He knew I cannot sue his community. Naively, I thought, "Surely now, in private, he will apologize to me and all this will be over." Instead, he said, "I cannot apologize to you. I have done nothing to apologize for. I had been provincial before; I knew what to do when you came to me. When I was provincial, I'd been accused of something worst than you were. I never defended

myself. God permits these things for our personal growth." When I tried to thank him for a least believing me, he objected, "I never said I believe you"!!!!

In 1986 when I had reported, "Father Mike propositioned me," no member of his community asked for any details. The next day I told the pastor I wanted Father Mike to get treatment so he wouldn't hurt others; the pastor replied Father Mike had no problem except me! When I asked to speak again to the superior, he listened but said only that he was a busy man with work to do. There was no investigation. No one ever spoke to me about my disclosure afterwards. Certainly no one ever told me Father Mike had denied what he had done and had told some terrible lie about me. It is just as well; I can imagine having strangled him with my bare hands, committed suicide, or filed the lawsuit he so fears before the statute of limitations had run out!

Denial is an interesting phenomenon. The words I had used for the way Father Mike's community responded to me after my disclosure were "They treated me as if I'd propositioned him," but not until last Sunday, 12/13/92, had I admitted to myself that he had lied to his superiors about what he had done and they had believed him, an alcoholic, with no attempt to learn the truth. I was very angry. I left a message on the answering machine at Father Mike's parish suggesting that he continued praying for me as I struggled to forgive him. I wrote the archbishop a letter pointing out the actions of Father Mike's community have been evil and should not be

tolerated. Provincial superiors answer only to Rome. From reading Jason Berry's book LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION; CATHOLIC PRIESTS AND THE SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN, I knew writing the Papal Nuncio would be a waste of paper. Lawyers and God are victims' only recourse.

On Friday I went to celebrate with the archbishop his anniversary of ordination. At that time, the chancellor looked me in the eye and said, "I believe you." God does answer prayers! Both the chancellor and the archbishop begged me to accept a check from them. The chancellor assured me no mention of sexual abuse would appear in Father Mike's personnel file. "This is a private matter between you and the archbishop," the chancellor promised me (Why I should care at this point I'm having trouble remembering! I did ask him about it again, but I didn't ask him to put it in writing.). "Let the money be a Christmas present from me," the archbishop insisted.

On Friday evening, thinking I would be required to sign a release promising to stop my pursuit of truth if I accepted a check on Monday, I went to the parish where I'd met Father Mike. Members of his community tried to brush me off when I asked politely to speak to them about all this. I threatened to kill myself in their church. Then I actually let some air out of one tire on each of their cars. The pastor came out waving his arms and threatening to call the police. "Go ahead. Please do. Hurry. All the TV stations and newspapers in this town have copies of my story. If you have me arrested, they can

print them!" I replied. When no police arrived after some time, I went home to dinner promising to return on Sunday. Members of the Alliance for Justice joined me Sunday morning in distributing the last of our leaflets about Our Lady of Guadalupe, but no police appeared then either. Sunday morning I mailed Father Mike a tiny homemade gift, a scratch pad decorated with my rubber stamps. On the package I wrote, "I know you have at least some sorrow; I forgive you for the lie you told about me in 1986."

On Monday at 4:15 p.m. I was handed a check for the amount the lawyer's letter suggested the archbishop pay for my counseling by Corinne Taylor, \$2401.80. It didn't reimburse me for all I spent for counseling. I took him bills totaling \$3300.00 from six other counselors I'd seen trying to heal my clergy sexual abuse and told him there were two additional from counselors who have since left town. It doesn't matter. The check was a Christmas present.

The first thing I did after receiving the archbishop's Christmas present was to write thank you notes to him and to the chancellor. Then I gave four hundred dollars to another survivor of clergy sexual abuse who has gotten no money from the archdiocese and whose insurance will not pay for her marriage counseling. Her sexual abuse by a priest has taken a serious toll on her marriage. I also gave gifts to the lawyer, my counselor, the archbishop, and the chancellor. I gave a hundred dollars to an incest survivor whose father will never apologize to her or

begin to make amends for all the ways he has hurt her. It will help her buy groceries as she makes her last car payment. I had Eucharist celebrated a number of times in thanksgiving and for all abused and their families as well as for all abusers and for all their families.

How I long for peace! How I want all this to be over! Martin Luther King Jr., said, "No man is free until all men are free." Yesterday I helped a dear friend, also a survivor of clergy sexual abuse, respond to a letter from the provincial of her perpetrator. The letter shows obvious good will but great ignorance. The provincial says in three years he has had nine disclosures of clergy sexual abuse. Two priests confessed. Three allegations were withdrawn when the priests denied them. Lawyers assure him there is no legal substance to the other charges. This man honestly believes sexual abuse only occurred in two cases! I pointed out to him that not all survivors are as articulate, persistent, or as healed of shame as I am. Not everyone knows how to write thank you letters to those who have hurt them! I also emphasized that the degree of sexual penetration is not the issue. Three sexual sentences, many lies, and the irresponsibility of his superiors have resulted in my severe depression. I lost sleep. I spent time and money counseling. I almost lost my job. I nearly lost my faith. I came close to losing my life.

I have personally spoken to over twenty survivors of clergy sexual abuse. I've heard their pain at betrayal by one whom they trusted like a father, their fear

that somehow, whether they were minors legally unable to consent at the time or vulnerable adults who had turned in trust, not to an equal but to a priest with such professional power that consensual sex was an impossibility, what happened was their fault. I have heard their love for the men who had lied to them telling them they were special, loved as their own fathers had not been able to love them. (In some survivors, this love is so covered by hurt that it sounds like hatred.) I have met the parents of a young man who committed suicide just after he'd shared with them that he'd been sexually abused by a priest. I have read about Freud's betrayal of those incested, changing his theories to please men in power. I have heard from what should be reliable sources that in New Mexico right now there are over forty known priest perpetrators and over 400 known survivors!

Years ago I met a woman who admitted to me she loved a priest and wanted him to leave the priesthood to marry her. I know such people exist. Recently a man I know learned that the woman he had married years before had lied to him; the child, for whom he had paid support from the time of his divorce until she herself married, is not his daughter! There probably are a few crazy people in the world who would lie about a priest for money or vengeance; however, I believe in almost all cases lies are told by priests after abusing the vulnerable, LIES, by PRIESTS-THE SAME ONES WHO GET UP IN THE PULPIT AND READ THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT: THOU SHALT NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS AGAINST THY NEIGHBOR!!!!

Or perhaps the priests are in denial. I also have spoken to a priest after a young man he had sexually abuse shared with me his story speaking haltingly, painfully, questioning whether it wasn't his fault even though the priest had gotten him drunk and he'd only been sixteen at the time. He'd had an orgasm and had experienced pleasure; hadn't that made it his fault? The priest said to me, "I don't care to discuss it; my conscience is clear"!!! I read in Jason Berry's book about a woman who mutilated herself with a pair of scissors, and I wept because I'd had thoughts of slicing my arm and walking up to receive Communion bleeding so the pain I felt on the inside would be visible to priests on the outside. No sane person would go through the pain I have for a couple thousand dollars or even several million. As a teacher I cannot rest until society learns to believe the abused.

NOTE: Father Mike did not rape me. HE NEVER EVEN TOUCHED ME!! The seriousness of his harm to me has to do with betrayal of trust. Many times in my live I've been propositioned by an equal. That is unpleasant, disappointing, insulting, but not devastating. A priest in my parish I'd turned to in need took advantage of my vulnerability. He indicated to me that I, who loved him LIKE A FATHER, meant no more to him than a piece of meat. He lied TO me on many occasions He lied ABOUT what he had done. He told some lie ABOUT ME that led to my being mistreated in my own parish by those who should have been ministering God's love to me, and all they will say is "God permits this for our personal growth"! So God

does! But that does not make it right, or excuse them from apologizing. The oppressed may pray "All shall be well," but this is not for oppressors to pray as they continue to oppress!!

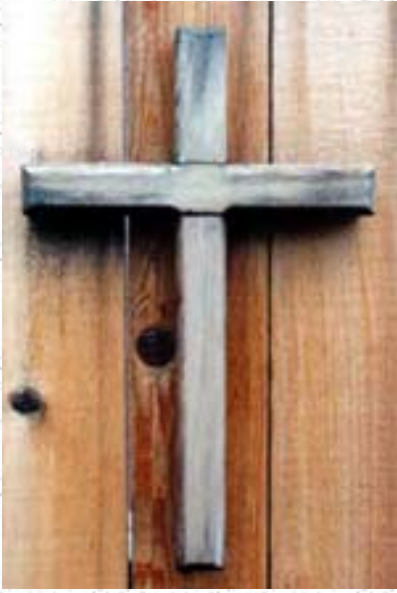
I pledge to keep talking and writing, sharing my story. I call on all survivors to do the same. Sexual abuse is an evil that can be stopped.

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops needs to formulate a national policy. Then that needs to be followed. Many priests who sexually abuse are so compulsive that they need to be removed from ministry. Others can be treated. Investigations need to be conducted. Accused clergy (which includes sisters and brothers) need to be sent for inpatient evaluation at appropriate facilities. Survivors need to be believed and to have their counseling paid for so they can begin to heal. The truth must be told to congregations where abuse has taken place. In his book, Berry estimates that by 2000 the Catholic church will have paid out one BILLION dollars in lawyer fees and treatment expenses. The causes of the problem need to be addressed if there is to be a church! Of the over twenty survivors of clergy sexual abuse I've spoken to, only five are now attending church regularly. Only truth and justice will bring healing and reconciliation. We must all pray for all abused and their families as well as all abusers and their families.

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1993 Part A

JANUARY 6, 1993

I no longer have suicidal thoughts or desires. I'm again able to cook for myself and enjoy simple pleasures like a sunset or good music. I no longer cry at Mass daily, only every other day or so. I have claimed for myself at least some measure of the peace and the healing that the archbishop wanted for me when he gave me a check for Christmas. He and the chancellor are in my prayers but seldom in my thoughts now.

My thoughts are still full of my perpetrator and his community. Living with injustice is not easy. I sent copies of the first printing of this booklet to Father Mike's superiors so they might see how incredible his lie is. I asked them for a word that would signal their sorrow at my pain. (One thing I have learned the last few months is that asking for written apologies today is quite unrealistic.) I'd sent copies of my Christmas letter to several members of Father Mike's community. I have had no word from any of them and do not really expect to hear from any of them. I wrote Father Mike a note telling him my request and explaining that I believe I win either way, with or without apologies.

The injustice I suffer allows me to stand in solidarity with all those oppressed even more severely than I, those incested whose perpetrators will never

acknowledge how they have been hurt, those oppressed for their race, sex, sexual orientation, age, nationality, whatever. It also reminds me to daily examine my conscience for both personal and social sins I may have committed against others, and to work diligently for the liberation of all those I oppress by my citizenship, status, affiliations, etc. I have hope. I have some measure of peace in 1993, a fullness of peace will come only with justice for all.

January 10, 1993

On January 9th as I prayed in the church where Father Mike and I had met, I was insulted by another member of his community. I struggled to reconcile valuing the humiliation, a gift to keep me safely on the path of the spiritual journey, and needing to stop my abuse at this church. I contemplated using the threat of force. Today I was sent a young man who shared deeply with me of his abusive childhood and his struggle to forgive his father. For weeks I'd been inquiring how there was to be justice if I did not exact it when God is so merciful all of us will be forgiven every offense. I was reminded that the love we unleash when we forgive someone is so powerful that it alone will bring about the offender's conversion. Fear is the opposite of love. One who has nothing to fear is free to love. It had worked with my father and Father Mike. It will work with the members of his community. I made the decision to forgive every one of them for each offense against me over the years. I wrote them a letter telling them this and wishing

them the peace of Jesus. This ends my personal struggle - except with those who will be unable to believe me!

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Baptism of Jesus, 1993

Dear Fathers,

On Friday, 1/9, I celebrated Eucharist at your parish at noon. I had delivered Meals on Wheels at 11:00 a.m., and I'd promised to take a friend shopping at 1:00 p.m. Father Rex was presiding. He preached a fine homily about Jesus touching lepers and wanting us to do the same.

At Communion time, I approached Father Rex, who was distributing Hosts on the side of the church where I had been sitting. He dropped a Host into my hand. I was so surprised that when I got back to my place, instead of praying, I watched him give Communion to others. He did not drop Hosts into their hands; he placed Hosts gently.

After Mass, instead of slipping quietly out the west door, I deliberately followed Father Rex into the foyer and shook his hand. Instead of grasping my whole hand, Father shook only my fingers. I said to him "I do not have leprosy, Father." "No, but you have other things," was his response. He turned from me and greeted others but would not speak to me further. There were witnesses.

I do have other things: a strong hunger and thirst for justice, truth on my side, a clear conscience, no reason not to pray at your parish, and a great devotion to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. I do not expect there to ever be a similar incident. I expect all members of your community to live the rule of life you have professed.

Years ago, Father Mike, ill with the disease of alcoholism, on two different occasions, spoke inappropriate, sexual, harmful words to me. He has gotten sober. He has apologized to me and made amends. I have forgiven him.

Those who were his superiors, at the time I reported what Father Mike had said to me, did confront him, but instead of conducting a proper investigation and being concerned for me, simply accepted his lies told out of fear and out of the realization that his words to me had been a serious wrong. These men, realizing how seriously I have been wronged, are afraid to apologize to me now. I forgive them.

Over the past nine years I have been hurt by many words, deeds and omissions by many members of your community. In spite of all of these, I believe each priest and brother aspires to truly live the mystery of the Eucharist and to proclaim its meaning to the world by your lives. Years ago I chose as my patroness Mary under her title as Mother of God because I wish to give flesh to God in my life. Many times I have failed by acting on my fear instead of loving. I forgive each and every member of your community for every offense against me. I ask your continued prayers for me.



I pray each of you may be filled with the peace of Jesus.

Mary

FORGIVENESS

It is 6:00 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 20, 1993. I am sitting in the CIRT Pod at UNM. I'm in too much pain to work on my spread sheet or any other program; I'm forced to continue the forgiveness work I've been struggling with all day.

I had gone to bed at 2:00 a.m., but I was unable to get to sleep until about 4:00 a.m. At some point after that I woke up from a dream that my bishop had murdered some people so no one would find out about his clergy sexual abuse!

At noon I called Father Mike on an impulse. He listened. Not too coherently I shared my hurt and confusion. I'm just admitting to myself that not only did the letter from his provincial last fall contain a lie, but that he must have lied over the years to several members of his community. When I disclosed to his superiors that he had propositioned me, I'd always presumed that he'd told them the truth, that they had simply chosen to ignore me.

Two years ago for Valentine's Day I took Father

Mike a 36" red heart shaped balloon; the priest who came to the door when I delivered it was the one who has been so disrespectful to me. Did he think there was something wrong with my friendship with Father Mike? Did he confront him in charity? Did Father Mike lie to him? Father Mike had a wedding or something. When he tried to excuse himself, I hung up on him.

I cried for several minutes then called my counselor. Listening to this is getting very difficult for her. She interrupted me for the first time I remember. She also pointed out my faulty assumptions: men are no less likely to lie just because they are priests! Rather, since men who become priests are so wounded, they are more likely to tell lies and engage in other broken behavior. She used some phrase about men who are unable to hold jobs in the real world! She explained to me Father Mike is not "split;" he was conflicted and was human like all the rest of us!

After she and I talked, I wrote Father Mike a note apologizing for hanging up on him when he couldn't listen any longer, for "labeling" him, and for expecting him to be less human than other men. I explained that when he'd had to end our "conversation" earlier, I was trying to tell him I realize that just because I'm beginning to "get on with my life" doesn't mean he is free to be truthful. I assured him of my love and prayers and that I know I have his. I promised to try not to call him again. I told him about an incident a couple of weeks ago when a friend whom I was hugging good-bye became

sexually aroused and looked at me as if he wanted to kiss me. I invited Father to join me in thanking God for our non sexual hugs. I called and read this to Father Mike, who was, by this time, back in his office. He said "Thank you!" before I hung up on him again!

In today's mail was a letter from a friend who lives out of state and who is a survivor of sexual abuse by his Episcopal priest when he was a child. Ralph says he cannot forgive what he has not yet remembered. I cannot forgive what I have not yet admitted to myself! Healing is a long, slow, painful process.

What I am realizing today is that Father Mike was not and is not free to tell his Brothers the truth. How awful to live with men with whom one cannot be honest, with whom one cannot share one's mistakes! How sad that after years of denying clergy sexual abuse, today power structures in the church are overreacting with legalism, ignoring the law of love they supposedly are to teach.

Besides being alive and having the gift of faith, I have so much to be grateful for: I'm retired with enough money to live on. When I make a mistake, I can admit it without fear of terrible repercussions. While I was able to, I showed Father Mike in every way I could think of just how very much I love him. Father Mike does not act on his fear by hanging up on me as I do on him! For eight years Father Mike and I shared wonderful hugs that were never sexual. Although he is afraid to talk to me any more, Father Mike still listens to me when I ask him to; his silence



eloquently tells me that he is sorry for all his lies and that he still loves me and prays for me. I have lots of people who listen to me sort out my feelings. My counselor has listened to me for nine years, day or night, and never charged me for my calls to her! By God's grace, I am well on the road to recovery; I have learned a lot about forgiveness.

MARCH 19, 1993

A week ago Monday the major news channel here aired a copyrighted story that Archbishop Robert Sanchez has been accused of sexual abuse by five women who are to appear on a Sixty Minutes program perhaps this coming Sunday. I had heard from two sources last January that victims of the archbishop existed. I also heard from a couple of different sources that he has a daughter now almost twenty, by a former nun presently living in Seattle. The media reported he paid some woman \$25,000 a year ago, but they have been unable to speak to the archbishop or to any of the women. The story has made the front page of the paper every day, nevertheless.

Last Sunday many priests spoke from the pulpit urging Catholics to forgive the archbishop for being human. Support rallies are planned. Petitions that he be allowed to remain as archbishop are being circulated. A white ribbon means "We love our archbishop"!! I chose to pray at a Lutheran church where a former pastor abused eight women; they know how to pray for abused as well as abusers.

A priest spoke to the media this week saying he'd learned of the archbishop's abuse from one of the women in 1984. He'd tried to arrange a meeting of three of the women with the bishop of Pueblo, CO, but the women were terrified their parents would learned what had happened. All were in their late teens when the abuse took place. The priest, a father, an editorial in Thursday's paper, and my counselor all agree that the power between the archbishop and a woman half his age is unequal; no consent was possible.

The headline on Wednesday night's paper was that the archbishop told several of the women to get on the pill!!!!!!

A reporter I spoke with on Thursday morning said he'd just talked to a woman, now twenty-four, who'd shared that the archbishop used to take her out to lunch when she was seventeen and eighteen. The last time he drove her back to work, the archbishop gave her a big kiss on the mouth!

I know that the archbishop spoke with Father Mike after I told him that Father Mike had propositioned me twice; before, Father Mike would not say, "Thank you;" the archbishop was quite upset about that. For a few weeks Father Mike remembered to thank me. But did the archbishop ever confront his sexual abuse? Probably not. I have written a number of imaginary dialogues in my head this week about the archbishop suggesting to Father Mike that he find someone younger who won't tell.



When I got home early this morning from the computer lab, I found a newspaper in my neighbor's yard. I sobbed in relief when I read that yesterday the pope asked prayers for the archbishop's victims. Then I read the article that said he was more concerned about the scandal.

APRIL 4, 1993

For years I have wanted to write my own booklet to help others pray the Way of the Cross. This is a prayer I have found very meaningful, especially since my clergy sexual abuse. Sunday I began typing each station of Jesus' Passion from all four Gospel writers. I'm only partly finished, but the typing is a form of meditation. Before next Lent I will have a booklet to share with others to enhance their prayer.

As I typed the story of Peter's denial, I could not help remembering the Mass Father Mike celebrated at my house for my birthday when I was 41. He insisted on choosing Peter's denial for the Gospel reading. He was feeling very guilty about having propositioned me and about having arranged this private celebration with the intention of getting me in bed!! What lie would he make up about it if some one confronted him about it now???

Andrew Greeley, a priest in the diocese of Chicago, is the author of over thirty books. Last month his latest novel FALL FROM GRACE was published. It is about an Irish family involved in Chicago politics

and about pedophilia in the Catholic Church. Father Greely does not hesitate to reveal the problems of clergy sexual abuse, including damaged priests, denial, cover up, and misuse of power. I stayed up all night reading my copy. I just finished writing a review of the book in hopes that many others will read it. It is entertaining and also very educational.

This week and last my Medieval English Mystics class has been reading SHOWINGS by Julian of Norwich. She was granted a vision by God of the Passion of Christ. He gave her to understand that by Christ's Passion, the devil was conquered. The Trinity assured her that because of sin and death being overcome, all shall be well. I had been quite depressed last week about all the clergy sexual abuse coming to light. When I read these words, I was given hope. In spite of all the evil that exists now, ALL SHALL BE WELL! What a grace to be reading this book at this time!

Last Friday the chancellor held his now weekly news conference. A week ago he said Sanchez wanted to return to New Mexico, at least to say "Good-bye" to everyone. This week he announced Sanchez may never return. Sanchez is "in counseling but not in therapy"! Articles about clergy sexual abuse make the front page of THE TRIBUNE nearly every day still.

APRIL 12, 1993

St. Valentine's Day felt hard this year. So did my

birthday when I remembered Fr. Mike saying to me in January 1985 that although he could not counsel me again we could still celebrate our special days together! Then the news of the archbishop's victims, which I'd heard as rumors in January, became public. Seven of the women he has sexually abused came forward, three appearing on Sixty Minutes. The archbishop had listened to me. I have believed that he had prayed for me and Father Mike, even if he had never confronted him or investigated my disclosure of clergy sexual abuse. He'd given me money for Christmas, part of what I paid for my counseling about my abuse. I wept for him with the many who love him. I also stopped attending daily mass when all the prayers were for perpetrators, and victims were forgotten or blamed.



Twenty priests accused of sexual abuse have made the front page of the local papers. With the acceptance of the archbishop's resignation and the appointment of a new interim bishop, I again dare to hope that I may experience the justice of apologies from Father Mike's community in my lifetime.

Holy Thursday's Eucharist with a reenactment of Jesus washing his disciples' feet brought me many tears as I got in touch with my grief and my rage. Sexual abuse by priests of those they have been sent to serve is so far from what Jesus modeled!! Forgiveness is a process. It does not equal forgetting but working for justice for all!

I prepare to spend the remainder of the archbishop's check to me for a trip to Hawaii where

I'll make two retreats and photograph flowers and the ocean.

APRIL 24, 1993



I have been in lots of pain the past two weeks. When I heard that a new interim bishop had been appointed, I got my hopes up that he would be horrified at how I have been treated and would conduct a real investigation examining my fifty spiral notebooks full of journalings from the past nine years and the correspondence I have had from Father Mike since I supposedly falsely accused him of propositioning me as well as interviewing some of my six counselors and three spiritual directors I have spoken to about my clergy sexual abuse. The bishop has not responded to any of my notes, gifts, Easter card, or letter. His secretary tells me he is too busy to speak to me. I have been flooded with very violent thoughts against myself and against priests. A week ago I called the police and was taken to the mental health center (in handcuffs!) A couple of hours later I walked out having learned that Father Mike did not even commit a petty misdemeanor, the person who was on duty at the Mental Health Center to handle crises was too busy to even listen to my answers to the questions she asked me, and there are no therapists available at the Mental Health Center I can see!!!

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1993 Part B

May 13, 1993

A couple of hours ago I finished the final for my Medieval English Mystics class. I knew enough to be able to write for two hours. Monday I'll know my grade for the course. I got back the paper I had turned in; I got an A on it!

Three books I have looked at the past few weeks have impacted me deeply. I got out my well marked copy of *WOMEN WHO LOVE TOO MUCH*. On pages 77-79 I reviewed what Robin Norwood says about women who grow up with emotionally absent mothers as mine was due to her disease of alcoholism. One consequence is that these girls do not learn the powerlessness that little girls learn who cannot have their fathers all to themselves. Another is that fathers with emotionally absent wives, in order to avoid the incest taboo, fail to validate their daughter's femininity. In *BELONGING* I'd just read that in healthy families little girls first flirt with their fathers. In Sipe's book *CELIBACY: A SECRET WORLD*, I'd been uncomfortable as I'd read case studies of women who had long term deeply emotional relationships with priests with only sporadic phone contact. Norwood says women with emotionally absent mothers learn that the only kind of love that is O.K. is nurturing love; they have no internal permission to be sexual.

On March 21, 1992, I took perpetual private vows. I was very much at peace about vowing consecrated celibacy that day because I believed that Father Mike and I loved each other and would pray for each other daily for the rest of our lives. I'd taken temporary vows three times before that. Each time I took temporary vows there was some part of me that wanted Father Mike to say, "Wait! I want to marry you." About a week ago my counselor said to me that Mimi, my inner Child, wanted to marry Daddy. All these pieces are coming together for me, at least to the extent I want to talk about them and explore who I am, where I am, how I got there, where I really want to be, and how I might get there.

On Saturday 5/1 I spoke with Father Mike. Before I hung up I said to myself that I really am facing a brick wall in regards to getting apologies. I also said, "Perhaps learning powerlessness is more valuable than getting apologies." If only I could stay with that thought. Sometimes more than once a day I try again to do something to get truth and justice from Father Mike's community and the archdiocese of Santa Fe. A week ago my counselor suggested that my struggle is really with my father. "If you terrorize them more, you might get them to pay for more of your counseling, but you will never get the validation and nurturing you want from them." When she said that, I knew she was right. This week I remembered the incident that led to my asking my father to go with me to family therapy ten years ago last month. I'd awakened with a visualization of standing over his bed with a shotgun. With Mother dead, he was putting me in the role of the family

scapegoat. I need very much to understand this better. Do I need a male therapist to help me do this work?

In the middle of the night Monday, I woke up with adrenaline pumping through my body. As I tried to meditate, I was flooded with violent thoughts against priests. There is not a single specific priest I know to whom I can imagine doing a harmful thing, but nothing would stop the thoughts or the adrenaline for about an hour and a half. I felt frightened by my anger, even though I know anger is a necessary stage of grieving, and is much healthier directed at those who hurt me than at myself.



I've interviewed two therapists this past week. One did not seem to believe in his own magic enough to be able to help me believe in it. The other did not qualify for my insurance plan. My inner child is eager to go to work. She is tired, frightened, angry, and lonely. Yesterday she burst into tears in a couple of inappropriate places. Where/ how do I find a qualified therapist?

+

May 18, 1993

The front page of today's Albuquerque Journal has a story about me and my clergy sexual abuse. Not all the details are accurate, but the story is in print for all to see. Father Mike's name and the name of his community were omitted, and it does not have his picture, but it is a start. I have been in pain since I first asked for apologies from his community; I have

been discounted and ignored. Now lots of people know about my pain. Perhaps more people will pray for me! I can at least guess now why the interim bishop has refused to meet with me. The chancellor must have told him some lie about me. I'm not surprised or even especially hurt by the lies about me in the paper; I have come to expect them over the past months!

In my search for a therapist the past couple of weeks I have heard a couple of comments that have been helpful. A woman said to me, "Father Mike's problem wasn't that he wasn't supervised but that he wasn't ethical." This is true. He did have a superior, a confessor, an AA sponsor, and a therapist. If he chose not to discuss his feelings about me and our interaction with any of them, having had a supervising counselor would have done little good. A man I spoke to said, "He needed you more than you needed him." That seems obvious to me from this point also. Father Mike could not tell me the truth; he could not urge me to find a healthy relationship because he needed my friendship. My pain has been tremendous. So much has not made sense. I wrote to him last week telling him I knew he still loved me and prayed for me, but when I got through, even I couldn't help noticing how fast I'd "danced to create the illusion we were dancing together." I'm exhausted. Today I have no desire to call him. I have nothing more to say. Perhaps some priest will press charges saying I threatened to kill him. I don't care. I hold no hope for truth or justice from a group of men who have already lied! Perhaps Father Mike and his community continue to huddle

in some corner hoping if they ignore me long enough I will go away! I really don't care.

Last night the woman counselor I have seen all these years said it is little wonder that I don't trust God to bring these men to justice when there have been so few trustworthy men in my life. God understands that!

Last night the newspaper reporter who was writing the story called and asked, "I have here three police reports about your threatening to shoot priests. Tell me about them. Ha Ha!" A reporter on the Tribune called this morning ending his message with "Have fun.!" Will no one hear my pain?? I have been robbed of my faith in the institution of the Catholic Church. I have had to give up my belief that priests who preside at Eucharist daily are holy men. I have had the man I loved most in this world lie about me to try to save his own skin-after he had lied to me so many, many times. I AM NOT LAUGHING.

May 20, 1993

On Tuesday May 11th I learned from another survivor that two of the women I know from the Alliance for Justice are in one of the local psychiatric hospitals after attempting suicide. Not only that, there are five others who have been sexually abused by clergy also in the same hospital! The following Monday I learned that there are FOUR MORE in yet another local hospital! I feel sad for these

people, afraid I may end up with them, and very angry that those who have been abused are not receiving more healing from the church. Monday night May 12th I woke up at 3:30 AM. For an hour and a half I was flooded with violent thoughts against priests. My body was pumping adrenaline. Finally at 5 AM it stopped. I called four answering machines of priests letting them know how much pain I was in and urging them to pray for me. A week later I got a phone call from a reporter at The Journal asking me about three police reports about my threatening to kill priests (Two were from when I called asking for help lest I do something violent.) The reporter laughed and acted as if he thought it were funny. I let him know I didn't. Tuesday morning the paper ran a FRONT PAGE story about me and my clergy sexual abuse. Someone had called the chancellor about my message on an answering machine. The chancellor's response was to file a police report that, the paper reports, says I called him several times threatening to kill priests and urging I be arrested!! I NEVER did.



Tuesday night Channel 13 News ran the interview with me they had taped weeks earlier about my abuse. After months of trying to get the media to publicize my story, I'm full of mixed emotions: I'm grateful my abuse is VERY public knowledge and that no one is asking me why I would falsely accuse a priest, I'm sad that priests act on their fear, and I'm peaceful about the humiliation. I have been busy typesetting and illustrating this story. I'm hopeful since I've not wanted to write Father Mike for a week, not even to send him the clipping.

MAY 29, 1993

Last Monday I finally made the trip to the police station to read the report that had been filed against me. Some things I once told a police officer got written down differently than the way I told him. Could a Catholic priest tell a lie? Since last September, I have learned that such a thing is a possibility.

Today I spoke with the priest who supposedly reported me. He shared that he laughed when his secretary, who had listened to my message, told him that I was threatening to kill him. He knows he would be one of the last people I would want to harm in any way. He has supported victims of clergy sexual abuse for years.

It was his secretary who misunderstood my message and called the chancellor. She could hear the anger in my voice; the nonverbal message was so strong she missed what the words were really saying. For years I taught my students that words are only a small part of any communication. I have learned an important lesson from all this. I may share that I am having violent fantasies with others, but I will be very careful where I share the content of the fantasies in the future.

I checked with the priests who own the other answering machines upon which I left messages.

They knew I was not threatening to kill them.

A couple of people have said to me that violent thoughts are from the devil. There may be a more simple explanation. While attending last summer's ecumenical workshop on sexual abuse in the church, I heard a talk by a lawyer who is the chancellor of the Episcopal diocese of Denver. He said whenever he does not handle victims properly, they become suicidal and murderous. I have had a normal reaction to my mistreatment by Father Mike, his community, and the archdiocese.

Last summer when I wrote THE STORY OF GOD'S MERCY, I told of being propositioned twice by an alcoholic priest who later apologized and made amends to me. Since asking his superiors to apologize for ignoring my disclosure, I have been revictimized:

- I have been further ignored.**
- I have been accused of something like making all this up because the priest would not go to bed with me (No one will tell me exactly what!).**
- I have been told it was all my fault.**
- My reality has been denied.**
- I have been betrayed by the man I loved most in this world.**
- And now I have been accused of threatening to kill priests!**

In spite of all this I am still a Catholic. I still go to mass every day and pray for all these men! I still

believe Jesus is really, truly present in the Blessed Sacrament as the perfect sacrifice to the Father and as my Daily Bread. As much as I would like to, I cannot just walk away.

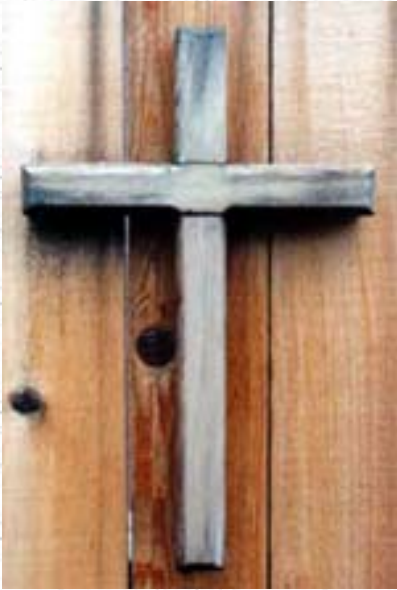
I'm told the statute of limitations for personal injury was changed by the legislature; I may be able to sue as of July 1st. I do not want to sue. I do not want money. I want priests to practice what they preach! I want priests to act like good shepherds, not like hirelings. This week my violent fantasies have been replaced by a fantasy of a Eucharistic celebration attended by me and by all those priests who have harmed me. At the penitential rite, we apologize to each other; at the kiss of peace we all hug! Unfortunately, this is only a fantasy. These men are so frightened, it will never happen. And if it did, it would not be enough. I want much more than just my own healing; I grieve deeply for all those abused. If such a reconciliation did take place, I'd expect these priests to do the same for other victims! I want truth and justice and compassion for all! I won't stop talking and writing and praying and offering my pain to God for them until it happens, which may take more than my lifetime! The problem is very widespread. I believe that some parts of the church as we know it today must go up in flames, but that a phoenix will rise from the ashes. (This is not a threat to burn down a building!!)



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1993 Part C

EPILOGUE

Last summer after writing THE STORY OF GOD'S MERCY and saying "Good-by" to Father Mike, I wrote his provincial fully expecting an apology and for all this to be over. I had read copies of sexual abuse policies by several groups all of which said believe the abused or conduct an investigation, apologize, and make restitution. I was dismayed at the lies and denial and stonewalling I received . (So was my spiritual director!) Events of the past months have put my experience in perspective. I am only one of tens of thousands who have been sexually abused in the church. Some groups are beginning to respond as church; many others are still responding legalistically. I have lost count of the lawsuits filed against my archdiocese! In spite of urgings to the contrary by the chancellor, no one has pressed any charges against me for threatening to kill priests since my story made the front page of the newspaper! No one has said anything to me about falsely accusing a priest! All the comments I have received have been to commend my courage for speaking out on this issue. A couple of weeks ago my counselor suggested my rage is not really at priests but at my father. I can believe she is right, but all my efforts to find a male therapist with whom I might explore my father issues have been fruitless; I have called many and interviewed four, none of whom were helpful. Since the successful completion of my class at the university, I have enjoyed working to prepare this story for publication. I am beginning to look forward to my trip to Hawaii; I do hope time away and the retreats will be relaxing and healing, though after reading Jason Berry's book, I may not want to pray much with the bishop of Honolulu!

The road from victim to survivor is a long, painful one. I gather strength when I can remember that all of this is just part of the spiritual journey. The revelation to Julian of Norwich that Jesus conquered sin and death by His Passion and that therefore ALL SHALL BE WELL is a mystery, but it gives me hope.

**I ask you to believe those who have been abused and to pray for all abused and their families and for all abusers and for their families.
Mary Isabel Steele**

June, 1993

POSTSCRIPT

I Will Not Be Silent

I will not be silent about my clergy sexual abuse.

I will not be silent about the lies which have caused me further suffering since I turned to my Church for healing.

I will not be silent about the thousands of other victims of clergy sexual abuse-some of whom have suicided-most of whom are now without faith.

I will not be silent about the victimization by the Church of even those who abuse.

I will not be silent about the persecution of my sisters and brothers who are lesbian, gay, transgendered, and bisexual - especially by a Church that preaches love for all.

I will not be silent about those living lies, covering up, and revictimizing those already wounded by the Church.

I will not be silent about ANY injustice.

I WILL NOT BE SILENT!!!!!!!!!!

**Mary Isabel Steele
June 1993**

LAND MINES

The war ended years ago.

Troops were sent home.

But I can't put it all behind me.

My life is strewn with land mines:

A casual remark by a friend,

An item on the news blows up in my face.

"Forget!" Wouldn't I like to!

Eleven years after the drunken priest first propositioned me,

**The war he declared continues to slowly kill me.
My life is strewn with land mines.**

**Mary Isabel Steele
8/20/95**

INVESTIGATION

None of the times I had reported my abuse had there been a real investigation. In April of 1994 I contacted the private investigators that the archdiocese had been using to investigate clergy sexual abuse in 1993. I turned over to them my more than 50 journals and my correspondence from Fr. Mike. They analyzed these and interviewed one spiritual director and one counselor as well as the priest I was supposed to have threatened to kill.

In a fifteen page report dated May 6, 1994, they conclude

- the priest knows I did not threaten to kill him**
- my counselor believes my attraction to Fr. Mike was not sexual but his pattern of emotional closeness then withdrawal caused me much confusion and pain**
- my spiritual director believes Fr. Mike propositioned me, had inappropriate boundaries, and was not always honest with me**
- the correspondence from Fr. Mike in his handwriting is evidence of an attraction towards me and a failure to draw appropriate boundaries. "He kept Mary tied to him both emotionally and spiritually in a way that was inappropriate for a priest-parishioner relationship."**
- my journals in my handwriting substantiate that the propositions did occur and that I suffered tremendous confusion and hurt**

I just reviewed again all of Fr. Mike's correspondence to me. (Some pieces lack dates, but the dated items range from 2/17/84 to 5/1/92.) They include

- 13 letters**
- 11 postcards**
- 4 Christmas cards**
- 3 Easter cards**

- 2 memo notes
- 2 thank you cards
- 2 St. Patrick's Day cards
- 2 birthday cards
- 1 valentine

Of these, three are signed "Fr. Mike;" all the others are signed "Mike." One closes with "See ya;" one, with "Prayers, love and a hug;" two, with "Peace and love;" three, with "Hugs and love;" eleven, with "Love;" and seventeen, with "Love and prayers."

In four of his letters to me Fr. Mike quotes MY concern for our boundaries

- 4/17/91 "You asked whether our visit was appropriate. I believe it was."
- 5/ 6/91 "You asked if you are a threat to my chastity. You are not."
- 6/23/91 "You inquired about our friendship. Our relationship has helped me a lot to learn that friendship is not bad."
- 1/19/92 "You asked if you'd ever shared anything inappropriate. Nothing you have ever shared has ever bothered me or caused me any problems."

Fr. Mike propositioned me in 1984 and in 1986. I reported him in 1984 and 1986. In 1988 I wrote the trilogy about his abuse and shared copies with him, the archbishop, and fifty friends. I have kept the many letters I received in response to this sharing. They include one from the archbishop and one from a former pastor who is a member of Fr. Mike's community. If I falsely accused Fr. Mike, why did he write to me almost forty times thanking me, sending hugs, and assuring me of his love and prayers? Why did he continue to listen to me on the phone until I had sent copies of my book to several members of his community?

Mine is not a story of a woman who made a false accusation against a priest. It is a story of a breach of fiduciary duty by Fr. Mike and his superiors, supposed shepherds, responding like lawyers because they knew they were seriously at fault!

POST SCRIPT 2000

Sixteen years ago this month I was first propositioned by a Catholic priest. In an attempt to make sense of the priest's words and actions, I learned to meditate. I learned a lot about forgiveness. I worked through some of my issues with my father and my mother. I got the priest to apologize to me and to make restitution. I learned a lot about sexual abuse. I tried to have a spiritual friendship with the priest, but I came to realize that because we had met in a counseling situation, we could not be friends. I told him good-bye. All this took hard work but resulted in wisdom and peace. What if I had been able to quit there?

When I realized how many lies the priest had told me, I called his provincial and reported his abuse again; I wrote his superiors to whom I had reported his abuse earlier and demanded an apology from them for not responding at the time as the now written policies said they should have. I asked the chancellor to get me a written apology. How naive I was! Instead of apologies, I was revictimized. I was accused, blamed, ignored, lied to and lied about! I became so depressed I feared losing my job; I retired. I continued to struggle to get apologies; after all, I believed in truth and justice! For the first time in my life I experienced real oppression. I soon saw how wide is the gap in the Catholic church between what is said and what is done. I left the Catholic church and became a Lutheran. I have severed ties with almost all my Catholic friends, who insisted on defending the priest, blaming me, and ignoring the real issues.

I returned to therapy. I have come to realize what childhood issues contributed to my vulnerability to the priest and the Catholic church. (I no longer respect my great uncle, now deceased, the former archbishop of Kansas City, Missouri! When I was a teenager, I was told he might be canonized someday. Now I ask how many cases of clergy sexual abuse he covered up! I can't bring myself to finish reading the second biography written about him.) I have much better boundaries today! I'm much less naive. When I hear of evil, I pray for oppressed and oppressors.

The media has had a part in my story. Over thirty Catholic priests have made the front page of the local papers for their sexual abuse! A lawyer I consulted told me I should have sued the church when my abuse happened; then he added, "Of course, no one would have believed you then!" Father Mike has not yet made the front page of the paper. I did, but the story was not accurate. Twice a local television station has told parts of my story on the news; however,

the facts were not correctly reported. When I learn about yet another priest's abuse, all of the pain of the past is again stirred up. Recent public acknowledgments by the pope and the local archbishop of the failures of the Catholic church are too little and too late.

I have started a business and connected to the internet; I have put up a web page where I have posted my book for all to read.

**Mary Isabel Steele
Albuquerque, New Mexico
April 2000**

**Write to me about clergy sexual abuse or about my book:
misteele@asbw.us**

My resource page has a bibliography, book and video reviews, and links to other books and web sites about clergy sexual abuse. BE SURE TO CLICK THE LINK BELOW!!

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RESOURCES

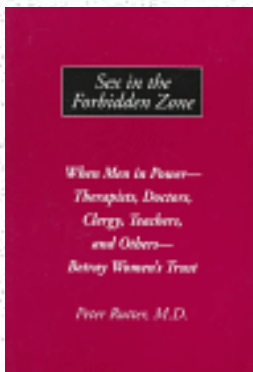
In the past months, I have read and reviewed these resources as part of my healing. I recommend all of them. They are listed in the order in which they were written.

Click on the title for my review. Use your "back" button to return to this list.

Click on the cover for more reviews and/or to order from Amazon.com!



IS NOTHING SACRED: WHEN SEX INVADES THE PASTORAL RELATIONSHIP by Marie M. Fortune. Harper and Row. 1989. \$10.00. This is a case history of clergy sexual abuse in a protestant church by the founder of the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence. Several women accused their pastor of sexually abusing them; it took three years for him to be removed and the parish was split.



SEX IN THE FORBIDDEN ZONE: WHEN MEN IN POWER-DOCTORS, CLERGY, TEACHERS, AND OTHERS-BETRAY WOMEN'S TRUST by Peter Rutter, M. D. Fawcett Paperbacks. 1989. \$5.99. A Jungian analyst, Rutter explains why sexual behavior is always wrong in relationships involving power, trust, and dependency and why professionals fail to police their own organization.

JUDGMENT 1990 PG-13 89 minutes. This is a video of an HBO movie based on the true story of a priest in Louisiana now serving a twenty year sentence for pedophilia. It may be available for rent at your local video store.



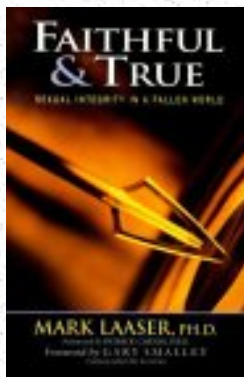
A SECRET WORLD: SEXUALITY AND THE SEARCH FOR CELIBACY by A. W. Richard Sipe. 1990. Brunner/Mazel. \$29.95. For twenty-five years Sipe, a psychotherapist, has been treating priests with sexual problems and studying those who do achieve celibacy.



SEX IN THE PARISH by Karen Lebacqz and Ronald G. Barton. Westminster/John Knox Press. 1991. \$14.99. This book explores the ethics of sexual contact between clergy and parishioners.

"IF YOU HAVE BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED OR HARASSED: A GUIDE TO GETTING EFFECTIVE HELP IN THE ELCA". By Dr. Mary D. Pellauer et al. 26 pp. 1991. Available from ELCA Distribution Service, Box 1209, Minneapolis, IN. 55440. Price \$1.00 each plus postage of \$2.50 for orders of \$1 to \$10. This pamphlet is sold from reading racks in Evangelical Lutheran churches. Imagine if Catholic Churches had such a thing! Besides insisting churches should be a safe place, it has a great list of resources. **May be out of print now. Call and ask it be reprinted! 1-800-328-4648**

THE SECRET SIN: HEALING THE WOUNDS OF SEXUAL ADDICTION by Mark Lasser, Ph.D. Zondervan. 1992. \$8.99. Lasser is a sex addict and



former pastor who shares his personal experiences and offers hope for healing. **New Title: Faithful and True : Sexual Integrity in a Fallen World**

BROKEN COVENANT by Charles M. Sennott. Simon and Schuster. 1992. \$23.00. This is the story of Fr. Bruce Ritter, founder of Covenant House for runaways, and his sexual abuse of children who had turned to him in trust.

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION: CATHOLIC PRIESTS AND THE SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN by Jason Berry. Doubleday. 10/92. \$22.50. Berry has been writing about clergy sexual abuse and interviewing priests all around them country for ten years making him the best informed lay person on the subject.

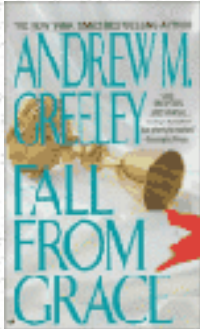
YOU MUST BE DREAMING By Barbara Noel, with Karen Watterson. Poseidon Press. 1992. \$21.00. This woman, sexually abused by her renowned psychiatrist, tells of finally getting him suspended from his professional organizations.

THE GENERAL'S DAUGHTER by Nelson DeMille. Warner Books. 1992. Ten years after her betrayal a woman is found dead. "Just forget it ever happened" does not work!

The book has been made into a movie with the memorable line, "Betrayal is worse than rape!"



SEXUAL ABUSE IN CHRISTIAN HOMES AND CHURCHES by Carolyn H. Heggen. Herald Press. 1993. Dr. Haggen, an Albuquerque psychotherapist, writes about how both theology and church practices lead to victimization of Christians.



FALL FROM GRACE by Andrew M. Greeley. Putnam. 3/93. \$22.95. Priest and author with 15 million books in print in this, his most recent novel, Greeley educates about sexual and political abuse in the church and domestic violence while entertaining with romance and suspense.



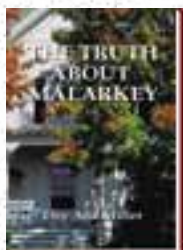
BOYS OF ST. VINCENT This is a powerful video of the sexual abuse by Christian Brothers in Canada. There are copies for rent at my local Hastings.



How Little We Knew: Collusion and Confusion with Sexual Misconduct by Dee Ann Miller. Prescott Press. 1993. \$11.00 Sexually assaulted while serving as a missionary with her husband by a fellow missionary, Dee's greatest trauma came from her church when she spoke out.



A Gospel of Shame: Children, Sexual Abuse, and the Catholic Church by Elinor Burkett and Frank Bruni. Viking. 1993. \$22.50. Two reporters interviewed dozens of survivors, experts, and bishops revealing horrendous abuse of trust and silence by the church.



The Truth about Malarkey by Dee Ann Miller.
First Books. 2000. \$13.98. This is a novel about the effects on a congregation when the pastor sexually abused parishioners.

The Hired Hand: a case of Clergy Abuse by Donna E. Scott. AmErica House. 2001. \$16.95. Some pastors are Good Shepherds, but some are just Hired Hands. These exploit the sheep they are supposed to care for.

The Crime of Father Amaro or El Crimen del Padre Amaro. 2002. Here is a movie made in Mexico about priests sexually abusing women, among their other sins. Available on video or DVD.



Write to me about these resources or others you know:
misteele@asbw.us

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REVIEWS

by **Mary Isabel Steele**

These reviews were written in 1992 and 1993. They were not published as part of my book.

IS NOTHING SACRED: WHEN SEX INVADES THE PASTORAL RELATIONSHIP by Marie M. Fortune. Published by Harper and Row. 1989.

Marie Fortune is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ and the founder and executive director of the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence. In 1984 she was asked to serve as advocate and pastor for six women who had made formal complaints of sexual abuse against the pastor of their church. This book is a case study of the church, the pastor, the women, and the church's inadequate response to the sexual misconduct. She uses fictitious names for individuals and places and does not name the denomination.

The First Church of Newburg was a fairly typical mainline protestant church whose senior pastor had resigned. The search committee had been reviewing applications for fifteen months and was beginning to get pressure to select someone.

Donovan had impeccable credentials. The committee member who visited Donovan's former church felt a vague sense of disquiet, but when the committee met Donovan, he seemed almost too good to be true. They called him to be their pastor.

Donovan was charismatic. His preaching was dynamic, but he was preaching Donovan, not scripture. He began using anger and threats to control meetings. Anyone who disagreed with him was told to find another church. Before long, rumors were flying of his being a womanizer.

All the women Donovan abused were vulnerable to his power as pastor. In two cases he forcibly raped the women. In the others he emotionally coerced them into having sex with him and then swore them to secrecy about the relationship. When the women learned about each other and shared their stories, they wanted to see Donovan stopped.

In the fifth chapter Fortune explains the three factors she sees as responsible for Donovan being able to continue to sexually abuse members of his congregation for over three years: a lack of professional policy, the failure to acknowledge the very real difference in power between a pastor and those served, and the family model which invites incest.

The last chapter is devoted to how churches can better handle clergy sexual abuse. It includes protection of the vulnerable, accountability, restitution, and vindication. It also shows how "shooting the messenger," misnaming the problem, and power of the patriarchy can prevent justice from being done.

The book closes on a note of hope by including a model policy for dealing with clergy sexual misconduct that even discusses education and prevention.

**SEX IN THE FORBIDDEN ZONE: WHEN MEN IN POWER-DOCTORS, CLERGY, TEACHERS, AND OTHERS-BETRAY WOMEN'S TRUST by PETER RUTTERS, M.D. 1989
FAWCETT PAPERBACK \$5.99.**

When was the last time you read a book that made you want to buy dozens of copies to share with almost everyone you know? This is such a book! Dr. Rutter grabs his reader's attention at the very beginning of the book by relating two personal experiences of sex in the forbidden zone: the time he came very close to having sex with one of his patients and the time he learned that an important mentor of his had had many sexual relationships with patients, knowledge which Dr. Rutter did not use to stop the abuse. Rutter explains how vulnerable all men, even those with the highest ethical standards, are to forbidden sex. He also explains why the response of many men to a colleague who has had forbidden sex is a secret envy accompanied by a hope that someday they will be able to do the same. This is what keeps men

from policing their own profession and permits them to stand by silently as women are victimized.

As a Jungian therapist, Rutter is convincing when he tells men that their sexual fantasies have the potential for healing, but only if viewed as representations of their own anima, not when they are projected onto a woman in the forbidden zone. Acting on such fantasies or even sharing them with women who have come to them in trust can cause severe psychological damage to the woman lasting for years.

This book tells why men find forbidden sex so enticing. It shows how women participate in it allowing themselves to be sexually exploited. It also describes the psychological and cultural conditioning that prepare women and men to participate in destructive sexuality. Examples are given of the severe damage that can result from such forbidden sex, and preventative measures, as well as steps to recovery from past abuse, are given.

Rutter clearly explains why sexual behavior is always wrong in relationships involving power, trust, and dependency. The dynamics of such relationships remove the possibility for a woman to truly consent, though in most cases the woman says the words indicating consent. He insists that because the man has the greater power, it is always the man's responsibility to guard the sexual boundaries, even if the woman is seductive. Rutter also emphasizes that a man in a position of power over a woman holds a sacred trust to guard her from harm and to share his power with her so she can eventually go on without him.

When he started researching this book, Rutter found that there were no books or articles written on this subject! The "Don't Talk Rule" was everywhere evident in our society. He insists that every book, article, and speech on this topic helps to remove the cloak of secrecy which has made sexual exploitation possible. The numbers of violations have been legion, but change is possible and has already begun in just the past few years.

The book is divided into seven chapters. One points out the immense potential to both men and women of relationships involving power and trust. Two discusses the psychological wounds women bring to forbidden sex relationships for healing. Three lists men's wounds stemming from parental relationships. Four shows the stages a woman passes through as her boundaries are violated.

Five traces the stages from the man's perspective. Six warns women how they can guard their boundaries. Seven provides men with a guide to not acting on their sexual fantasies. In the epilogue is an extensive list of resources, both books and organizations, and notes on networking.

Take care of your holiday shopping early; buy a copy of this book for everyone on your shopping list. Be sure to include your doctor, lawyer, professor, clergy person, therapist, and your boss!

JUDGEMENT 1990 PG-13 89 minutes Director: Tom Topor Cast: Keith Carradine, Blyth Damer, Jack Warden

The screenplay for this movie made for HBO is based on the true story of a priest of the Lafayette, Louisiana Diocese who was convicted of pedophilia in 1982. Some of the events and characters were changed for dramatic purposes. The plot focuses on one young boy and his family involved in taking the case to trial. That as many as 200 altar boys may have been abused over a five to seven year period is only hinted at. It makes no reference to the fact that seven priests were implicated during legal proceedings and that "they were trading these kids like baseball cards" (A quote from the prosecuting attorney in "Unholy Alliances," VANITY Dec. 1991, p.227.).

The story does show how innocently the parents allow their son to become involved with the priest. It shows how the priest secures the boys' silence, the psychological and even physical damage the boy suffers, the denial of a doctor who sees the evidence of the physical damage, and the denial, for some time, of some of the parents. That the Church's response is dictated by the insurance company is well brought out! The priest, obviously sexually addicted, is allowed to remain in his denial of what he has done by a monsignor and a bishop who, upon receiving complaints of new sexual abuse promise him a promotion and make no direct reference to the complaints until months later when they ask him to surrender to the police!

The only avenue to justice left after the bishop's unavailability and cowardice and shortsightedness, is taking the abuser to trial. The difficulties of a child testifying, his lawyer's skill in preparing him without "leading the witness," and the boy's great courage fueled by

his anger are powerful scenes.

The suffering of all involved is well portrayed. The boy suffers terribly. Viewers see his fear of the abuser, his insomnia, and his nightmares. The parents suffer also. Their faith suffers. Their marriage suffers. Their relationships in the community suffer. The family business suffers. The hierarchy of the Church suffer at least anxiety as the case is brought to trial and they are ordered to pay millions of dollars in damages. And finally the priest suffers when he is sentenced to prison for twenty years at hard labor with no chance for parole.

If this video is not available for rent, it can be purchased for \$89.99, or it may be borrowed from the library of the NEW MEXICO COALITION OF SEXUAL ASSAULT PROGRAMS at 4004 Carlisle NE, Albuquerque, NM. (505)883-8020.

A SECRET WORLD: SEXUALITY AND THE SEARCH FOR CELIBACY by A. W. Richard Sipe. Brunner/ Mazel. 1990. \$29.95.

A. W. Richard Sipe is a Catholic priest who left active ministry and married. He works as a psychotherapist in private practice and has treated and interviewed over 1500 persons over the past twenty-five years, mostly priests.

The book is divided into three sections. In Part I "The Background and the Context" Sipe explains how he came to write the book, how celibacy was affected by the sexual revolution of the 1960s, the origins of celibacy, and the meaning of celibacy.

In Part II "Practice Verses the Profession" Sipe takes an in-depth look at patterns of heterosexuality, homosexuality, masturbation, pedophilia, sexual compromises, sex drive, and urging abortion upon those they have impregnated by Catholic priests.

In Part III Sipe explores the stages necessary to achieve celibacy and discusses married priesthood and the incredibility of the church's sexual teachings. ("How many still believe every act of masturbation is always a mortal sin?" he asks!) He describes those priests he has met who have achieved celibacy and urges them to write of their experiences so that others might follow their example.

This is a most thought provoking book, one to be read by celibates and all those concerned with the crisis in the church today.

SEX IN THE PARISH by Karen Lebacqz and Ronald G. Barton Westminister/John Knox Press. 1991.

This is a book about sexual ethics. The authors are concerned not only with sexual abuse, but also with how to create, nourish and express sexuality in a healthy way. It grew out of work of the Professional Ethics Group of the Center for Ethics and Social Policy at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley.

Chapter One focuses on sexuality as a positive gift and some of its vulnerabilities and joys in a parish setting. Chapter Two examines the dynamics of sexual desire and temptation, especially in respect to male sexuality, since most pastors are male. Three is the story of one pastor who failed to set proper sexual boundaries.

Chapter Four analyses power and role to explain why sexual contact between a pastor and a parishioner is suspect. Mutuality is missing in the pastor-parishioner relationship. The pastor has power; the parishioner is vulnerable. The responsibility for maintaining boundaries lies with the pastor because the pastor is the stronger party. To be violated by a person of the cloth is to feel violated by God and the church. Ministry is a profession. Pastors are ordained to meet the needs of parishioners, not to get their own needs met. Sexual intimacy in such cases is a violation of trust and has an incestuous quality.

Chapter Five is an ethical framework. Consent is a necessary condition for ethical sex. Equal power, full knowledge, and freedom are prerequisites for consent. If a pastor offers time and attention to a needy, vulnerable parishioner in exchange for sexual contact, the parishioner is not able to give valid consent. Any use of coercion or deception is not ethical. If, however, the pastor and parishioner meet as equals, as in some ministry, the authors of this book believe in the possibility of a genuinely loving, consensual relationship if the pastor's behavior is professional and ethical.

Chapter Six discusses sexual harassment and points out that our society

normally expects male domination and violence rather than consensual and mutual sexuality. Frequently a woman reporting a male violation of sexual boundaries is not believed or is blamed. Chapter Seven explores the sexual ethics of a woman pastor, Chapter Eight, a single pastor, Chapter Nine, lesbian and gay pastors.

Chapter Ten discusses the bishop's responsibility in the area of pastoral sexual ethics. An appendix presents guidelines for allegations of inappropriate sexual contact by pastors or pastoral counselors in professional relationships. I highly recommend this book to all bishops, clergy, pastoral counselors, and to those who have experienced violation of their sexual boundaries in a pastoral setting.

THE SECRET SIN: HEALING THE WOUNDS OF SEXUAL ADDICTION by Mark Laaser, Ph.D. Zondervan Publishing, 1992. \$8.99.

In his introduction, Dr. Laaser affirms his belief that there is hope for the church and all those in the church who suffer from sexual sins including spouses, families, friends, and sexually addicted pastors confessing that he writes from his personal experiences as a sex addict and a former pastor.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I deals with sexual addiction. Laaser discusses sexual addiction as both a sin and as a disease. Next he explains the building blocks of sexual addiction: fantasy, pornography, and masturbation and shows how they create a vicious cycle. He distinguishes activities ranging from sex with a consenting partner all the way to rape, incest, and child molesting which produce different types of sex addicts. In the chapter on the characteristics of sexual addiction Laaser points out parallels between sex addiction and alcoholism: low self-esteem, an attitude of entitlement, control, unmanageability, denial, delusion, increasing tolerance, blackouts, blaming others, rigid thinking, and not being stopped by consequences. He explains that sex addicts crave the nurturing they did not receive as children but don't feel worthy of nurturance. They become codependent, addicted to one or more people. They often lack basic information about sex and are cross addicted. Many seem to hate all men or all women as a result of projecting anger toward their childhood abuser upon all of the same sex. The list of twelve observable

symptoms at the end of this chapter may prove useful in identifying sex addicts. The last chapter in this section describes sexually addicted pastors .

Part II traces the roots of sexual addiction to unhealthy families. Laaser describes characteristics of these families and their resulting physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Then he explains how sexual addiction is a strategy to cope with abuse and points out connections to religious addiction.

Part III is devoted to healing the wounds of sexual addiction. One chapter describes the 12 steps as tools for healing. Another shows how to confront a sexual addict. Treatment for sexual addiction is discussed in another. In the chapter devoted to the recovery for couples, Laaser explains that addicts and their partners have very similar childhood abuse issues. Their first recovery task is to stop projecting abuse issues from parents onto the partner. To build intimacy Laaser suggests telling about past behavior, fighting fairly, and playing together. He discusses a number of needs addicted couples have in order to heal. He recommends the couple have a couple sponsor to go to with couple issues and a practice he calls the couple's personal inventory. The last chapter suggests how congregations can recover. A list of resources concludes the book.

BROKEN COVENANT by Charles M. Sennott. Simon and Schuster. 1992. \$23.00.

This is the story of Father Bruce Ritter, the founder of the under 21 runaway shelter, Covenant House, and the events that led from his reputation as the living saint of Times Square to his leaving both the charity he'd founded and the Conventual Franciscan Order to which he had belonged for nearly fifty years. The author is a newspaper reporter for the NEW YORK POST; it was his article about Ritter being investigated by the Manhattan District Attorney's office that first told the world that this Catholic priest was not all he had appeared to be.

The book begins with a gripping reconstruction of the gathering of evidence against Father Ritter by a young man who, disillusioned by his sex-for-money relationship with him, recorded a conversation between them and turned the tape over to the D. A.

Then the author gives biographical background about Ritter's childhood, seminary years, and the founding and early years of Covenant House. Suspicions of Ritter's sexual problems began in the 1950's but were never investigated.

Sennott refers to Ritter as the Donald Trump of Catholicism explaining how corporate contributions and direct mail campaigns provided Covenant House with an annual budget of \$90 million by June of 1989. He describes his connections to Reagan, the Far Right, and the Contras. In spite of his vow of poverty, by 1985 Ritter was paying himself a salary of over \$98,000 and had set up a private trust fund of over \$300,000 for his own use.

Ritter's last weeks at Covenant House are reconstructed as fifteen young male clients with whom Ritter had had sex came forward alleging he'd not only exploited them but had also bought their silence.

As a survivor of clergy sexual abuse, I found the last chapter the saddest. Ritter resigned from Covenant House but was never charged with any crimes. Eventually investigations by the Franciscans and Covenant House revealed clearly unethical behavior both sexually and financially, but he never admitted any guilt or went for treatment. He was forced out of the Franciscans but remains a priest, technically under a bishop in India.

Only one of his victims received any financial compensation; this was an out-of-court settlement with Covenant House, not the church. Sennott includes a copy of a letter from one of his victims to Ritter and a response from the Franciscans thanking the young man for coming forward but offering no compensation beyond "our gratitude and our prayers"! The book ends with these sobering statistics: Over four hundred Roman Catholic priests have faced charges in the past ten years. The church has already paid \$400 million for therapy and legal fees. An estimated 3000 priests in the U. S. today are pedophiles.

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION: CATHOLIC PRIESTS AND THE SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN by Jason Berry. Doubleday. 10/92 \$22.50.

One sentence in the Prologue seems to summarize this whole book

very well: "The crisis in the Catholic Church lies not with the fraction of priests who molest youngsters but in an ecclesiastical power structure that harbors pedophiles, conceals other sexual patterns among its clerics, and uses strategies of duplicity and counter-attack against the victims."

In Part One, Jason Berry, a freelance writer living in New Orleans, tells the story of Gilbert J. Gauthé Jr., a priest of the Lafayette diocese, who in 1983 admitted under oath to sexually abusing thirty-seven boys. When Ray Mouton, the lawyer hired to defend Gauthé, read reports of the hundreds and hundreds of sex acts he had had with little boys in the rectory, in the sacristy, and on weekend outings, he concluded he was going to meet the Devil disguised as a Catholic priest. Upon interviewing his client, his first thought was, "I'm talking to a nine year old."

Like so many pedophiles, Gauthé was psychosexually arrested at an early age. He had been abused by an older neighbor boy when he was in grade school. Convicted, he is now serving a twenty year sentence in a Louisiana state prison with no chance for parole. Church officials refused to pay for treatment that would have enabled him to serve his time in a medical facility. The Lafayette diocese has paid out over \$20 million in damages to his victims.

Part Two is an analysis of the problem by Berry, who has been writing articles on clergy sexual abuse for over eight years. He quotes books, studies, and interviews with many priests across the country who believe that today between thirty and ninety percent of all Catholic clergy are gay and that at least half of all clergy are sexually active. He concludes that leading lives of secrecy and narcissism has resulted in the great disregard for children and women evidenced by the number and treatment of cases of clergy sexual abuse surfacing now.

Part Three states that four hundred Catholic priests have been reported for pedophilia between 1984 and 1992 and illustrates with several examples how bishops and church officials across the country have responded by covering up, denial, transferring the perpetrators who continue to abuse, and even filing counter suits against those seeking healing from their church. Berry points out that such tactics may be expected from corporations, but when practiced by men trained in scripture, ethics, and values, this seems to indicate a great moral flaw. Besides, it is expensive. By the year 2000, the church may pay out \$1 billion to resolve abuse cases. The

book is not pleasant reading: yet, it is only when the People of God, clergy and laity alike, face squarely the extent and causes of the scandal of sexual abuse in the church today that true healing can begin. Berry's years of intimate familiarity with this subject highly qualify him to write this book. READ IT SOON!!!!

YOU MUST BE DREAMING by Barbara Noel with Kathryn Watterson. Posidon Press. 1992. \$21.00.

"We are telling!" is the current motto of survivors of sexual abuse. Indeed, survivors are talking and writing about their abuse. This is the second book I have read this week that exposes men of power who have sexually exploited those who came to them in trust for help and healing.

Barbara Noel is a singer, composer, and lyricist who lives in Chicago. In 1966 she began therapy with a psychiatrist, Dr. Jules H. Masserman, because of performance anxiety. Over the next eighteen years he regularly gave her injections of Sodium Amytal "to help her overcome her resistance to the truth". She saw him over 2000 times and paid him more than \$100,000 of her own money without any health insurance compensation. She became addicted to the Amytal, a barbiturate, and to alcohol as a result of her "treatments". On September 21, 1984, she woke up in the middle of a "treatment" to find Dr. Masserman on top of her raping her. When she reported the rape, a police officer told her, "You must have been dreaming"!

Noel discovered two other patients whom Masserman had also abused. All filed lawsuits. Because Masserman was by that time eighty-one years old and court dates were four years off, all agreed to settle out of court. In October of 1986, Noel was paid \$200,000 by Masserman's insurance company, but she knew he was continuing to abuse other patients. The lawsuits were reported in an article in the Chicago Tribune on January 6, 1987. Several other of Masserman's victims contacted Noel. Noel wrote to Masserman's professional organizations.

Barbara Noel went into treatment and began to recover from her drug and alcohol addiction caused by Dr. Masserman. After three years of seeing a woman therapist, she remembered being incested by both her mother and her father. In October of 1991, Noel was notified that Dr.

Masserman had been suspended from the American Psychiatric Association and from the Illinois Psychiatric Society although he still refused to admit to any professional misconduct.

Let all perpetrators of sexual abuse be put on notice: We are telling. We won't "just go away". We will talk and write about our abuse until professions take responsibility for their members and abuse stops, no matter how many years that takes!

THE GENERAL'S DAUGHTER by Nelson DeMille. Warner Books. 1992. \$21.95.

I just came across this book. It is my story with different nouns! The institution comes first!

"This is what happened on a night in August ten years before. The commandant of West Point did not announce that a hundred women in the woods with a thousand men did not get raped during training. And he wasn't about to announce that one did. So the people in Washington, in the Pentagon, at the Academy, had reasoned with General Joseph Campbell. And, as he related it to Cynthia and me, it certainly sounded reasonable. Better to have one unreported and unvindicated rape than to rock the very foundations of West Point, to cause doubts about a co-ed academy, to cast suspicion on a thousand innocent men who did not gang-rape a woman that night. All the general had to do was to convince his daughter that she-as well as the Academy, the Army, the nation, and the cause of equality-would be better served if she just forgot about the whole thing." p. 331

"Five men have a memory of a fun night, and here we are dealing with the mess. Five men, if they were all cadets, went on to graduate and become officers and gentlemen. They were classmates of hers and probably saw her every day. Indirectly, or perhaps directly, they were responsible for her death. Certainly they were responsible for her mental condition."

Cynthia nodded. "And if they were soldiers. they went back to their post and bragged about how they all fucked this little West Point bitch cadet."

"Right. And they got away with it."

General Campbell returned and sat again. After a while, he said. "So you see, I got what I deserved, but Ann was the one who paid for my betrayal." p.332

The movie is much more violent with several changes in the storyline, but I hope it delivers the message to all those who do not read.

SEXUAL ABUSE in CHRISTIAN HOMES and CHURCHES by Carolyn Holderread Heggen. Herald Press. 2/93. \$9.95.

Dr. Heggen, an Albuquerque psychotherapist specializing in treatment of adult survivors of sexual abuse, has written this book to show how both theology and church practices lead to victimization of Christians. In Chapter One she defines sexual abuse as tricking, trapping, bribing, or coercing someone with less maturity or power into a sexual experience. Touch is not necessary. Words, sounds, or exposure to sights can violate personal physical and emotional space harming another and leaving life-long scars. Chapter Two examines the scars which can include low self-esteem, self-damaging behaviors, inability to trust, damaged spirituality, and, perhaps, even loss of faith. Chapter Three discusses denial, incidence, and factors related to abuse.

Chapter Four is devoted to who become perpetrators and various theories why they do. Chapter Five examines six religious beliefs commonly held in Christian homes and churches and how these foster abuse. Chapter Six is devoted to abuse by clergy, the damage to victims of such abuse, an explanation of the imbalance of power between pastors and parishioners making consent impossible, and ten guidelines for pastors wishing to avoid abuse.

In Chapter Seven Heggen points out that restitution involves the desire to make amends for sin and a willingness to bear the consequences of the abuse. Forgiveness is primarily an act of the will, but it is also a process allowing the victim to experience and let go of the intense emotional pain of the abuse. Reconciliation cannot happen without true repentance by the offender; however, when the abuser continues to deny the abuse, the victim can extend a unilateral forgiveness freeing her self or himself from the pain, despair, and frustration of the abuse.

Chapter Eight provides ten guidelines to congregations working with abuse victims as well as ideas for working with offenders and with families. Chapter Nine is full of ideas for making church worship

sensitive to survivors. Chapter Ten suggests fourteen ways sexual abuse can be prevented, and Chapter Eleven includes five steps congregations can take in fostering healthy sexuality. The book concludes with a very hopeful epilogue and a bibliography of over one hundred books and articles.

Dr. Heggen's book is not intended to be a self help book for recovery from abuse but, rather, a handbook to give clergy and lay people the knowledge and tools so they might be truly channels of healing and grace for victims, perpetrators, families, and congregations wounded by sexual abuse. May this book be widely read, especially by Catholics!

FALL FROM GRACE by Andrew M. Greeley. Putnam. 3/93. \$22.95.

Greeley is a renowned sociologist, Catholic priest, college professor, and the author of over thirty titles with 15 million books in print. FALL FROM GRACE is his most recent novel, published in March of this year, although he says he drafted it last winter before the explosion of the clergy sexual abuse crisis in the archdiocese of Chicago where the story takes place.

The main characters of the novel are Irish. Kathleen is a beautiful redhead with lots of political savvy, a Ph. D. dissertation in progress, three charming daughters, and a husband who beats her. Kieran is a psychiatrist who has been in love with Kathleen since he first saw her in eighth grade. Leary is the auxiliary bishop, a prisoner of seeing the world the way he wants to see it. Brendan is a priest with a law degree who, in a case against the archdiocese, is representing the parents of a third grader physically and sexually abused by another Catholic priest. Not Irish, the perpetrator, Father Greene, had been accused of anal rape of two twelve year olds ten years earlier and is suspected of participation in a Satanic cult.

Because the book is fiction, Greeley writes many things he might not have in a work of non fiction. He illustrates the denial of priests and hierarchy about clergy sexual abuse. He explains why the hierarchy will attack those victimized by the church before they will relinquish any of their power. He also states clearly the church is being run by lawyers who are profiting immensely. Greeley shows the sexual, political, and moral corruption that exist within the church from top to bottom. He

suggests an independent lay review board as a solution to the crisis and says the media is the only real hope for clearing up the mess.

At the same time, Greeley also points out that most perpetrators were themselves abused when they were growing up, and he makes some powerful statements about forgiveness at the end of the book. Full of romance and suspense, this story ends with a twist most will not have anticipated. *FALL FROM GRACE* entertains readers while furthering their understanding of the crisis facing the Catholic church today.

New Reviews

The Truth about Malarkey by Dee Ann Miller. First Books. 2000.

Dee Miller has written a novel about the devastation caused by clergy sexual abuse, not only to adult women and adolescents betrayed by their pastors, but also to congregations, other pastors, and even children conceived in abusive relationships. Very cleverly Miller uses a 92 year old grandmother as the narrator and letters to her grandson, to be read someday when he is older, as the vehicle to tell her story.

A pastor is invited to return to a mega-church he served years before as a guest speaker for the church's 35th anniversary celebration. At first all seem pleased, but the new young assistant pastor notices one woman's pain and inspires the trust of her confidence. Once he knows, he takes her story to the pastor, who tells him to forget it, but he cannot. Miller uses her extensive communication with survivors to weave a story of the denial and blaming the victim and blaming the messenger in one nondenominational congregation that could be most churches anywhere.

As a survivor myself, I found the book less than fun to read. I was relieved it is short. But I am glad I read it. I left my church before I could experience all of the pain characters in *The Truth about Malarkey* feel. This book is fiction, but I know Dee Miller did not invent the responses to news that a trusted professional has misused his power. I hope many will read this book and ponder it's message.

The Hired Hand: A Case of Clergy Abuse by Donna E. Scott, AmErica House, 2001. \$16.95.

In the *Hired Hand*, Donna Scott tells the story of a woman sexually abused by her pastor. Part One tells The Setup: the issues that brought Renee to pastoral counseling, details of how Pastor Smith sexualized their counseling sessions, an explanation of the danger signals that might have alerted Renee if she had not been wounded and trusting of her pastor, a look inside the head of the hired hand contrasted with that of a good shepherd, and words to clergy exhorting them to not harm those who turn to them for healing and to not ignore other pastors who do.

In Part Two, *Disclosure and Denial*, we learn what happens when a woman tries to report her abuse. Scott explains the denial by the abuser, the denial by others, and the distortions of reality blaming the victim for what has happened. She devotes several pages to explaining why, although she is an adult, no woman who has gone to her pastor for counseling can ever give consent to a sexualized relationship and why she is never at fault. She ends this section with why pastors try to pass the buck instead of accepting responsibility for what happened, what God has to say about those who abuse, and words to clergy and congregations.

Part Three is devoted to *The Aftermath*, discussing in detail how the victim is impacted by the abuse: guilt, impaired ability to trust, ambivalence, emptiness and isolation, emotional volatility, suppressed anger, sexual confusion, increased suicidal risk, role reversal and boundary disturbance, and cognitive dysfunction.

The book concludes with an *Afterward*, endnotes, a bibliography, and an extensive resource list including books, videos, organizations, and support groups.

So few people understand the necessity for equality in power in order for sex to be consensual. Ms. Scott does and she says it over many times in this book. Let's send copies to Hillary, who refers to her husband's "affairs". Let's send copies to all the reporters who refer to abused parishioners as having had "affairs" with their pastors. Let's give copies to all the Catholic bishops who think only children can be abused by priests. Let's make copies available to members of congregations whose pastor has abused women. Let's give copies to our family, friends and neighbors, and let us pray they read them!

**The Crime of Father Amaro or El Crimen del Padre Amaro 2002 R
118 minutes Director: Carlos Carrera Cast: Gael Garcia Bernal,
Sancho Gracia, Ana Claudia**

The movie is based on a Portugese novel written in 1875. The film itself is set in Mexico in 2002. Clergy sexual abuse has been around for a long time, and it is everywhere.

In this story, a newly ordained priest is sent by his bishop to serve in a small town under a seasoned pastor. He and a teenager of the parish are attracted to each other from their first meeting. Father Amaro soon notices that the girl's mother is not only the pastor's housekeeper and cook but also shares his bed. Amelia teaches catechism to the parish children and helps her mother serve meals to the priests. She kisses Father Amaro's hands as an act of devotion. She attends mass with her boyfriend, Ruben, who has said he loves her and wants to marry her. However, when Ruben writes an article telling the truth about inappropriate clergy behavior, Amelia gets angry at him and refuses to even speak to him. Ruben gets angry at Father Amaro and hits him. Father Amaro refuses to press charges against Ruben. Amelia, projecting the sufferings of Jesus onto the priest, weeps for him. He wipes away her tears and kisses her on the mouth.

Amelia goes to confession to Father Amaro. He admits he was "out of line". She asks, "What about our love?" Father Amaro tries quoting scripture: Love is patient. Love is kind. When Amelia presses him, he says, "It is a gift from God, but we must be careful as people will not understand."

In a group of priests Father Amaro expresses his opinion, "If celibacy were optional, the Church could avoid a lot of trouble." The pastor responds it will never happen. Later, in a conversation with Amelia's mother, he says, "I made you a priest's whore. Because I love you, I will go to hell." He is a conflicted man.

In a brief scene Father Amaro is shown holding his hand over an open flame as he struggles with temptations. But soon after he tells lies that get him a room where he and Amelia can have privacy. He has sex with her while quoting "The Song of Songs". During one of their meetings he covers her with a blue star-studded cloak and tells her she is more beautiful than the Virgin. She tells him, "I want to love you in front of everyone." He responds, "Our love is different." She points out, "Lots of priests hang up their cassock and marry." Amaro replies, "I spent years studying, I have a vocation. I can do much good for people as a priest."

When the pastor learns what Father Amaro has done, he is furious. "She is just a child. You are a priest." Amaro replies, "I am also a man." The pastor challenges, "You took a vow of chastity," and announces he will tell the bishop. Amaro assures him he will not tell; doing so would "force" Amaro to tell the bishop about Amelia's mother! "It is not the same," the pastor insists. "It is," says Amaro. Because of his own sin, the pastor is blackmailed into silence.

When Amelia tells Father Amaro she is pregnant, he asks, "Are you sure?" She is hurt: Is that all you can say? He suggests she go away for nine months and place the baby for adoption. She asks, "Is that what you want, for me to give up my baby?" He insists, "I am a priest. I can't jeopardize my priesthood. You knew that from the beginning."

How damaged would Amelia be if Amaro had insisted they use birth control? If he left the priesthood and married her? If she placed her child for adoption? If Ruben married her and raised the child as his own? If she kept the baby and raised it herself? I will not spoil the ending for you except to say the narcissistic young priest remains in character right up to the very last scene and the girl he "loves" pays the highest price for his sin.

I found this to be a powerful dramatization of how parishioners can be vulnerable to clergy, why clergy do not police their own ranks, how well-meaning bystanders collude with abuse, and how bishops are concerned only with the reputation of the institution they head rather than with those they shepherd. I highly recommend it, even though it is anything but a cheerful story.

This movie was nominated for thirteen Mexican Academy Awards. The video I rented had Spanish dialogue with English subtitles. I believe there is a DVD available with English dialogue.

On the film's official web site

<http://padreamaromovie.com>

there are links to many reviews. Several were written by people who do not understand a parishioner cannot have an "affair" with a priest. None are by survivors of csa. Drop by and do some educating! There are also photos and free ecards!

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Mary Isabel Steele
welcomes you to
a new book
about her
CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE

All Shall be Well was put together after Father Mike's superiors refused to apologize to me again in December of 1992. The last part of it was written as I lived it from painful moment to painful moment in the spring of 1993. Ten years have passed. I ought to be able to write more now with some perspective. I want to explore why I was so vulnerable to the priests and what I have learned since I wrote my first book. In the months to come I shall write on these and related topics and post them below.

The Beginning

The Steeles were a mixed breed. I'm sure I have some English, Scotch, Irish, and French blood from my father. My mother's side of the family was all Irish. Her father was one of eight children in a devout Catholic family. One of his sisters was abbess of a Poor Clare monastery. One brother was ordained a priest and later became an archbishop. One of my mother's cousins was a priest, another a nun. My grandfather was editor of the Catholic newspaper and owner of a Catholic bookstore. He went to Mass every day for much of his life. My mother had gone to Mass every day for many years of her life. I had a religious conversion experience when I was fourteen and began attending Mass daily. By the age of fifteen, the only thing I wanted to do with my life was to become a cloistered nun.

to be continued

Pastoral abuse.com asked me to write a synopsis of my story for their site. This is what I wrote in June of 2003:

I was sexually abused by a Catholic priest when I was forty years old. How did it happen? The priest was drunk. My mother had been a devout Irish Catholic who was very proud of the clergy in her family, especially her uncle, the archbishop, who had presided at her wedding and my baptism. She was also an alcoholic; so I had grown up knowing the games alcoholics play. My mother's chronic drunkenness had resulted in my being raised essentially by my father, who had taught me a lot about keeping secrets and dependence on authority figures. I had been set up.

The spring of 1984 was quite a tumultuous time for me. I had just returned to faith after a thirteen year dark night of the soul during which I had not known whether or not there was a god. My adolescent dream of becoming a Carmelite nun had returned. Childhood abuse issues were resurfacing. I was still grieving the loss of two people I loved dearly. My father became ill and died. I returned to therapy and I reached out to an assistant pastor who had been kind to me in the confessional. For my fortieth birthday I asked Father Mike to celebrate a mass in my home for thirty friends and relatives. When for the fourth time in four months I asked to sit in his office to sort out my feelings about all that was going on in my life, he interrupted my narrative about growing up in an alcoholic home with the words, "I'd really like to go to bed with you, but I think it would destroy us both." I was lonely and vulnerable. I trusted this priest, who had taken a vow of celibacy, whom I called, "Father". He betrayed my trust.

I was surprised by his words. I had not been thinking of having sex with him. I felt guilty: What had I said or done that a priest would speak to me like that? I felt I could not talk about what had happened. He had told me he was an alcoholic. I somehow confused protecting his anonymity with keeping a bad secret. From the beginning, most professionals I turned to, most Catholics, did not know what to say when I did tell. The counselor I had just started to see said, "How cute! You and Father Mike are in love!" (I did have the good sense to find another counselor.) When I tried to report Father Mike to his superior, the priest stood up, said to me, "Mary, I have to put the vegetables in the soup," and walked off leaving me sitting at his desk! The superior was not drunk. That he or Father Mike might be held accountable did not cross his mind. Father Mike later told me he never mentioned my disclosure to him! His breach of fiduciary duty, to use legal terms, harmed me more than Father Mike's words.

Because his superior did not send Father Mike to treatment as he should have, and because Father Mike continued to drink, he propositioned me again

a year and a half later. I had tried avoiding him. I had tried making peace with him. His behavior toward me had been very strange, smiling and hugging me one day then ignoring me the next time he saw me. No other parish had Eucharist five times a day and Morning Prayer; I could not leave this parish where I was so active. The Sunday after Christmas, I served as Eucharistic Minister. Father Mike did not wish me a Merry Christmas, even though we stood in the same room for ten minutes. I called him later and asked, "Is silence really what you need from me? It seems dishonest to not even say 'Hello'. I just want a spiritual friendship with you." He responded, "Sometimes I think we could be friends if only we went to bed together. You know. You could say, 'I'll be home this afternoon at 2:00,' and I could come on over."

Did I have sex with the priest? No, but I realize now it was because my father had never physically inceded me. He had been inappropriately emotionally intimate, but I had intact physical sexual boundaries. And, I had spent years wanting to devote my life to praying for priests. I was emotionally enmeshed with this man, but he was my confessor. He had an indelible mark of priesthood on his soul! I saw him as a father figure, not an equal, not a lover.

For nine months I tried to forget Father Mike's words. One day a man I knew named what had happened: "He propositioned you." It was as if someone had flipped open the blinds! I saw clearly what had happened and knew the only way to stop the abuse was to tell the secret. I walked up to Father Mike's new superior and told him. "Healing takes a long time," was all he said before walking away. I walked over to my pastor. Well, that is all behind you now" was his response as he tossed his head over his shoulder. I did not feel I had been heard. I tried for months to speak to the archbishop. I did tell the chancellor. "But nothing happened, Dear," was his response. Finally I found the archbishop at a feast day celebration of a nearby parish. I told him which parish I belonged to and what had happened, "Oh, you mean Father Mike A_____. Do you want me to speak to him about it?" was his response!!! Certainly not. I was still protecting Father Mike! Was I the first or only woman Father Mike ever propositioned? For years I wanted to believe so. I wanted to be special. But as I look back on the archbishop's words to me, I'm sure I was only one of many Father Mike had come on to sexually.

With no one responding appropriately to my disclosures, did I then walk away from my parish? No. I did learn to meditate. I filled many journals. I studied forgiveness and struggled for years to get things right with Father Mike. During the summer of 1988 I wrote three short stories about my abuse in an effort to heal. I made fifty copies and mailed one to each person on my Christmas card list and one to the archbishop. No more secrets!

Eventually Father Mike got sober. He asked my forgiveness for "all the ways I have hurt you." During the summer of 1989 I took a writing course. I wrote

several poems about my feelings for Father Mike. Months later he was transferred out of state. We said good-bye. I had not intended to continue our relationship, but Father Mike wrote me, and I found myself once again emotionally centered in him. He sent me birthday cards, Easter cards, a Valentine, letters. He kept telling me he loved me. I took vows, but I was not able to end our relationship. He was the “professional,” but neither was he.

I was in therapy. I meditated two hours a day. I struggled with my enmeshment with this priest. I read an article that explained why dual relationships are harmful. I made a copy and sent it to Father Mike. I called him and discussed it. He agreed that because we had met in a counseling relationship, we could not be friends. We said good-bye again. But my story does not end here. My abuse was far from over. I contacted Father Mike’s community and pointed out to them that they should not have “ignored” me when I reported his abuse. I asked for an apology from them. That started World War III!

Instead of receiving an apology, I was stonewalled, blamed, lied to, and lied about. I was told to go home and keep quiet, that God uses things like what had happened to me for our spiritual growth! I called Father Mike and asked him what he was doing to get me an apology so this could be all over. He replied, “We cannot apologize to you. You will sue us for six million dollars and put us out of business.” The statute of limitations had expired, and I did not want to sue. I only wanted an apology. But he was right. I just was coming from such a different mind set his words made no sense to me at the time.

Eventually I went to one lawyer who told me to walk away from the situation. Another told me, “You should have sued years ago, but of course no one would have believed you then.” A third saw no money for himself in my case and dismissed me. A fourth lawyer, a woman, wrote the archbishop that he should pay for my counseling as he was doing for many other survivors of clergy sexual abuse in this archdiocese. After months of my feeling suicidal, the archbishop gave me a Christmas present, a check that just happened to be for one half of the amount I had paid one of my counselors. I used it to spend a month in Hawaii on retreat and to start my own business!

Nearly twenty years later, is it over? I no longer have illusions that Mike loved me. I no longer have any respect for the Catholic Church. At last I understand that much of Mike’s behavior toward me that made no sense to me at the time was about his realizing he had been so inappropriate with me I might sue him. When stories of abusing priests first made the news, I cried. Now I smirk and snigger and smile at the thought of all the billions the church has paid to survivors and all the priests who are in prison. I look forward to the day New Mexico rescinds its statute of limitations on sex

crimes. I still have all the correspondence from Mike and my box of journals in a very safe place!

For years when I tried to tell my story, I always sobbed. Now the book I have written about my abuse has it's own domain on the web for all the world to read!

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ALL SHALL BE WELL: ONE **WOMAN** SURVIVOR'S STORY OF CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE

by **Mary Isabel Steele**

Clergy Sexual Abuse Links

- [Advocate Web](#) Help Overcoming Professional Exploitation
- [Canadian Survivors Network](#) a home for all those sexually abused by priests in Canada
- [Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence](#) an educational resource
- [Confronting Collusion in Churches](#) Dee Miller's site confirming those who protect the perpetrator cause the greatest harm
- [Faces of Rape and Sexual Abuse Survivors](#) survivor stories-many abused by priests- accompanied by wonderful photos
- [The Lighthouse Foundation](#) a non-denominational, non-profit corporation consisting of an office and resource center for survivors of clergy abuse, managed by survivors themselves.
- [The Link Up](#) largest advocacy organization in US for survivors of clergy sexual abuse
- [The Hope of Survivors](#) a Christian site devoted to recovery of survivors of clergy sexual abuse
- [Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests](#) national organization in US with regional chapters
- [Tamar's Voice](#) an organization to promote the healing of those sexually abused by clergy
- [Why It Is Not An Affair](#) explains why no consent is possible without equal power

Email me with other links to add to this page: misteele@asbw.us

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Mary Isabel Steele welcomes you to
**ALL SHALL BE WELL:
ONE WOMAN SURVIVOR'S STORY
OF CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE**

In 1984 I was forty years old. I was dealing with many spiritual and emotional issues when I turned to a priest who was an assistant pastor in my Roman Catholic parish for pastoral counseling. Instead of helping me, he sexually exploited and abused me. He betrayed my trust. His behavior was unprofessional. He was guilty of sexual misconduct, repeated sexual boundary violations. In legal terms, he and his superiors were guilty of a breach of fiduciary duty. What they did changed the course of my life in many ways forever. Struggling to understand what had happened and to recover, I wrote a book. I published it myself. I have created this site just to tell the story of my clergy sexual abuse. Click on the cover of my book to begin reading.

