

Fr. James J Scahill - Priest of Integrity

Acceptance Speech – Nov. 13, 2004

1.

Voice of the Faithful – New England Conference

I am humbled by the kind words spoken about me and I thank you for them. Please know that I am deeply moved and very grateful for this designation and award.

However, I do not accept this award in my name alone.

This award belongs to the people of St. Michael's Parish Family of East Longmeadow, Massachusetts. They have stood with me and have supported me ~ indeed have spurred me on throughout the past 2-1/2 years.

This odyssey began when a parishioner and abused victims advocate Warren Mason, along with Jay Lefebvre, Tom Wilson and other parents came to me and urged and demanded that I challenge this institutional Church relative to its handling of the abuse of children by clergy.

And there is no way I could have managed the turbulence of the struggle of truth against power without the consistent support of a genuine circle of friends notably parish secretary Patti Baran, also Ruth & Jim Connor, Loretta Gaffney, Betty Joseph, Marion McCracken, Pam Robbins; my dear cousin Joanne & her good husband John Murphy; and Sr. Betty Broughan, Sr. Connie Quinlan, Sr. Mary McGeer & Fr. Joe Soranno.

In May of 2002 we took this Church on for the sake of God and from the start have given it over to God – knowing we were simply instruments of His purposes and instruments to truth and compassion. This designation and award belongs to the many who have prayed for us and for the realization of our efforts.

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For the many who have voiced or written of their support, and to those who have themselves become outspoken challengers of the clerical mindset of “My way or the highway.” I thank you!

I am grateful to my family, to my parents who, although deceased, live on in me, and in the principles they taught me, and the character and conscience they helped me to embrace. I am grateful for my sister Mary and my brothers, Tom and Patrick and their wives Karen and Jane.

But most of all, next to God’s grace, I am deeply and humbly grateful to the victims and their loved ones. They have become a new and treasured family to me. The courage and endurance of each of them has inspired me. I have been forever changed by those who have poured out their hearts to me, telling of their own suffering or that of their children. With God’s grace, I will never abandon them.

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I am grateful to the Voice of the Faithful, not only for the words its members have offered, but for their willingness to step up in parishes and dioceses across the state and the nation to try to fix what is wrong from the inside out. I applaud your devotion to what is good in this church and your willingness to fight to change what is not. Also, to be recognized, applauded and embraced is all the good energy and efforts of SNAP.

Also, let us please acknowledge the Media. Un-like the hierarchy of this Church and the over-whelming majority of its clerics, I do not find them – the personification of evil. The media did not cause this scandal and its cover-up. It is the media that has exposed the evil of this institutional Church. Without them this Church would have remained a hidden cesspool of sin, sickness, hypocrisy and deceit.

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In the name of the people of St. Michael's and victims of abuse and assuredly in my own name I specifically, with appreciation, note the steadfast coverage of this issue and struggle by our local television affiliates – Channel 22 and 40; and most notable have been the efforts of the Springfield Republican newspaper, especially its publisher, Mr. Larry McDermott, and investigative reporter Bill Zajac.

In closing, it is regrettable that you should have to establish an award to give to a priest for integrity. Integrity is something that should be expected of us. Yet, inexplicably the vast majority of clerics have been silent. In their complicit silence they have betrayed truth and turned their backs on children and minors. By and large the clerics have been myopic, company puppets instead of being men; and proponents of the gospel when it comes to challenging and exposing the hierarchy relative to their cover-up, and protection, and on-going support of abusers.

There are retired and still active Bishops in this country who should be in jail. And one of them who should be sitting on a jail cell cot ~ sits pompously instead on the throne in a Roman Basilica. Cardinal Law was awarded by this Pope and the corruption of this institution for his steadfast protection of the image of the clergy even at the expense of countless children. The tragic truth is that he and many of his colleagues have abandoned principle, and betrayed virtues such as truth, justice and compassion for the sake of the institution. There is something quite ill and strange about all of this and that needs to be eradicated and forever changed.

In many ways we have just begun. But we can take this Church. We can take it for the people of God who are the Church. We can take this Church for the children – both those whose lives have been destroyed in the past, and those children who will renew it in

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the future. And ultimately we can take it back for Jesus Christ. It will be hard, arduous, tedious and heartbreaking work. But it is noble work and it is God's work.

So, I salute you for all you have done and call upon you to be persevering in moving forward.

Thank you and God bless you.