

COMMENTARY

A mother regrets her silence after son was molested

To William O'Connell's alleged victims in Lower Township ... an apology

For well over a month now I have been attempting to find the words to convey to the people of Lower Township my absolute heartbreak and total sympathy for the horrors many of them are suffering because of William C. O'Connell, the "retired" priest from Rhode Island who is also a convicted felon and admitted pedophile. This is one of the most difficult letters I have had to write in my life.

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main objective was to see to it that O'Connell was never in a position to harm another child. I really thought that I had succeeded, even though the sentence he received on the criminal charges was barely minimal. He served only seven months of a one-year sentence in a work-release program.

The civil suit was painfully long and drawn out. I was led to believe, however, that by having to pay out \$1 million to my son, the Diocese of Providence would take every possible precaution to keep O'Connell away from children and the children out of harm's way. I have never been so wrong in my life. And silence has been the culprit.

Never in my worst nightmares or conscious thought did I think that



O'Connell would be given the opportunity to set up house-keeping somewhere else and proceed to allegedly victimize a whole new group. This was totally pre-

ventable and avoidable and absolutely reverberates of gross negligence on the part of the Diocese of Providence and Bishop Louis E. Gelineau. The bishop's silence (and lack of appropriate action) thunders louder than words ever could and speaks volumes of his own personal priorities — which quite apparently do not include concern or caring for the safety of children.

Aside from the legal issues involved, I cannot emphasize enough how deeply I understand and empathize with the deep and traumatic emotional toll O'Connell's actions have on his victims and their fami-

lies. The lives of the victims and their families are truly changed forever. Intensive counseling may assist in learning to cope with the effects, but they will never forget.

I know only too well what these people are going through.

There is what I have experienced to be a "ripple effect," and those ripples go on and on. Only God himself knows where those ripples will end. Every single person we know, relatives and friends alike, have been af-

ected in one way or another by this horrific action by O'Connell against my son.

There are absolutely no excuses good enough to defend the negligence in this case, and nothing that can be said to make me believe for even a moment that O'Connell's whereabouts were not known to the Diocese of Providence. It makes me wonder if the safety of our children has ever been a real concern of the diocese.

I feel compelled to break my silence because, in addition to feeling great sadness and outrage, I also feel a tremendous responsibility for the victims who could have been spared. Consequently I hope that all of you who have been affected by the alleged actions of William O'Connell will not make the mistake of keeping silent as I did, thus perpetuating the victimization of children.

(Kathleen A. Guilfoyle lives in Narragansett, R.I.)