

October 30, 2012

I attended St. John's University in Collegeville in the mid-to-late 1970's. Recent events at St. John's, of which I have just been made aware, compel me to come forward and to relate an experience from my freshman year.

I feel it necessary to state, at the outset, that I have a very high regard for many of the faculty at St. John's who were, and who still are, members of the religious community. Indeed, I have maintained contact with a few of my professors over the years and continue to believe that the quality of the education I received at St. John's was outstanding.

When I reflect back upon that education, however, I realize that my experience at St. John's might easily have been much different. What I have to say here is not intended to harm or offend anyone, but rather to encourage others with similar experiences to come forward.

Needless to say, all of the experiences related below seemed less significant to me at the time. But now, in light of the role that a certain priest appears to have played in connection with the many claims of sexual abuse that have been made against St. John's Abbey, I see things in a much different light. The role he has played in these scandals—because of his status as both a civil lawyer and a canon lawyer—seems to me the ultimate irony when I reflect back upon the sexual advance that he made toward me when I was eighteen years old.

Like many of my fellow classmates, I attended Catholic grade school and graduated from a Catholic high school. During high school, I participated in several religious retreats and generally considered myself to be a "spiritual" person. Over the years, I had had contact with a few "charismatic" priests who certainly made an impact upon my life. I entered St. John's with a certain comfort level regarding my ability to relate to and to communicate with priests.

I first met Fr. Dan Ward, OSB, during my freshman year. A disciplinary matter had come to light in our dormitory, and I was a representative of the board that reviewed such matters. Fr. Ward was the faculty representative on that board. Shortly after that disciplinary matter concluded, Fr. Ward invited me to have dinner with him on a Saturday evening in his room on the second floor of our dormitory. I did not regard this invitation as being anything out of the ordinary—the presence of priests as "faculty residents" in the dormitory was—and still is—an accepted feature of campus life at St. John's. In addition, I was a classmate of a cousin of Fr. Ward, and I knew that this classmate had also been invited to dinner in Fr. Ward's room on at least one previous occasion.

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I recall that Fr. Ward served alcohol both before and during the meal (the legal drinking age in Minnesota at the time was 18). I recall the general discussion that occurred before, during and after the meal. Fr. Ward told me that he had been accepted to the University of Iowa Law School and that he would be leaving St. John's the following semester to attend law school. He told me that "the abbot" had agreed to allow him to attend law school if he first agreed to become a canon lawyer, which he had done, obtaining his canon law degree from Catholic University in Washington, D.C. Fr. Ward told me that when he obtained his civil law degree, he would be one of only a handful of people in the country with degrees in both canon law and civil law. He also told me about his experience working on "annulments" with the bishop of the diocese, located in St. Cloud. I recall him telling me that evening that reviewing requests for annulments required him to consider many intimate facts about marriages that were required to be disclosed during the process. This seemed to me an odd subject of conversation between a priest and a student.

During the evening, Fr. Ward asked me questions about my family and about my upbringing. I found his apparent interest in the details of my life to be somewhat flattering. I do recall that he also made some inquiry about whether I thought I would ever have any interest in becoming a monk.

Both during and after dinner, Fr. Ward spoke to me about a student at St. John's Preparatory School. Apparently, although I do not recall the specifics, Fr. Ward either taught at the prep school or had a position there during the previous school year. He spoke about the "special relationship" that he had with this former student, and indeed, I was shown a framed photograph of this student in Fr. Ward's bedroom. (I recall the student's name, but out of respect for his privacy, will not disclose it here).

When I felt that it was time for me to leave, I stood up, thanking Fr. Ward for his hospitality. He stepped toward me and began hugging me, then—in a move which took me completely by surprise—kissed me full upon the lips. It was not a brief kiss, but rather was very passionate—I had been kissed by girls in this way, but never by a man. I just stood there enduring it, not knowing what to make of what was happening. The kiss went on for a very uncomfortable amount of time. As he kissed me, I also felt him rub his obviously aroused genital area against me. I had never been kissed or touched by a man in this way before, and it was repulsive to me. And I could not understand what prompted it. As soon as it was reasonably comfortable for me to leave Fr. Ward's embrace, and to leave his room, I did so.

I don't remember what I did immediately afterwards, but I most certainly did not tell anyone at St. John's about this incident. (Who would have believed me?) In fact, in the intervening years, I have told very few people—perhaps only three or four—about what

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happened that night. In the 1970's, there did not seem to be much discussion about claims of sexual misconduct by priests. I certainly never had heard any such claims. And I also remember wondering what would have happened that night if my sexual orientation had been different. I knew at least one fellow student during my freshman year at St. John's who was openly gay. I wondered if Fr. Ward would have stopped with someone who "welcomed" his advances.

I had no contact with Fr. Ward for several days. I then ran into him by chance on a walkway outside of the dorm. It must have been obvious to him that I was uncomfortable, because he sort of jokingly asked me if I had been avoiding him. I told him that what had happened made me uncomfortable. The only thing I remember him saying was that it was very difficult for a priest to find ways to show affection towards another person. I just kept wondering how he could have acted the way he did with someone he had known for such a short amount of time. I also began wondering about the nature of his relationship with the prep school student whose picture he kept in his bedroom.

I continued to have contact with Fr. Ward through the rest of my freshman year, although I was certainly on my guard and never allowed myself to be in a position where the events of that first evening could be repeated. He once asked me to do the readings at a Mass he performed in the Abbey Church, which I felt I should not refuse. He also found excuses to ask me to accompany him through certain parts of the monastery which were considered "restricted." I felt at such times that he was "showing me off" to other members of the monastery.

Fr. Ward was away at law school and absent from St. John's during my sophomore and junior years. I do recall him "dropping in" on me from time to time, however, when he was back on campus. One thing he continuously requested from me, from the time shortly after his unwelcomed sexual advance, to the time I graduated, was a photograph. I remember not wanting to give one to him—because it brought to mind the framed photograph of the prep school student that I once saw displayed in his room.

During the first semester of my senior year, I learned that Fr. Ward would be coming back to St. John's for my last semester. I remember feeling that I wanted to show him that what had happened on that night during my freshman year did not affect me in the least. By this time, I was dating (and in fact intended to marry) a woman from St. Benedict's. I remember that Fr. Ward always seemed to try to put my fiancé in a bad light, making derogatory comments about her and suggesting that she was not being faithful to me. This was consistent with other statements he had made about women. When he returned from law school, for example, he was full of stories about his experience there. He often told me about the drinking and partying he did in Iowa City.

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Once he told me about a female law student who he claimed had attempted to seduce him. He laughingly referred to the seduction of a priest as "the ultimate challenge" for some women.

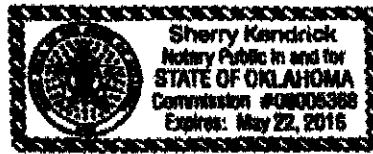
[REDACTED]

STATE OF OKLAHOMA

COUNTY OF [REDACTED]

Personally appeared before me, a Notary Public, in and for said county and state, on this 30th day of October, 2012, the within named [REDACTED], known to me, or satisfactorily proven, to be the person whose name is subscribed to the within instrument and who acknowledges that he executed the same for the purposes therein contained.

Sherry Kendrick
NOTARY PUBLIC



Print Name: Sherry Kendrick

My Commission Expires: 5-22-16