

Finding Little Solace in Sharing of Long-Guarded Secret

Catholic Priest Who Was Victim of Sex Abuse Draws Fire After Speaking Out

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Thursday, April 27, 2006; A01

The Rev. James Moran was asking his usual questions during his chaplain rounds one day last summer at Washington Hospital Center: How are you? Would you like to pray together? Maybe take Communion? But one of the patients on his "Catholic" list bristled at the sight of a clerical collar.

The Catholic Church hierarchy's treatment of clergy sex abuse victims was disgusting, the patient told him.

"Believe me, I'm not trying to force Jesus down your throat," answered Moran, a beefy 60-year-old with an agonizing secret he had only recently started to let out: "I'm a victim of a priest myself."

The patient stared at him from the bed. A question came, point-blank: "Then how can you be a priest?"

Moran spoke the words he had said so many times to himself since August 1970, when he was a 25-year-old seminarian. It was then, he says, that an older priest climbed on him one night in an attic bedroom, held his hands down and performed a sex act on him.

"I'm just trying to do the good to offset the bad," he said.

But Moran heard the question in a new way this time. He heard a permission, the possibility of a door opening to a different answer.

Maybe it *wasn't* possible, he thought, to reconcile his love of God and priesthood with his anger at church leaders who he felt had ignored the victims.

It was time to leave, he decided soon after that conversation, and he arranged to retire May 31 on a medical disability. But first, he wanted to let loose the *whole* secret -- not just the abridged version. He wanted people to know that the fallout of clergy sex abuse is not over, even if it has waned from headlines. And he wanted to do it during Holy Week, the week before Easter, the time when priests renew their vows.

The decision would bring more pain than liberation.

A Longtime Dream Dies

Moran was a city kid, a good boy among more rebellious cousins. His mother was elated to give her only child to the church, and Moran remembers feeling only peace about his decision. He was coming to the priesthood with no sexual experiences, just as he had dreamed.

The dream died on that summer night in 1970. He was doing an internship at a small parish outside Boston, preparing to be ordained the next year. He panicked: Had his virginity been violated? Could he honestly be ordained?

Moran, who is from Boston, tried immediately to communicate that something had happened, but he was too embarrassed to be explicit. He told his parish supervisor that the priest was gay, hoping to raise red flags. He told a room full of people at his seminary that "there's a problem in that rectory" and that no more interns should be sent. No one followed up. He called rape crisis centers in the Boston Yellow Pages, he said, and was told that only women could be victims.

In the wave of clergy sex abuse cases, the image of priest-as-victim has been mostly absent. An exception is Detroit Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, who made international news in January when he said he had been molested by a priest as a teenager.

But some experts say many priests like Moran won't speak out until they retire. "The wave of clergy victims is just getting started," said Gary Schoener, a clinical psychologist who specializes in clergy abuse cases. As hard as reporting abuse is for laymen, it is even more difficult for clergy because of professional concerns about retaliation, experts say.

Being a priest-victim is complicated, said A.W. Richard Sipe, a former Benedictine monk who has treated abusive priests and their victims. Priests are the ones who guide people to forgive, and priests may also get mixed messages about what is normal.

"You're preaching that this or that is sinful; but, on the other hand, you know from hearing confession all the time that this is common, and you are forgiving it," he said.

In Moran's case, the young priest forged ahead. The attack reflected not on him but on his abuser, Moran told himself, and he was ordained in 1971 before hundreds of relatives and friends. It was a social network that would soon slip away as he became guarded, moving to parishes around Massachusetts and eventually to military base chapels in California, Japan and Florida.

He had heard that sexual abuse victims were more likely to become abusers, and he kept his distance. "Let's say I wasn't big on visiting people's houses," he said.

Although many priests speak of their shared brotherhood, Moran didn't feel it. "It was God and me."

Moran believed he was suppressing his anger, his memories, his conflict. "I ran *it*, instead of it running me."

All that changed in 2001, three years after he came to Washington Hospital Center as a chaplain. He was in a pastoral care training class that required intense reflection about one's ability to give. While in that frame of mind one day, he and his teachers argued over something seemingly mundane -- they wanted him to lead an additional service, and he didn't want to. Something about that sensation of authority telling him to do something he didn't want to struck a long-silent chord.

"I feel like I'm being spiritually raped," he remembers blurting out. His trainers picked up on his comment immediately, and from then on Moran started telling people that he had been abused: his family, co-workers, other victims in group therapy. But most people had no idea how deep the conflict in him ran.

Just as he started to sketch the outline of his experience, something happened that he had not anticipated: the Catholic clergy sex scandals. It turned out that he was far from alone, which angered and upset him further.

In 2002, he told then-Boston Archbishop Bernard Law about the 1970 incident and received an offer of financial support for counseling and later a \$90,000 settlement from the archdiocese, but not what he wanted. "There was no validation of me as a good person," he said of his meeting with Law, who resigned later that year.

Reports about the extent of clergy abuse gnawed at him. The priest supervisor he tried to tell in 1970, the Rev. Richard Johnson, was accused of sexual misconduct by four teenage girls, the Associated Press reported in 2003, citing documents released that year by the Boston archdiocese. The priest Moran alleged had attacked him, the Rev. Anthony Laurano, described their encounter differently and said it was consensual, according to a transcript of a 2002 interview with a Boston church official. Laurano, 81 and retired, faces charges in two separate Massachusetts cases: two counts of raping an 8-year-old in 1991 and four counts of indecent assault on a mentally retarded person over the past four years. A phone message left for Laurano was not returned.

Moran's lower-back pain grew; his cholesterol level shot up 75 points. And his longtime mantra wasn't working. "There was so much bad going on now, I couldn't possibly do enough good to offset it," he said.

The Whole Story

Thirty-five years after Moran was ordained, the Boston archdiocese granted him a medical disability retirement for chronic depression and post-traumatic stress. But he wanted people in Washington to know why he was leaving -- and not just in shorthand. He wanted to stop being jocular, the good kid, a victim who can hint but not outright name his pain.

He picked Holy Week. And that Tuesday, as about 20 hospital staff and patients' relatives filed into the chapel for Mass, Moran took a deep breath. Then he spoke about the bittersweet nature of the week for him and about the whole story, right there, in church, during the most hallowed time of the Christian year.

He railed against church leaders who protect abusers and care more about money than victims. He talked about therapy and the "rationalizations" that kept him in the ministry. Copies of his comments were in the back of the chapel, he said. And when it was over, a burly man came over to hug him. No one else seemed to know what to do.

The next day, a Washington archdiocese official called, telling him that the hospital thought his actions were inappropriate and that the church felt they were accusatory. His priestly credentials were being pulled immediately, he was told, something that usually wouldn't have happened until he retired six weeks later.

Hospital officials, who instructed Moran's colleagues not to comment for this article, said that people at the Mass had complained and that the priest had burdened people in trauma. Although Moran had recently been "more vocal" about his past problems, there was no sign until then that they interfered with his ability to do his work, said Janis Orłowski, chief medical officer at the hospital.

Officials with the Washington archdiocese said Moran left them no choice by saying in his letter that he was leaving the ministry.

"These men literally are responsible for people's souls, so we take it very seriously if a priest indicates he can no longer function," said archdiocese spokeswoman Susan Gibbs.

Moran feels he is being punished for speaking out: "My gut feeling is that I have been raped again."

Advocates of clergy abuse victims who know Moran are livid and say that because he was leaving his position anyway, removing his credentials was unnecessary.

On Easter, five days after he was removed from his job, Moran didn't know where to go. He had celebrated weekend Mass for the past eight years at the hospital, and that was no longer an option. So he drove to a small parish in Arlington where he didn't know anyone and sat in the back, alone.