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Sex abuse scandal continues to broil overseas

by Isabella R. Moyer

NCR Today

I received an email this morning from a friend in Ireland. She was spitting mad after watching the BBC's "This World" last night. The program claimed that in 1975, Cardinal Seán Brady, the current primate of Ireland, had names and addresses of those being abused by Fr. Brendan Smyth but did not share these with either police or parents.

Brady was quick to issue a statement in his defence. While it contained a few sentences of sadness and regret, the bulk of the statement focused on deflecting the blame to others. His rationale included the fact that the present guidelines for reporting sexual abuse were not in place at the time. And even if they were, he would not have been considered a "designated person" according to present state guidelines and therefore not obligated to notify the legal authorities.

Here in Canada, the *Western Catholic Reporter* published a story this week called "Abuse crisis needs more talk." Sr. Nuala Kenny is a pediatrician and was a member of the five-member commission that examined sexual abuse at the Mount Cashel Orphanage and in the St. John's, Newfoundland, archdiocese in the late 1980s. She also helped develop the guidelines approved by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1992. These were the first national church guidelines in the world to deal with clergy sexual abuse.

After all the commissions and guidelines, Kenny believes "there has been a profound loss of trust and moral credibility by our church. And, to tell you the honest to God truth, I still don't think our bishops and priests get it."

She helped write "Breach of Faith, Breach of Trust," a discussion guide for parishes, but it has been rarely used. "In some dioceses, the bishop said, 'I'm not using that at all.'" In others, people said, "Talking about it will make it worse."

To those who try to provide "superficial answers" to the root cause of the abuse scandal, such as clerical celibacy, a male-only priesthood or homosexuality, she responds with, "All sexual abuse is an abuse of power. ... We have a particular form of abuse of power in the church and its name is clericalism." And clericalism is perpetuated by all of us when we do not listen to the victims, choose to remain silent, or merely breathe a sigh of relief when an abuser is moved to another parish.

While prevention is important, Kenny pulls no punches when describing the harm inflicted on the victim.

"When the offender is a man of God, an *alter Christus* -- respected as though he were Christ himself -- and Christ is raping you, imagine the spiritual harm. We haven't even begun to understand that."

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