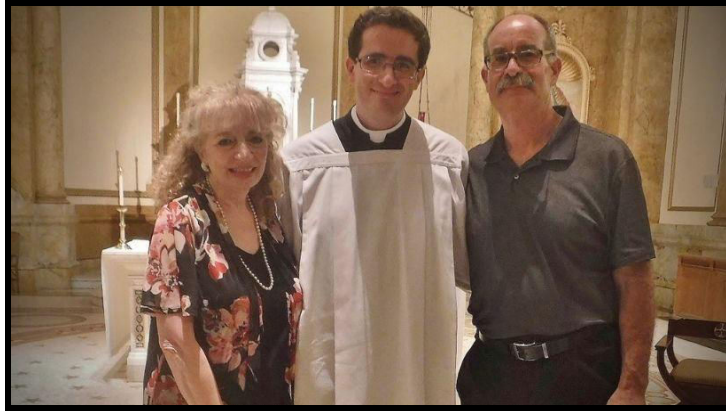


# A Mother's Cry for Justice



by **Gene Thomas Gomulka** • May 9, 2021

*'I gave them my most prized possession'*

When peace activist Anna Jarvis held a memorial service for her mother in 1905, she was determined to have a day set aside to honor all mothers owing to her conviction that a mother is "the person who has done more for you than anyone in the world." Her efforts came to fruition when President Woodrow Wilson signed a proclamation in 1914 designating Mother's Day to be observed as a national holiday on the second Sunday in May.

Most mothers work and sacrifice to help their children achieve success, happiness and love in their lives. This sacrifice is all the more intense for mothers who forgo the joys of becoming grandmothers by giving their sons to the Church to follow priestly vocations. In the wake of sexual misconduct scandals rocking U.S. seminaries, Catholic parents across the country are left questioning how their precious gifts to the Church could have been exploited at the hands of accused superiors or how Church leaders could have deceived them into believing their sons would be safe under their care.



Fr. Adam Park and Fr. Peter Harman

A bombshell lawsuit brought forward by former seminarian Anthony Gorgia against New York cardinal Timothy Dolan and North American College (NAC) officials alleges the defendants sought to destroy Anthony's prospects of becoming a priest after he witnessed and learned from other seminarians about inappropriate physical behavior on the part of NAC's vice-rector, Fr. Adam Park. The lawsuit states that, despite Anthony's exemplary record, Dolan and NAC officials coerced him into leaving formation because he was "perceived as a threat to having defendants' secrets revealed."

Corroborating the lawsuit are multiple other NAC seminarians with accusations against the vice-rector, including one alleging that he suffered disturbing instances of harassment at the hands of Park. The NAC rector, Fr. Peter Harman, was accused of grave misconduct at a homosexual orgy in the presence of seminarians. The witness, whose graphic account was found very credible by a retired FBI special agent in charge, was threatened and retaliated against after attempting to report what he saw.

While it does not take long to conclude from the complaint that Anthony and scores of other seminarians clearly suffered, one cannot forget these seminarians' parents, the "silent victims," who have been no less affected by Church officials' illegal activities. Just as a parent suffers when his child is sick, these parents suffer watching their sons' vocation to the priesthood ripped away unjustly.

Such was the case with Maria and Michael as they watched their son Anthony be victimized by Church leaders. After a life-threatening pregnancy, Maria gave birth to Anthony in 1993. As Maria knew she and Michael would never be able to have another child, it was the beginning of these parents' sacrifice when Anthony, at six years of age, first told them he wanted to become a priest. Being devout Catholics, Maria and Michael were willing to give their only son to the Church.

They watched with pride as he gave the best years of his life serving as, *inter alia*, an altar boy, catechist, parish council member and master of ceremonies. Seeing Anthony graduate as his Catholic high school's valedictorian and, later, with the highest grades in his Catholic university class, Maria said, "I knew that Anthony could become anything in life — a doctor, a lawyer — but he chose to become a priest to give his life in service to God's people." Although Anthony's nomination to study in Rome meant he would be living thousands of miles from home, his parents were proud of their son's vocation and all his accomplishments.

When Maria and Michael saw the horrific events that later befell Anthony, they wrote a respectful letter to Cdl. Dolan, questioning why he refused to meet with their son after five urgent requests and whether Dolan had investigated what ulterior motives may have led to the injustices against him. Without concern for the tears Maria shed in appealing her son's unjust treatment, Dolan wrote a handwritten reply saying that he decided to "discard" the parents' correspondence instead of investigating their son's case.

For two years, Anthony, his parents and his supporters appealed to Dolan, Harman, Vatican officials and the apostolic nuncio, only to learn that many of those to whom they wrote were themselves reported for having covered up the abuse of minors, seminarians or others. After exhausting all options within the Church, Anthony had no choice but to bring suit to protect other vulnerable seminarians and their families from a similar fate.

Reflecting on her son's grief, Maria said, "I gave the Church my most prized possession, and I'm shattered by what happened to him. No one should have to go through this pain, especially when you're innocent."

Maria added that if her parents were alive today, they would be devastated:

My dad was a fisherman in Sicily who took up painting homes when we immigrated to the United States. Even though my parents were very poor, they sacrificed — even going without food for themselves — to send me and my sisters to Catholic schools. My parents would never have imagined that something so terrible could happen to their family in a Church that meant so much to them.

Another mother whose son was forced to leave the seminary after being constantly sexually harassed wrote, "The betrayal and intense personal suffering our family experienced has been devastating. ... We have been abandoned and shunned by people who we thought were our friends. ... The pain has been intense." She added, "With very few exceptions, Catholics, both clergy and laity, have not wanted to know about — let alone actively address — the abuse happening right under their noses."

These families' legal battles are 'David vs. Goliath' undertakings in which they come up against Church-retained lawyers paid at rates up to \$1,000 an hour.

Hundreds of seminarians and their families have been casualties of the sexual predation that's been going on for decades in Catholic seminaries. These families' legal battles are "David vs. Goliath" undertakings in which they come up against Church-retained lawyers paid at rates up to \$1,000 an hour. One way to support victimized seminarians like Anthony (whose case can benefit numerous other seminarians) is by contributing to the "[Save Our Seminarians Fund](#)."

Just as the investigative *Spotlight* reports showed that the clerical abuse of minors was far more widespread than ever imagined, the lawsuit brought by Anthony and his attorneys will surely give voice not only to these countless seminarians but also to their moms and dads, who, until now, have been deprived of justice.

*Gene Thomas Gomulka is an abuse advocate and retired Navy captain/chaplain. Ordained for the Pennsylvania Altoona-Johnstown diocese, Fr. (Monsignor) Gomulka was reprimed against by prelates whom he confronted for underreporting and covering up abuse.*