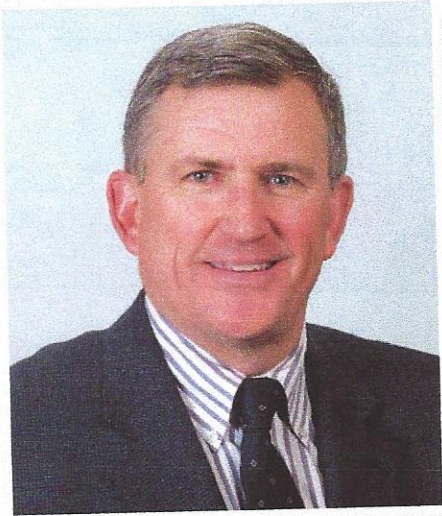


A Voice for the Abused

Former priest Robert Hoatson dedicates himself to supporting victims of sexual assaults.



ROBERT HOATSON BELIEVES it's time for sexual abusers to be held accountable for their actions—no matter who they are or how long ago the harassment occurred.

A self-described survivor of clergy sexual abuse, Hoatson is a former priest in the Archdiocese of Newark. Today, he serves as president of Road to Recovery (R2R), an organization dedicated to assisting victims and survivors of sexual abuse from all over the globe. Hoatson cofounded the nonprofit in 2003 with Monsignor Kenneth E. Lasch, a retired priest of the Diocese of Paterson.

Hoatson, who has a PhD from Fordham University, was ordained as a Roman Catholic priest in 1997. After founding Road to Recovery, he began to expose clergy sexual-abuse cases and cover-ups. His superiors in the priesthood objected and ordered him to cease R2R operations. But Hoatson believed his

work with victims of sexual abuse and their families was his calling. He would not back down. In time, he was suspended from performing priestly ministry; the Vatican granted his voluntary removal from the priesthood in 2011.

Hoatson and his team provide support for those who have been abused in churches, prisons and schools, at home or in public. R2R services include counseling, legal referrals and financial support. R2R also works to increase public awareness about sexual abuse and advocates on behalf of victims.

Lately, it seems not a day goes by without another sex-abuse scandal exploding in the headlines. Notably, in August, a grand jury investigation in Pennsylvania accused more than 300 priests of collectively abusing more than 1,000 children over 70 years. That revelation made it clear that a comparable investigation was needed in New Jersey.

In early September, at the encouragement of state senator Joe Vitale (D-Middlesex), New Jersey attorney general Gurbir Grewal began to move the effort forward, announcing the creation of a special task force to investigate allegations of sexual abuse by members of the clergy within the Catholic dioceses of New Jersey, and efforts to cover up such abuse. Grewal said the task force will have subpoena power

through a grand jury to compel testimony and demand the production of documents.

"We need to hold these dioceses accountable," says Hoatson. "The attorney general in Pennsylvania had a great plan, and when he had to raid diocese files, he did it. The attorney general in New Jersey needs to be raiding files of diocese offices because we have what are called secret files and those secret files contain the most important information, for the most part."

Hoatson believes alleged abusers should not be able to dodge prosecution, even if their alleged transgressions occurred decades ago. "There shouldn't be any statute of limitations on murder of souls," says Hoatson. "We don't have it on murder of the body; we

shouldn't have it on murder of the soul."

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The special task force will bring together detectives and a team of prosecutors from county prosecutors' offices and

the state Division of Criminal Justice to address sexual abuse in New Jersey. The state has also created a dedicated, 24/7 hotline, 855-363-6548, to report allegations of sexual abuse by members of the clergy.

In the meantime, Hoatson and his team at R2R, who have worked with more than 5,000 victims to date, will continue to support sexual abuse victims and their families as they navigate the road to recovery. For more information, visit road-to-recovery.org.



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