

Celebrate!

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Communion in the blood of Christ

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A healing service for people who have been sexually abused

By Jill Maria Murdy

This healing service was celebrated March 22, 2006 at St. Frances Cabrini Parish in West Bend, Wisconsin. Three people led the celebration: Deacon Michael, Fr. Jeff and myself, Jill Maria Murdy, the parish liturgist who designed the celebration. (See "Healing: a prayer service for sexual abuse" in *Celebrate!* January-February 2007). Parishes would need to assign the roles according to the ministers available in their particular situations. The rubrics appear in red.

INTRODUCTION

Jill Maria: Good evening. We wish to thank you for coming here tonight. Those gathered here come from many walks of life, but we all share one thing. We have been touched by sexual abuse. Perhaps you or a member of your family was abused by a clergyman. Maybe a trusted uncle took away your innocence. Or maybe you are simply here to pray in solidarity and support with those who are hurting and in need of healing. Whatever your reason, we wish to respect you and your privacy, and to thank you for coming tonight.

As we begin, there are a few things you might want to know. There are bathrooms located in the north side of the narthex, just beyond those glass doors in back, and to the right.

Afterwards, several individuals will be available to offer support if you need to talk. Amy Peterson, from the Archdiocesan Sexual Abuse Prevention and Response Office, Fr. Jeff, Deacon Michael, and myself will be available.

Let us now turn to the back of the church, and begin our journey together towards healing and forgiveness.

RITE OF CLEANSING (PASTOR AND DEACON)

Deacon Michael: As we begin, we acknowledge that much pain has happened here within the parish of St. Frances Cabrini, as well as elsewhere in the church and the world. It is a painful part of our history.

Canon Law 1211 tells us: "Sacred spaces are desecrated by acts done in them which are gravely injurious and give scandal to the faithful when, in the judgment of the local Ordinary, these acts are so serious and so contrary to the sacred character of the place that

worship may not be held there until the harm is repaired by means of the penitential rite which is prescribed in the liturgical books."¹

Therefore, we begin with a simple cleansing rite with holy water.

Fr. Jeff: As we sprinkle the narthex, let us pray for all those who have experienced the abuse which has taken place in the larger world, and for individuals and institutions who try and hide it.

All: Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison (*sung*).

Fr. Jeff: As we sprinkle the doors, and walls, let us pray for all those who have left the church, or felt excluded because of their abuse.

All: Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison.

Fr. Jeff: As we sprinkle the ambo, let us pray for all those who can no longer hear the voice of God, because of their pain and anger.

All: Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison.

Fr. Jeff: As we sprinkle the altar, let us pray for all those who have sacrificed their innocence at the hands of priests, nuns, teachers, relatives, or brutal strangers.

All: Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison.

The Kyrie continues until Fr. Jeff and Deacon Michael reach their places.

OPENING PRAYER

Fr. Jeff: God of healing and consolation
We ask you to look upon the people
gathered tonight.

We stand before you with our pain,
our sorrow, our anger, and frustration.
See the fragility, brokenness, and despair
of those in pain.

Help us to enter into a spirit of open-
ness and healing

as we listen to your word,
and pray for innocence lost.

Hear our laments, and restore us.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

Lector: A reading from the book of the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31.15-17)

Thus says the LORD:

A voice is heard in Ramah,
lamentation and bitter weeping.
Rachel is weeping for her children;
she refuses to be comforted for her
children, because they are no more.

Thus says the LORD:

Keep your voice from weeping,
and your eyes from tears;
for there is a reward for your work,
says the LORD:

they shall come back
from the land of the enemy;
there is hope for your future,
says the LORD:
your children shall come back
to their own country.

The word of the Lord

All: Thanks be to God.

*Now Jill Maria reads excerpts from
Psalm 55. Fr. Jeff reads statistics.*

Jill Maria: Give ear to my prayer,
O God;

do not hide yourself
from my supplication.

Attend to me, and answer me;
I am troubled in my complaint.

Fr. Jeff: There are many reasons why
abuse may remain hidden. An abuser
may manipulate, bribe, coerce or
threaten a child to prevent them from
telling anyone about the abuse. Depend-
ing on their age and stage of develop-
ment, a child may not be able to
communicate what has happened to
them, or they may fear they will not be
believed. They may be convinced that
the abuse is their fault and, if they tell
anyone about it, they will be punished.
They may fear that they or the abuser
will be removed from the home, or
suffer other consequences. They may
feel ashamed and want to keep the

abuse (and related family problems) secret to avoid being stigmatized or have their sexual identity questioned.²

Jill Maria: My heart is in anguish within me, the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me.

Fr. Jeff: It may sound strange, but people sometimes have trouble recognizing that they are being abused. For example, sometimes people have been abused but don't think of it that way. Recognizing abuse may be especially difficult for someone who has lived with it for many years. A person might think that it's just the way things are and that there's nothing that can be done about it. People who are abused might mistakenly think they bring it on themselves by misbehaving or by not living up to someone's expectations.³

Jill Maria: And I say, "O that I had wings like a dove!

I would fly away and be at rest;
truly, I would flee far away;
I would lodge in the wilderness;
I would hurry to find a shelter for myself

from the raging wind and tempest."

Fr. Jeff: One study on women's abuse related: "Family friends and acquaintances compose the largest group of perpetrators (28 percent), followed by such relatives as uncles and cousins (18 percent), stepfathers (12 percent), male siblings (10 percent), biological fathers (10 percent), boyfriends of the child's mother (9 percent), grandfathers and step-grandfathers (7 percent), and strangers (4 percent)." The researcher was struck by the fact that 10 percent were biological fathers and only 4 percent were strangers. "Which means," he said, "86 percent of the perpetrators were known to the family, but were someone other than the child's father."⁴

Jill Maria: It is not enemies who taunt me—

I could bear that;

it is not adversaries who deal insolently with me—I could hide from them.

Fr. Jeff: "Like in the general population, child sex abuse in the Catholic Church appears to be committed by men close to the children they allegedly abuse; many appear to use grooming tactics to entice children into complying with the abuse, and the abuse occurs in the home of the alleged abuser or victim ..."⁵

Jill Maria: But it is you, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend, with whom I kept pleasant company; we walked in the house of God with the throng.

Fr. Jeff: About the same incidence of abuse occurs among all the socio-economic classes. "About 85 percent of the offenders [of child sexual abuse] are family members, babysitters, neighbours, family friends or relatives. About one in six child molesters are other children."⁶

Jill Maria: But I call upon God, and the Lord will save me.
Evening and morning and at noon
I utter my complaint and moan,
and he will hear my voice.

Fr. Jeff: Sexual abuse is especially complicated because of the power differential between the adult and child, because of the negotiations that must occur between adult and child, and because the child has no way to assimilate the experience into a mature understanding of intimacy. Regardless of the child's behaviour or reactions, it is the responsibility of the adult not to engage in sexual acts with children. Sexual abuse is never the child's fault.

Sexual abusers can be: parents, siblings, or other relatives, childcare professionals, clergy, teachers, or athletic coaches, neighbours or friends, strangers.⁷

Jill Maria: He will redeem me unharmed

from the battle that I wage,
for many are arrayed against me.

God, who is enthroned from of old, will hear, and will humble them—because they do not change, and do not fear God.

Fr. Jeff: Girls and boys are affected differently by abuse. Compared to boys, girls are more likely to internalize their response to violence, and experience, for example, suicidal ideation, eating disorders, low self-esteem and psychological disorders. Boys are more likely to externalize their response to violence, displaying, for example, increased aggression, delinquency and spousal abuse.⁸

Jill Maria: My companion laid hands on a friend and violated a covenant with me with speech smoother than butter, but with a heart set on war; with words that were softer than oil, but in fact were drawn swords.

Fr. Jeff: We are all born innocent. Due to sexual abuse or subsequent sexual behaviour, you may erroneously believe that you are bad, damaged goods, an object for someone else's use. Let the past be past, and give yourself a healthy start. You are not strapped to the negative labels an offender may have called you or to the way you saw yourself as a result of the abuse. Now you have choice and can assert your true self with others. Old labels will disappear as you stop believing them and stop acting in ways that reinforce them.⁹

Jill Maria: Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved.

After a pause, move silently into the gospel (Luke 13.10-12), proclaimed by Deacon Michael.

Now Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said,

“Woman, you are set free from your ailment.” When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.

REFLECTION

Fr. Jeff's reflection included the Archbishop's apology: “There is deep regret and profound sorrow that any child or young person was ever harmed by a clergy member or by anyone serving on behalf of the church. For such a tragedy to happen in the church is contrary to the will of Christ, who showed such tender care for children, and is in violation of everything the church and the priesthood stand for. Healing the suffering associated with clergy sexual abuse remains an important pastoral concern of the Catholic Church, particularly in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. We know much has been accomplished during these past several years, but we also know there is more we can do.” (Most Reverend Timothy M. Dolan, Archbishop of Milwaukee)

AFTER THE REFLECTION

General Intercessions (announced by Deacon Michael [DM])

DM: For the women and men and girls and boys who have been sexually abused by priests, nuns, religious sisters, and brothers, teachers, coaches, family members and friends. We pray to the Lord.

All: Lord, bind their wounds.

DM: For the victims and those who care for them who have been wounded and scarred by abuse and betrayed by the church.

All: Lord, bind their wounds.

DM: For those who struggle, broken-hearted, to have their voices heard in the church they love, a church which often cannot and will not hear. We pray to the Lord.

All: Lord, bind their wounds.

DM: For those who have heard the message of Jesus Christ and the call to be healed. We pray to the Lord.

All: Lord, bind their wounds.

DM: For those who hold positions of power: let the power of love overcome the love of power and sweep injustice from our church, we pray to the Lord.

All: Lord, bind their wounds.

A hymn of reflection, David Haas' "You Are Mine" (GIA) was led by Jill Maria and sung by the congregation.

CANDLE LIGHTING

Fr. Jeff: Yes, we are a people who have walked in darkness, who have been bent and broken by pain and shame, yet, let us continue to seek the light. Let us walk forward with new hope and new healing. For, as psalm 30 says, "weeping endures for the night, but joy comes in the morning." Abuse has been a source of embarrassment in our past, but do we need to let it be our legacy to the future? Let us use the painful knowledge we have gained, and these experiences to strive for a safer environment for all children. Maya Angelou said it well in her powerful poem "Still I Rise."¹⁰

Jill Maria then read Maya Angelou's poem.

DM: The paschal candle is a symbol of Christ, our light in the darkness. We invite you to each come forward and light your candle, and as you do so, to proclaim "I rise."

Someone may wish to begin. In this case, Deacon Michael began by lighting a candle for those who were not here, who could not even enter a church building to receive healing.

RECONCILIATION PRAYER:

Fr. Jeff reminded the assembly that resource people would be available in the narthex if anyone wished to speak with them, and thanked all for coming. Then he prayed:

Fr. Jeff: O God of peace and consolation, source of light in our darkness, gather us together as your people, and recreate in us a renewed spirit. Rededicate us to healing those who have been abused, and help us pray for those who have abused.

Bind the wounds of your world, your church, your people, that all may come to know your loving embrace.

We ask this through Christ, our Lord.
All: Amen.

The celebration closed with "Healer of Our Every Ill" (363 in Catholic Book of Worship III).

Jill Maria Murdy is Director of Liturgy and Music at St. Frances Cabrini Parish, West Bend, WI. She serves on the Archdiocesan Community Advisory Board for Sexual Abuse. She holds an MA in Theology from Notre Dame, and a BS in Music from Dickinson State University. Her website is <http://www.jillmaria.com>

NOTES

¹ http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_P4G.HTM Vatican Website, Code of Canon Law

² <http://www.justice.gc.ca/en/ps/fm/childdafs.html> Child Abuse Factsheet: Department of Justice Canada

³ http://kidshealth.org/PageManager.jsp?dn=chp&lic=48&ps=207&cat_id=20127&article_set=22594 Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh

⁴ http://www.catholicleague.org/research/abuse_in_social_context.htm#_edn2 Sexual Abuse In Social Context: Catholic Clergy and Other Abusers citing works of (Wade F. Horn, "Common-sense article about abuse," Washington Times, February 6, 2001, p. E.1.)

⁵ <http://www.americancatholic.org/News/ClergySexAbuse/> American Catholic article on Clergy Sex Abuse, Citing the John Jay Report <http://www.usccb.org/nrb/johnjaystudy/>

⁶ http://www.catholicleague.org/research/abuse_in_social_context.htm Sexual Abuse In Social Context: Catholic Clergy and Other Abusers citing works of (Dr. Garth A. Rattray, "Child Month and Paedophilia," The Gleaner, May 14, 2002.)

⁷ http://www.helpguide.org/mental/child_abuse_physical_emotional_sexual_neglect.htm Help Guide Child Abuse

⁸ <http://www.justice.gc.ca/en/ps/fm/childdafs.html> Child Abuse Factsheet: Department of Justice Canada

⁹ <http://www.selfhelpmagazine.com/articles/sex/healing.html> Sexual Healing by Wendy Maltz

¹⁰ <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0394502523/lordldameincstra/103-1402929-2317454>