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Community forum



MAC MURPHY/COURIER JOURNAL CONTRIBUTING CARTOONIST

Ky. needs remedy for victims of priest abuse

Legislature shouldn't bow to Catholic Church

Your Turn
William F. McMurry
Guest columnist

As reported in the Courier Journal on Wednesday, Sept. 12, 2018, Kentucky Attorney General Andrew Beshear, announced that he "will seek the legislature's permission to form a statewide grand jury to investigate Kentucky's Catholic dioceses in line with last month's damning report on Pennsylvania Catholic churches."

In 2004, I witnessed our legislature's refusal to change the laws governing the time limitations for lawsuits against those who would hide and protect child sexual abusers. The Catholic leadership in Kentucky actively sought to prevent the passage of legislation that would have eliminated the civil statute of limitations as a road block to lawsuits against the church for its conduct in hiding and shielding its pedophiles, and they succeeded.

It is painful to imagine why any legislator would vote to protect a pedophile. Many states across the U.S. have passed legislation extending the statute of limitations, allowing victims time to come forward to file their claims. Connecticut, for example, allows a victim of child sexual abuse 20 years from the date the child becomes a legal adult to file his or her legal claim against those responsible.

Until the time limitations on lawsuits for childhood sexual abuse are extended, I will continue to struggle with the words I use to advise survivors: "I am sorry, but there is no remedy for you." If there is no remedy, there is no accountability. Unless we see real accountability for concealing and protecting known pedophiles, children will never be safe in their parish communities.

The only form of accountability available is the civil justice system. Sadly, money is the only form of compensation available to a survivor of abuse. It is the church's reluctance to let go of that money that is behind its decision to hide its pedophiles.

Currently, the statute of limitations expires on a victim's right to bring a civil lawsuit arising out of the hiding and shielding of pedophiles on the child's 9th birthday. The statute of limitations ending a child's right to bring a lawsuit against the actual abuser is age 25.

Social science instructs that, on average, childhood survivors must reach their 40s before they begin to accept that the abuse was not their fault. When a child is abused by an adult, that incident for the child remains frozen in time such that he/she continues to see the incident through the eyes of a child. "I must have done something wrong for this to have happened to me."

How do I know this? I have listened to more than 1,000 adults reiterate this well-understood dynamic as each recounted his or her personal story.

Coincidentally, the Archdiocese of Louisville advised the Courier Journal that "we have always cooperated with the authorities in our response to sexual abuse and will continue to do so." Nothing could be further from the truth.

The reality lies in the magnitude of the carnage in

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this community over the last 60 years: On April 19, 2002, I filed the first lawsuit against the Archdiocese on behalf of perhaps the youngest man I have ever known, Michael Turner. Together, we reached out to the community of survivors and by July of 2002, I had filed 150 individual lawsuits against the Archdiocese. By September of 2002, I had filed 185 lawsuits on behalf of adult survivors. In all, my partners and I filed a total of 243 lawsuits, but the vast majority of 1,000 more still haunt me to this day.

Each lawsuit alleged actions taken by the Archdiocese to conceal its priest's sexual abuse. By the time our cases concluded, we identified 53 abusive priests, one sitting bishop, two religious brothers, three Catholic school teachers and one volunteer football coach. In 2004, I discovered the victimization of more than 100 orphans at the St. Thomas-St. Vincent Orphanage from the 1940s through its demise in the mid 1980s, also operated by the Archdiocese.

Many of the then-living perpetrators were prosecuted and served prison sentences. The criminal abuse we uncovered spanned five decades stretching into the 1950s, yet during these years, no Archbishop or employee of the Archdiocese of Louisville ever voluntarily reported a priest even after the priest had admitted to church hierarchy his "sin" of sexually abusing a child.

Despite Louis Miller's admission under oath that he reported his abuse of children to three archbishops (including Kelly), he never reported his conduct to the police as required by Kentucky law. Miller was encouraged to serve as a priest into 1990 and remained in a position of trust until we filed these lawsuits. No prison sentence for a priest can be assumed to be "justice" for survivors of abuse, when it is the hiding of pedophiles by the archdiocese that caused this carnage. There remain hundreds of survivors who were not ready to come forward in 2002 and will never see justice because the statute of limitations ran out on their 9th birthday.

Frustrated by my inability to achieve real accountability, I thought the only successful suit in the U.S. against the Holy See (The Vatican). While my partners and I were able to establish for the first time in U.S. history that the Vatican could not shield itself as a "foreign nation" under the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act, the Vatican benefited from the short statute of limitations and no longer held any assets in the U.S. history that the Vatican could not shield itself as a "foreign nation" under the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act, the Vatican benefited from the short statute of limitations and no longer held any assets in the U.S. that has no period of limitations for filing criminal charges for "leaky" child sexual abuse, Kentucky's civil statute of limitations is antiquated, pitifully short and totally inconsistent with the burgeoning recognition across the globe not only of the frequency of child sexual abuse but also of the extent of its coverage by the church.

God knows, it is time for a change. William F. McMurry won a \$25.7 million settlement for 243 victims of sexual abuse in Catholic churches and schools in the Louisville Archdiocese.

READERS' FORUM

A good solution for Castlemans controversy

Many thanks to Peter Morin for his well-argued assessment of Gen. Castlemans and his statue. And thanks to the University of Kentucky for its recent compromise over the mural in Memorial Hall, which was to add an artistic response: show a work that some found sentimentalized slavery. Both Morin and UK show us that there is a better way to handle the Castlemans controversy than removing the statue. Cities don't come together by destroying things. They come together by solving problems constructively and by creating things. And surely one of the goals of good civic governance—which we all desire—is to do the hard work of bringing more voices into public life and public art, rather than silencing some. Moving Castlemans will be expensive—tens of thousands of dollars. How much better to take Morin's suggestion of using our money to create a new piece, close to Castlemans, that serves as a response. Such an effort would show respect to Castlemans's critics, while allowing us to remember him for the good he did, and to hold onto a beautiful and technically excellent piece of public art. It would bring openness and healing to this painful debate in a way moving or worshipping the statue will not.

Katherine Dalton Royer
Louisville 40205

Barr made mistake attacking Amy McGrath

I recently went to Andy Barr's campaign website where I saw a collection of attack ads—video after video attacking his opponent Amy McGrath, a retired Marine Corps lieutenant colonel and former F-16 pilot. Andy Barr disparages Amy McGrath for not having lived in Kentucky long enough? Amy left Kentucky because she was serving her country! When she was mission complete, she moved back to Kentucky to Mr. Barr, assuming that Amy is less of a Kentuckian because of her absence? As a proud Kentuckian myself, I submit that Kentuckians are the most patriotic people in our country. Andy Barr is about to learn that after his dumb strategy of attacking an American hero.

While Amy and I were never in the same squadron, I knew her reputation well. She was an exceptional pilot and officer. Amy was a leader among leaders. Her reputation is impeccable.

We need to remind Mr. Barr that Amy was sacrificing a normal life, risking all that she had, defending this nation in foreign lands. She was serving to protect the life and freedom back here that he was enjoying. He should be ashamed of himself.

Kentucky and America need more leaders like Amy.

Richard Westmoreland
Lieutenant Colonel (USMC Retired)
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'I'm tired of people being ugly to each other'

No city names a street after a person so that people can "drive over them after they die," as Rick Jones stated. My belief is that kindness and an attempt to understand others is a better path to social change than inflammatory comments.

I agree with what character John Coffey said in "The Green Mile," which is "I'm tired, boss. Mostly I'm tired of people being ugly to each other."

Karen Level
Louisville 40220

Taxpayers shouldn't pick up Trump's bill

Our president has an addiction to campaign rallies, he has to leave his weekly fits that make him feel special at these rallies. This is a very expensive addiction for us taxpayers, people what it cost to fly Air Force One is \$300,000 an hour not counting the security cost. If he is using the rallies to raise campaign funds I personally think we taxpayer should be reimbursed the cost of traveling and security for these events.

Now that the midterm elections are underway he is campaigning for individuals running for congress, these candidates should have to pay the cost if they want the president to campaign and raise campaign funds.

Dennis Steier
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