

C 1.8 Education Through Encounter: Insights for Ministry from Encounter With Survivors of Clergy Sexual Abuse of Children;

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The clergy child sexual abuse scandal of 2002 had its epicenter in the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston. During the past 12 years the Catholic Church became a target of anger, an object of ridicule, and a lightning rod of controversy. What was learned in Boston is an important lesson for all.

At the Catholic Archdiocesan seminary, St. John's Seminary, the Master of Arts in Ministry Program is a separate program prepares lay women and men for non-ordained professional positions in ministry or "lay ecclesial ministry." This unique term officially used in 2004 in the USCCB document Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord reflects the fairly unique position of professional full time laity working in the Catholic Church in ministerial positions. CARA statistics reflect nationally: 22,791 Catholic laity enrolled in programs for ministry.

During the past 10 years the lay students in their second year of spiritual, pastoral, and human formation at St. John's Seminary have met with staff social workers from the Archdiocesan Office of Pastoral Outreach to discuss this issue. Over the years the staff has brought persons who have been abused to speak to the students. Interviews with staff members reflect that they chose carefully who to bring. The sexual abuse survivors who did come appreciated the opportunity to be heard. They gave permission to have an ordained priest, a member of the faculty, to be present. The survivors report that these encounters gave them a chance to communicate the reality of the situation and feel that they were contributing to the training of the future ministers. Students had the opportunity to learn how to address complex issues. A debriefing session of students with the ordained member of the faculty allowed painful issues to be discussed. The encounter of the survivors and social workers with students and faculty is analyzed including a look at the effect on students who themselves had been sexually abused.

Presentation Outline:

Why continue to address this issue? Isn't it "over"?

How effective is learning in the presence of the victims, Archdiocesan staff social workers, and faculty including clergy?

What should students in ministry programs know about this issue? What should be the goals?

How does one best present on this issue when there are students who have been sexually abused?

Does this encounter with victims in the presence of clergy help develop ministerial skills, empathy, and a nuanced response? How does one integrate these responses with the deep sense of fidelity and defensive stance of students toward their faith tradition?

What other factors do the interviews and survey indicate were helpful to this encounter?

Methodology: Qualitative study with focus groups, interviews, survey

Primary Sources:

Survey of students and graduates;

Interviews with social workers, victims and faculty;

Bibliography:

Data Reports:

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