



FRIENDS COMMITTEE ON RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Loving Law Suits: Restoring Michael

by Constance d'Angelis

“If you want to fix your future, start by fixing yourself. In the face of war and recession, what the... world needs is less greed and more love.”

Tim Sanders, Yahoo Senior Executive

War is being waged against the Roman Catholic Church in Dioceses all over the U.S. through numerous civil lawsuits seeking millions of dollars in damages. Focus on wrongdoing in business is narrowed in on Enron and its accountants, Arthur Anderson, through Congressional inquiry and Justice Department indictment. What do these two historical dramas have in common? Each is the result of abuse. Each case involves the abuse of power- and the power that is abused by the Roman Catholic Church through its priests and Enron and Arthur Anderson through its officers is –Trust. Abuse of Trust is the culprit here.

Six weeks ago I listened to an interview with an Enron executive who said “Business is War”. In war we seek destruction of power over an opponent. Who is the opponent? Could the fight be with the employees, the public, the shareholders, officers, directors, accountants, attorneys, congress, other companies with the same industrial market? My take on the “war” created a “win at all costs” attitude that resulted in abuse of power and abuse of trust that was granted to the chiefs of the companies. So why do we care, and what does abuse of trust, whether in business (Enron) or personal (the Catholic Church) life have to do with restorative justice? Let me tell you a story.

A friend of mine, Michael, went to Catholic school with me when we were children. I knew him as Mikey, then. Although I’ve lost track of him over the years, recently he and his story have come into my life. Mike was year younger than I, my little brother’s age. The parish school we attended combined the 3rd and 4th grade classes, so Mike and I were in the same class.

I remember when Sister Mary Caritas stopped lecturing and turned her attention to me. All I could see was her finger, her very long and skinny finger. She was pointing at me. I thought. What did I do wrong? I had been swinging my legs under my desk, having forgotten the cigar box where my feet were usually stationed. A wave of sticky, aching heat rushed into my neck and head-I couldn’t stop it. I know my face was as red as a fire engine. I heard shrill, squealing sounds coming from her mouth and then I felt the sting. I don’t remember what happened after that. Later, nobody talked to me. My friends wouldn’t even look at me. I remember how lonely I felt. Especially, I remember how ashamed guilty I felt. I never forgot my cigar box again.

As I was to find out, Catholic School held many such experiences for me. But, the experiences Michael endured were far greater than I ever could imagine. It seems that Mike’s family moved to another parish. The priest in charge took a liking to the boy and because Mike’s parents had divorced, his mom encouraged the priest to take Mike out on excursions including sailing on the Great Lakes. It turns out that the trusted Confessor and family friend was a pedophile-a sexual pervert with children as his preferred sexual object. While a child, Mike could never tell anyone. A classmate of Mike’s exposed the sordid secret many years later. The classmate’s lawsuit was dismissed based on the Church’s defense that the case was not timely; it was filed after the statute of limitations had run. Mike never gave up. He never attempted to sue.

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