

Editorial – Another Step Forward

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The recent offer of mediated settlements to 61 individuals claiming sexual abuse in the Diocese of Springfield may bring some measure of healing to individuals who have been harmed by those who betrayed their positions of trust in the church.

We say "may" because experience has sadly taught us that money alone often is not enough to heal heavy wounds that some victim-survivors of sexual misconduct carry with them throughout their lives.

Contrary to the ill-informed opinion of the Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests (SNAP), we know firsthand that many survivors have benefited in the past from professionally-run mediation sessions.

Rather than testify about the harm they have endured in open court, they have welcomed the opportunity to tell their story in a non-confrontational format that is confidential and objective. And while no process can be perfect, outside mediation is probably the best method we have to assign a relative seriousness to a wide variety of harms which have occurred, sometimes many years ago.

Some survivors may believe that the compensation being offered by the present settlement process is inadequate, and want the opportunity to convince a jury that the diocese should give them far more than long-term therapy and between \$5,000 and \$200,000 to make up for the damage.

That is their legal right, and we trust that those who might go to court will be respected by those who might question their motives. As SNAP rightly said in a recent press release, "Flawed though it may be, our courts have often proven to be a good way to expose the truth, get justice and deter wrongdoing."

But SNAP is just wrong when it says that "everyone else involved – the police, prosecutors, parishioners and public – are denied the chance to learn exactly who's covering up horrific clergy sex crimes and just how widespread those cover ups are" without abuse trials in this diocese.

For several years, western Massachusetts has been blessed with competent law enforcement officials who have vigorously investigated acts of sexual abuse by clergy. They have also checked into unproven theories that the misconduct resulted from a conspiracy or a cover-up among church leaders. They allocated countless hours of police personnel time, convened a special grand jury, and examined 80,000 pages of subpoenaed church documents without finding any evidence to prove those theories.

Building on that massive effort, the diocese's insurers then launched their own effort. After nearly four years of legal wrangling, they too have concluded that it is now pointless to endlessly examine past responsibility for abuse.

It is time for all concerned to recognize last week's developments as a significant step forward in resolving the issue of compensation for those who have been truly harmed by agents of the church.

