

Letters: THERE ARE CARTOONS AND THEN THERE ARE CARTOONS

Tony Auth's editorial cartoon is so prescient that it gives one chills.

It is an excoriating indictment of the institutional church's failure to protect children and for that reason it should be as offensive to everyone, especially Catholics, as it is to me.

It points to the fact that church leadership failed to even address its sexual abuse problem until decades of cover-up were exposed in the Archdiocese of Boston, ground zero for the Catholic Church in the United States.

Boston Superior Court Judge Constance Sweeney, an exemplary product of at least sixteen years of catholic school education, ordered the release of all records and files on credibly accused pedophile priests in Boston early on while pastors in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia were being told not to worry because the church in Philadelphia had no such problem.

Sadly, that was not the case as was made embarrassingly evident when the Philadelphia Grand Jury Report was released in September of 2005.

Historically, the church in Philadelphia has not been open about nor has it ever admitted to its cover-up of sexual abuse by many of its priests and that is the reality documented by the Philadelphia Grand Jury Report.

Speaking with Grand Jury members and victims of childhood sexual abuse along with their parents brought tears to my eyes but attempts at a revisionist history like the comments made by a local auxiliary bishop and the vicar for clergy are not only disingenuous they are downright immoral.

What is "blasphemous and deeply offensive to the Catholic community," is that so many children could have been spared a lifetime of agony brought on by sexual abuse but for the callous behavior of enabling church officials who shuffled these men around the five county Archdiocese of Philadelphia instead of calling the police.

A close reading of the Grand Jury Report should be required Lenten reading for anyone who has not already done so. It can be found online.

Why hasn't the Archdiocese of Philadelphia released all the records and files that the Grand Jury members had access to during its investigations?

Why isn't the Archdiocese of Philadelphia actively supporting legislation that would better protect children?

Lifting the civil statute of limitations by providing window legislation of a year or two would give victims of childhood sexual abuse the opportunity at long last to have their cases bought into a court of law and, in the case of clerics, it would force church records into the public venue.

Quashing court cases by successfully arguing that statutes of limitations have expired are hardly moral victories.

The institutional church should be supporting child abuse legislation, including window legislation, which would demonstrate that it really does believe in accountability and transparency rather than just saying that it does.

Rest assured that the institutional church's loud protestations of commitment to victims of sexual abuse in the present offer neither absolution nor justice for the sins and the crimes of the past.

Heads up, Tony. How about a cartoon with a millstone represented like the one dedicated to the victims of sexual abuse at St. Joseph Parish in Mendham, New Jersey?

These words of Jesus Christ appear a little earlier in Chapter 18 of Matthew's Gospel than in Auth's editorial cartoon.

As quoted in the New Testament, Matthew 18:5-8:

"Anyone who welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But anyone who is an obstacle to bring down one of these little ones who have faith in me would be better drowned in the depths of the sea with a great millstone round his neck. Alas for the world that there should be such obstacles! Obstacles indeed there must be, but alas for the man who provides them!"

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Sister is a educator, a member of the Delaware non-sectarian coalition, Child Victims Voice and was a speaker at the November 3, 2007 conference of NAPSAC, the National Association to Prevent Sexual Abuse of Children in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She testified twice before the Delaware legislature in support of their newly passed Child Victims Law. She is a board member of DACOA, the Delaware Association of Children of Alcoholics.