

## **Therapy is not enough for the Adult Survivor of Childhood Sexual Abuse**

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After the Bishops leave, after the dust settles, after safe guards are in place to protect children, and after the church mops up the damage.... what's left behind are the adult survivors of sexual abuse, that happened years ago when they were children. No one is talking about what they should do. No one is talking about how they heal the spiritual wounds left behind.

Faith communities across the country have been slow to recognize their responsibility in the spiritual healing of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. All too often they have relegated healing to the psychological and therapeutic community... who frequently feel ill-equipped to facilitate the spiritual healing of clients. So the survivors are left having their healing unfinished. They are left with a spiritual hole in their soul, with a sacred wound still gaping.

Mary's Hope Workshops is an organization, located in Colorado, educating and training those professionals working with adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, to facilitate spiritual healing in the survivors. Specifically we are educating and training those who would act as spiritual companions for adult survivors, who offer pastoral counseling, and those who work with survivors in some other capacity... say as a victim of a crime, domestic violence shelter, abuse recovery center, etc. The secular community is extraordinarily anxious for training and information to help them deal with these spiritual issues.

The faith community, for the most part, seems to be reluctant to embrace the work of the spiritual healing of those adults sexually victimized as children. My personal experience as an adult survivor was hearing, 'forgive them and move on'. Well, forgiveness is usually one of the last issues to deal with in spiritual healing. Certainly there is a place for forgiveness, but I think we rush there before healing has even begun. Premature forgiveness of the perpetrator blocks the healing of more basic wounds in the survivor. They continue to believe: "I was created flawed." "Why did God stop liking me?" "I am unlovable." "I am evil."

The faith community and society at large must put in place safeguards for children of all ages. Sexual abuse is an evil, which must not be allowed to continue in any form. Protect all children, YES! And, at the same time, find a way to embrace the adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse who are in the pews, who are living in domestic violence shelters, who are in substance abuse centers and who live next door. We cannot as a society focus on prevention only, without looking to the healing of an earlier generation of children. Our creator would have us each know we are created in love, to love. We have to stop ignoring their pain, their needs, their spiritual emptiness.

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As Michelle, a survivor, said to us, "It's hard to deal with, but that doesn't make it go away. We can be a better society, a better culture, a better people if we say, 'I can't look the other way anymore. What can I do to help?'