

SNAP

Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests

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July 13, 2004

Carole Shinnick, SSND
LCWR Executive Director
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
8808 Cameron Street
Silver Spring, MD 20910-4169

RE: Plan of Hope, Respect, and Open Healing

Dear Sister Carole Shinnick:

We, the undersigned, represent:

- Surviving human beings with broken souls and lives, who were raped and sexually molested as children, teenagers, and vulnerable adults by religious women of numerous orders; many of which belong to the Leadership Conference of Women Religious which you embody;
- Those victims who took the ultimate escape from pain by suicide and their heart-broken parents who continue to exist with the needless and dreadful loss of their child; and
- Those who have lived with us and loved us despite the life-long afflictions of abuse which absolutely affects our spouses, children, and friends as they struggle to dearly love us and support us.

Sexual abuse by religious women offenders, whom the LCWR members represent, has left many of us spiritually desecrated with a murdered soul.

The goals of the Leadership Conference of Religious Women are admirable. We call upon you to recognize that the LCWR goals naturally include us, your victims. LCWR objectives include working for justice and showing solidarity with those who experience powerlessness or any other form of violence and oppression. Sexual abuse is violent and oppressive. We are very concerned and distressed about the lack of leadership of women religious organizations regarding the acknowledgement of sexual abuse committed by members of women religious orders and the outreach to victims.

We, as victim-survivors, challenge you to live your goals in response to sexual abuse perpetrated by nuns and sisters. We are resolute that your communities to take more courageous and basic actions.

We ask that a group of victim-survivors of nun sexual abuse be allowed to address your entire audience at the upcoming LCWR-CMSM Joint Assembly in Fort Worth. By allowing us to speak to your assembly and dedicating yourselves anew to your goals you will positively affect the lives of many sexual abuse victims and prevent future abuses.

We, as Survivors, strongly encourage and justly challenge the LCWR to become the world leader in stamping out sexual abuse committed by women religious and to become the model of Hope, Respect, and Open Healing for all victims of women religious throughout the world.

To become this model of Hope, Respect, and Open Healing, we specifically ask the LCWR to:

- Reach out to victim-survivors, who are not yet able set aside their years and decades of misplaced guilt and shame, by releasing the names of all women rapists and sexual predators who have had credible claims made against them on your website. Predatory women often have multiple victims as they live out their lives disguised as nuns. By releasing the names through Open Healing, more victims will have an opportunity to unburden themselves of misplaced guilt and shame and begin to live fulfilling lives. We know predatory women often have multiple victims throughout their lives.
- Develop a plan of Survivors' Hope and Respect. Victim-Survivors are unfortunately, the true experts of religious women sexual abuse. To exclude Victim-Survivors in the development of a plan for Hope and Respect would be a facade. We request that those actively involved in this plan for Hope and Respect be comprised of fifty percent survivors.
- Guarantee an Effective and Just Response to Allegations of all Sexual Abuse Committed by members of the Religious Communities.
- Conduct an independent annual audit of the progress and deficiencies in the Hope, Respect, and Open Healing Plan to ensure public accountability of the Plan.
- Adopt Truth and Justice as the basic foundations of the Hope, Respect, and Open Healing Plan. A noted expert on clergy sexual abuse stated, "There are two kinds of communication that are very dangerous: Asking questions and telling the truth." Without Truth and Justice there can be no Healing for the victim-survivors, our families, the families of those that did not survive, your communities, or the Roman Catholic Church in the United States and throughout the world.
- Prohibit any secrecy that creates an atmosphere that inhibits the healing process and enables sexually abusive behavior to be repeated.
- Offer victims just and ample compensation for their suffering in order to continue on their journey of healing and recovery.
- Create a punitive and clear discipline plan of action for those communities that do not adhere to the plan.

In your letter of May 12th, you stated that each "congregation has its own structure, constitution, policies and procedures and they, in turn, are directly accountable to the Church – either in Rome or in the local diocese depending on the nature of the particular religious community." Re-victimization by default to a bishop or Rome is unacceptable when Healing and the Safety of Children is required.

We call on you as agents of change and as agents of change in society to use your corporate voice and influence to urgently and systematically change the severe shortcomings and uninspiring LCWR response to nun sexual abuse.

We trust you will provide copies of this letter to the LCRW Officers and your member orders.

Sincerely,

Steve Theisen
Iowa SNAP Leader
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cc: United States Catholic Conference of Bishops