

## **A Call for Transformation**

The 8th Day Center for Justice Staff wants to express our sorrow, our grief and extend our prayers of healing for the victims sexually molested by priests. We call for the transformation of a structure, which has not only allowed such evil to exist, but to thrive.

Over the past two years, the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church has been faced with two major scandals involving misuse of power over another person. The first to come to light was the rape of nuns and other women by priests throughout the world. Some were used as concubines to avoid the HIV virus. Some were threatened with loss of privileges or even necessities if they did not submit to the wants of the priest. The second, and most recent scandal, is the sexual abuse and rape of children by those in positions of authority and trust - their priests.

We condemn not only the abuse of power by individual priests, but the scandalous cover-up and obstruction of justice by Church officials. These acts contradict the most basic principles of the Gospel teachings on love, mercy, and justice.

It is out of this context and the continued abuse of power over centuries by the Church hierarchical system, that we join the collective voices of Catholics throughout the world and call for transformation. Such transformation has been long overdue. Lack of transparency in decision-making and disrespect for non-clerics especially women, allows sexual abuse to thrive.

Recent actions by the Cardinals in Rome prove the urgent need to begin the process of transformation. The "Final Communique" from the April 23-24 meeting between the Vatican and U.S. Cardinals includes threats to "reprimand individuals who spread dissent \_" Such threats seek to squelch voices calling for transformation and allow for continued scapegoating and minimizing of culpability. True transformation can only come from those who exercise their prophetic role to the call of the Gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit.

New policies to restrict homosexuals from entering the priesthood will not address the issues of sexual abuse. Such abuse of minors is not inherent among homosexuals; both homosexual and heterosexual men are capable of committing such crimes. According

to Sr. Kathleen Pruitt, president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious "Homosexuality is not the issue. Celibacy is not the issue. The issue is whether we will address the need in the church for an integrated holistic theology of human sexuality and start discussing how you foster healthy relationships." Similarly, shared responsibility and power by women in decision making positions can provide a balance to the male patriarchal thoughts and policies expressed by the Church hierarchy.

We, staff of the 8th Day Center for Justice, are not experts in the area of pedophilia and sexual abuse. We have done work for 27 years on issues of systemic change. Psychiatrists, lawyers, and other experts on pedophilia are advising the Church on how to deal with the current scandal. Good ideas may come from the Bishops' meeting in June. However, we see this as a measure to merely deal with the current scandal. It does not deal with the overall problems, which have not only allowed sexual abuse and the rape of children, but of nuns and other women as well. We do not want to wait until the next scandal erupts to deal with transformation issues.

We ask the institutional church to develop a process to address the following topics on transforming the church structure:

- A church structure that shares its responsibility and power among the laity, the clerics, and the congregations of religious life, thus providing an atmosphere that allows each to develop and exercise their own spiritual gifts in the Church and in our world.
- The role and participation of women in decision making positions of the Catholic Church including the priesthood.
- The need in the church for an integrated holistic theology of human sexuality and how to foster healthy relationships.
- The opening of the priesthood to married persons and laity.

We ask all the faithful to commit to prayer and action to help usher in a new movement of the Spirit. Let us all pray for the victims, abuser priests and those involved in the cover-up of these activities. We pray that the grace and wisdom of God will see us all through this difficult time yet monumental opportunity for transformation.