

Our Response to Victims/Survivors of Abuse at Holy Cross Church

To the Parishioners of St. Isidore the Farmer Parish:

I know that many people get tired of hearing about the sexual abuse crisis. Surely, some will ask, why can't we put this behind us? Why can't we? Because those who have been harmed by the very people who should have been most concerned with protecting children and youth betrayed their vocation as ministers of the Gospel. Those who suffered abuse at the hands of priests and religious cannot be asked "to get over it" and neither can we. However, many victims and survivors of abuse can with professional help and the love and support of others come to terms with what happened to them and find some healing. Perhaps, through the grace of God, some can even find it possible to share in the life of the Church whose ministers betrayed them through the crime of sexual abuse.

I write this to you because I believe there are many – too many – members of our community who were sexually assaulted by Fr. Jude Hahn during his tenure as the associate pastor of Holy Cross Parish. I believe that some of Fr. Jude's victims have come forward and received help. Others have never made themselves known to our Capuchin leadership, perhaps because they understandably find it impossible to ever trust a Capuchin or a priest again. We should also be aware that family members of those who were Fr. Jude's victims have also suffered. I can only apologize to you for what you and your loved one experienced.

It is common in a small community for people to know the business of others. It is also common for people in a small community such as ours to actually know much less than they think they do. Sometimes, without meaning to do so, we can make statements out of ignorance that are far more hurtful than they were intended. Sometimes comments are made about another's lack of support for or participation in the parish. Sometimes these comments are made directly to the person. Please know that in making these comments we may be unintentionally making statements that add to the hurt experienced by either a victim of Fr. Jude or a family member of a victim. Now there are many reasons why a person may no longer participate in the life of our parish. It would be wrong to engage in any speculation as to who may have been a victim of sexual abuse. Such abuse is traumatic and may have lifelong effects. It is not our place to ever force a victim or survivor of sexual abuse to reveal him or herself. I beg all of us to approach this topic at all times with great care, empathy and compassion. To re-victimize someone is a tragedy, to do so intentionally would be a sin.

Finally, to anyone who was sexually abused by Fr. Jude or another friar I am deeply sorry and ask you with all my heart to seek help if wanted or needed. Amy Peterson, the Director of the Capuchin Province of St. Joseph's Office of Pastoral Care and Conciliation can be reached by calling 414-374-8841, Ext 22 or emailing: apetersonwi@gmail.com.

May God who is the source of all mercy and compassion send down a spirit of healing and wholeness to all who have been harmed by the theft of their innocence.

In all humility,

Fr. Gary Wegner, OFM Capuchin
Pastor