

Father Daniel Miller victims feel betrayed by church hierarchy



Renfrew native Father Dan Miller, left, a priest in the Diocese of Pembroke, was sentenced to nine months and 10 days in a Pembroke courtroom last Thursday after pleading guilty earlier to molesting five young boys.

By Debbi Christinck
Staff Writer

Pembroke – Two of the men victimized by Father Daniel Miller when they were young boys in Deep River spoke publicly about their feelings on the court proceedings, the assaults and the response of the Catholic Church after the priest was sentenced last week.

“There are systemic problems in the church,” Victim A, whose name is protected under a court ordered publication ban, stated. “It does not capture the pain it has caused people.”

Father Miller confessed to sexually molesting five young boys who were between nine and 13 when the assaults took place. The incidents occurred at the home of Father Miller’s mother or at the parsonage at Our Lady of the Nativity in Pikwakangan.

Last Thursday the priest was sentenced to nine months and 10 days for the assaults. Following the court proceedings Victim A said it was a difficult experience to go through the court proceedings and to re-visit what happened 40 years ago.

“There is a lot of pain in your family,” he said. “A lot of family and friends were impacted by this; he was a trusted member of the family.”

He maintains the church has not reached out to help him in any significant way.

“I promise you there has never been any outreach to myself as a victim,” he said. “I can’t speak for the other victims, but I understand there has been no outreach to them.”

However, he questions if he would want the help anyway.

“Do I want to go to the very people who have been part of the problem to offer me support?” he asked.

Victim A said he was bothered to hear media reports of the church reaching out to victims and their families.

“They made the appearance we were offered every support in the world and they have not,” he said.

The lack of support from the church was a difficult situation for him because the family felt they had no one to turn to, he said.

“The healing process is seeing this through,” he said. “We want everyone to heal in their own way.”

As far as the sentence of just slightly over nine months, he was ambivalent.

“It is about as good as we could get,” he said. “We got the max (the Crown asked for) so we can be happy.”

At the same time, he believes a crime of this nature should have a harsher punishment.

“It is not sufficient as to where the legal system should be,” he said.

“Have we reached justice to match the pain caused?” Victim A questioned.

As an adult he is disanointed the legal system only allows for so little time in jail for crimes of this nature, he said.

“This is what the Crown asked for and we got that,” he said. “It seems trivial when you look at what happened to us.”

The court proceedings were challenging for him, especially when he was cross-examined by the defence lawyer after he presented his victim impact statement.

“It was very disturbing for me we were questioned after the victim impact statement,” he said.

He was a nine-year-old boy from Deep River when he was molested. His family was a deeply devout Catholic family. His grandmother was a long-time organist in another parish and the family knew Father Miller’s family.

“The Catholic Church was an extension of our family,” he said. “It was hundreds of years in the making.”

His mother has been devastated by the revelation of the abuse, he said.

“She took him (Father Miller) into our family because she knew him as a child,” he said. “There was no reason to believe he would do this to us.”

Knowing her children were abused was one of the hardest things his mother every experienced, he said.

As he continues on the healing process, it is “one day at a time,” the now 49-year-old said.

“We at least have a support system in each other with the victims,” he said.

Victim A said he is not surprised there are additional charges now against Father Miller.

“When you look at sexual abuse there is a wider span,” he said. “Maybe more victims will come out.”

It takes a lot of courage to come forward, he said.

“It is difficult to go through this process and be in the (witness) box,” he said. “People dissect every word you say; it is very hard.”

Victim A said a civil lawsuit is the last thing on his mind at present. He only hopes sexual predators like Father Miller will be stopped.

“Imagine your children and this happening to your children and it will make it more real,” he said.

More Victims To Come

Victim B, who was supported by his counsellor in court, said he knows more victims will come forward speaking of what Father Miller did to them.

“I know there are more and they will come forward,” he said. “I know there are people in Arnprior.”

Coming forward is not easy, he admitted. He came forward after the first charges were laid.

“Six of us came forward and they went ahead with charges on five of us,” he said.

When he heard the charges were laid he told himself he would also come forward, he said.

“I told myself I would not let someone come forward alone,” he said.

After suppressing the memories for so long this has been a painful year since charges were laid in 2012, he said.

Although resentful of the Catholic Church hierarchy, Victim B said he considers many priests to be friends.

“I am upset with the upper echelon,” he said. “There is nothing to show they are sorry.”

Victim B said he was upset the Bishop of Pembroke never released a statement on Father Miller, but rather let the parish priests deal with this.

“It was up to every priest to make a statement this time,” he said.

Victim B said when he went to Father Peter Proulx and reported the abuse he was asked if he wanted counselling. However, due to his lack of trust in the church he rejected the offer.

“I went to get my own counsellor,” he said.

The experience of the last year with the court proceedings and the testimony he gave was difficult for him, Victim B said.

“It was very hard to come forward,” he said. “I got rid of it with drugs and alcohol for years; I gave up drugs and alcohol years ago, but this has been hard now again.”

In order to cope he had blocked out many memories, but the court proceedings made him focus on them again, he said.

“The worst part was the discovery with no judge to referee,” he said.

The defence counsel was able to ask anything he wanted, and did, he said.

“He drilled us,” he said.

Victim B, who still considers himself a practicing Catholic, said the support of his family helped him endure through the court proceedings.

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