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# Catholicism In Crisis

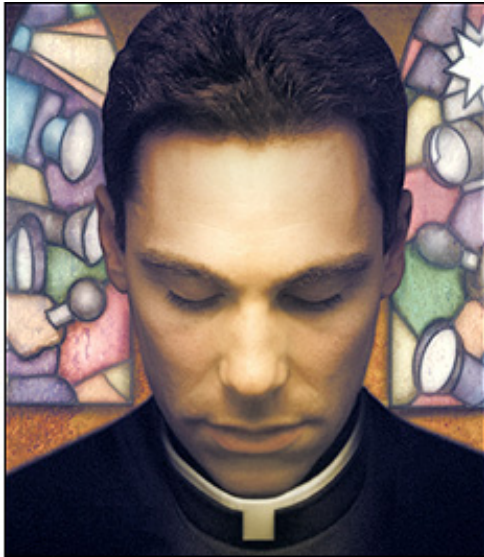


ILLUSTRATION FOR TIME BY MATT MAHURIN

## Feature Stories

### [Catholicism in Crisis](#)

As charges of priestly pedophilia pour in from around the country, a church besieged by law and laity seems incapable of making amends--even to save itself

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Beset by scandal and a priest shortage, the Roman Catholic Church nonetheless keeps growing

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How one typical priest's world is changing

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An ex-priest and child molester speaks

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TIME asks several leading Catholics to

## RELIGION

### A Victim's Story

By [Alice Jackson Baughn](#)

The first big priestly sex abuse scandal broke in Louisiana in 1984, when Father Gilbert Gauthé was indicted for sexual abuse. Two years later, he was sentenced to 20 years for molesting 11 altar boys, and admitted he'd assaulted dozens of other children. As a result of the civil cases that followed, his victims were awarded at least \$18 million in damages. TIME recently spoke with one of Fr. Gauthé's victims. Now in his 30s, the victim has married several times and is the father of four children. He works in law enforcement in Louisiana, and has requested anonymity.

"If my name were to be printed in my local newspaper, I would lose my job in law enforcement, and getting that job has been a life-long dream," he explains. "Louisiana still revolves around the Catholic Church even today, and there are plenty of people who don't want you saying anything at all against the church, even if one of its priests did molest children."

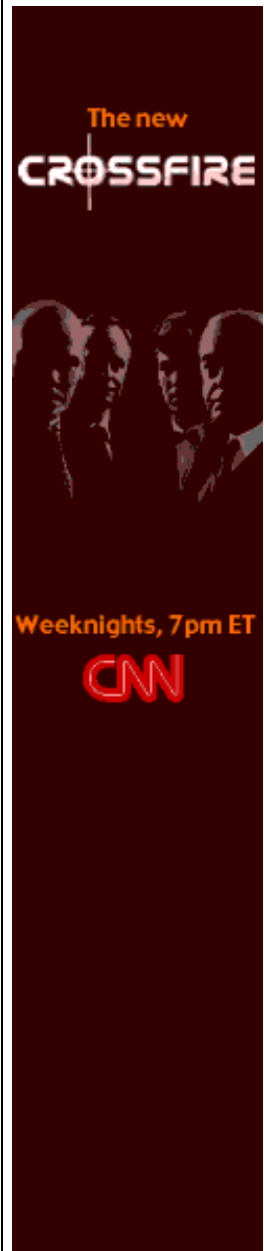
And he harbors much anger over that mentality. He had not stepped foot inside any church since the day Gauthé was exposed, and he doesn't have any intention of doing so.

"I have a whole different outlook on religion now. I question every religion out there. Before, I was a normal Christian who looked at it as a foundation for life. At one time, I had even thought about being a priest. Now, I see the Catholic Church as a joke because the hierarchy has allowed the abuse of children to continue."

Gauthé arrived at his parish when this victim was eight years old. The abuse began one year later when he became an altar boy and continued until he was 15. He says Gauthé "should have been a member of the Actors Guild" for playing his role as a caring older man "who wanted only to be the big brother to every boy in the parish."

The charismatic Gauthé got along with the kids

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Will the Catholic Church be more responsive to future allegations of abuse?

- Yes
- No

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The World's largest religion, as covered by TIME

[TIME Archive:](#) Coverage of church related sexual abuse from 1985-2002

**Resources**

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[RAINN: The Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network](#)

[Child Abuse Prevention Network](#)

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famously, and spent thousands of the parish's dollars on a treasure trove of goodies for his youthful parishioners. The haul included a van equipped with television and a video recorder, a large-scale television and video game equipment for the parish rectory, a black Chevrolet Camaro and even a hunting camp in the marshes of south Louisiana, where Gauthe kept numerous shotguns.

This victim says Gauthe used every one of the purchases to lure the parish's children deeper and deeper into his nightmares. "A priest in south Louisiana has the same status as a police officer. He is someone children are supposed to look up to, and Gauthe played that role to the hilt," he says.

It didn't help that most south Louisiana residents were facing tough economic times. The oil-based economy had gone bust. Few homes had the extra cash to spend on the kind of entertainment Gauthe appeared to provide.

"The kind of entertaining toys he had were a powerful magnet for a kid from south Louisiana. Hey, you show a teenage boy from south Louisiana your collection of shotguns, tell him you are going to take him hunting and let him use those guns, and you've got a friend," he says. "Plus, parents were encouraging their kids to spent more time with Gauthe. He had the parents so brainwashed, they never even questioned it."

Even though the victims occasionally whispered among themselves, trying to get enough courage to expose Gauthe, it never happened. The secrets broke when one boy was admitted to a local hospital for unexplained rectal bleeding.

"We kept wondering who was going to break that barrier of silence. The biggest weight of my life came off my shoulders the day Gauthe was arrested," he says.

Immediately afterward, there was counseling. And as an adult he has seen a psychologist to deal with trust problems that arose in his two marriages. He has a difficult time establishing trust with most people, including people who interact with his children.

"I watch out for adults who get too friendly with them. I can't explain exactly how I know, but I know. It's a certain touch. Maybe it's a pat on the head that lingers a little too long," he explains. "And, if someone is abusing children, it's not always a friendly touch. Parents need to watch for touches that indicate control over a youngster."

He said Gauthe was constantly touching, rubbing and patting the children he abused, even as he stood with altar boys in the rear of the church before Mass. "Parents really need to question that sort of touching. They wouldn't tolerate it in another adult, but they think it's okay when it's a priest."

He admits his life would be easier if he left Louisiana, but he feels an obligation to stay near his parents in their old age, and he wants his children to grow up near them.

"My parents were crushed by what Gauthé did. They were also embarrassed because it happened right under their noses, and they didn't see it." Like him, his parents left the Catholic Church, but they have found a spiritual home in a Protestant congregation.

Over the years, he and his family have dealt with Gauthé's legacy as well as they can. But, because of his law enforcement job, he has learned to stay quiet when the national news is filled with stories about pedophilic priests. "The more I talk about what happened to me, the better I feel about it, but in my profession, it's the kiss of death to talk about it. I would like to shout from the rooftops about what happened to me so I can help other parents, but I can't," he says. He admits that he does occasionally run across child abusers and molesters in his work, but he prefers "to stay as far away from them as possible."

As the stories poured out of Boston in recent weeks, he has avoided watching the national news. "I get so angry when I hear about it because I know what those people are going through," he says. Today, his most intense anger is reserved for the judicial system that allowed Gauthé to go free after serving only 10 years of a 20-year sentence. "I'll never forget the day I got that phone call, telling me that he was getting out," he remembers. "I work in the system. I know how frustrating it can be, but I still find it hard to believe they let a man like that go free. He changed my life forever. If I wanted to run for political office, I couldn't do it because someone would dredge all that back up and use it to make my life miserable. Now, he's out there free to make someone else's life miserable."

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