



# Cabrini Notes

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## On the Child Victims Act, Part I

As I write this letter to you, you should not be surprised about what is coming forth in the days and weeks ahead. If you have watched any local television lately, you have seen any number of advertisements of law firms in search of clients in response to the Child Victims Act passed last year in the state of New York. What is the Child Victims Act (CVA) and what does all of this mean for us?

The CVA made several changes to existing state law regarding child sexual abuse. 1) It extends New York State's statute of limitations; 2) Allows for criminal charges against sexual abusers of children until their victims turn 28 in felony cases, up from the current age of 23; 3) It allows for civil actions against their abusers and institutions where they were abused (until age 55); and 4) It opens a one-year window on Aug. 14, permitting any victim to take civil action, *regardless of when the abuse occurred*.

It is this fourth point in particular that has paved the way for the recent advertising that has appeared not only on television but also been in local publications. Suffice it to say, this painful wound in the church is a long way from "healing" – if we can ever even speak of healing. What does that mean and to whom does it refer? Certainly, there are many victims of this abuse; how many of them would love to be "healed" of their wounds! There are secondary victims as well—those who are relatives or friends of these victims who are so hurt that they have left the practice of the faith. Then there are those of us who remain—who believe in the good of the Church and her mission but struggle so mightily with these offenses by her members and especially those who are clergy (there are Catholic school teachers and others who have abused our young). There are no adjectives left in our language to suffice for the feelings we have all felt—'disgusted', 'appalled', 'horrified'—are all mere signifiers in a pantheon of emotional distress that has overcome us all in this past year, revisiting for each of us the hurt and shame we all experienced back in 2002.

The Church is suffering on all sides: we hurt with all who are hurting; we pray for all who have been so damaged; we are dismayed that it has all come from within the Church. As St. Paul says in regard to the body of Christ, "If [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy" (1 Cor. 12:26). Would that we could all arrive one day at the joy of being in the Church and living the Christian life! May God make it so. Until then we have to pray for that healing to come as was stated by the New York State Catholic Bishops on Jan. 28 of this year, "We pray that the passage of the Child Victims Act brings some measure of healing to all survivors by offering them a path of recourse and reconciliation."

Despite the undeniable negative impact all of this has had on us, we stand in faith and in defiance of the notion that the sins of the few characterize and define the flock as a whole. The good will and the hard work that carries on day after day in the church is a reality that may be invisible to the world around us, but is one that we continue to live as we strive to love Jesus Christ, believe in his divine action in our lives and seek to follow him daily, albeit having accepted and taken up this cross presented to us in our day. In a Lenten reflection in the Catholic Courier earlier this year, Bishop Matano encouraged us to focus on Jesus, especially in the tabernacle, as a point of recognizing that, despite our personal failures in the human family and that of the Church, Jesus is still present, alive and ready to console us whenever we turn to him. Let us keep all victims in our daily prayers, may those who have hurt them repent and seek forgiveness, and may we all be ministers of reconciliation and healing in witness to the merciful love of the Lord even as we secure every effort to protect the weakest and most vulnerable in our midst.

Next week I will explain a little more of what the Diocese of Rochester has done leading up to the CVA and things that may impact our local church in the near future.

Peace in Christ,  
Fr. Mickev