

The Boston Globe

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To the judges of the Anthony Shadid Award for Journalism Ethics:

When Mike Rezendes first heard from a man who claimed to be the illegitimate son of a Boston area priest, he had no idea he was wading into a global issue that had been percolating inside the Catholic Church for almost 900 years.

Rezendes was a veteran of the Boston Globe Spotlight Team that won a Pulitzer Prize for exposing the church sexual abuse scandal, so he was no stranger to priest misconduct. But Jim Graham, who had spent years of his life searching for his biological father, was just one man.

But then Rezendes met Vincent Doyle, the son of a Catholic priest from Galway, Ireland. And Vincent led him to another child of a priest. And another. And another.

Rezendes soon realized that there could be hundreds or even thousands of priests' children around the world, an invisible legion of suffering and neglect forced to grow up without the love and support of a father, or simply not told about their fathers at all. And all of them, to one degree or another, were victims of a church mandate that forbids priests from having sex, but makes no provisions for the children born when priests break their vows.

Many were fearful that publicly disclosing their true fathers would embarrass their families by revealing secret affairs and the fact that some of the men who helped raise them weren't their biological dads. All but one asked that we not publish their names or revealing family details.

Rezendes spent months gently educating these men and women that their stories would have vastly more impact if they allowed their names and life stories to be used -- as long as they discussed their choice with family members in advance.

In the end, nearly a dozen children of priests agreed to use their names and the names of their fathers, with their mothers often contributing additional information. All of them felt empowered to tell their stories and none suffered repercussions in their families or employment. Though the Globe had to wait months longer to publish, we could take satisfaction in knowing that we did not pressure anyone to step forward before they were ready.

The result was "Father, My Father," the first-ever deep investigation of the children of Catholic priests worldwide and one of the most widely read stories in the Boston Globe in 2017. Until this series, the press had periodically reported on priests who have children as isolated scandals. But Rezendes, for the first time, connected the dots and showed that these children are living in the shadows throughout the Catholic world.

The impact of "Father, My Father" was immediate, as major Catholic groups distributed the series to their members, and an important advisory committee to Pope Francis said that it would finally tackle the rights and needs of priests' children.

Meanwhile, daily hits to the website for Coping International, a support organization for the children of priests, have more than tripled since publication of the series, and more than 30,000 men and women from around the world have visited the site repeatedly.

Perhaps most rewarding of all, the series made a profound difference in the lives of thousands of priests' children, like Mary Bull. The 80-year-old New Hampshire woman learned that her father was a Catholic priest when she was a young mother of three, and she spent decades searching for someone within the church who would respond to her story in a substantive way, to no avail.

She contacted Rezendes after the Globe series published, and, with his help, she had her first conversation with another child of a priest. "It was huge," she said. "Whatever the church does, it cannot hide us all in a dark chamber as it did along with all its other secrets."

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As the Assistant Managing Editor for Projects at the Boston Globe and the editor that corresponded with Mike Rezendes on this series, I am proud to nominate “Father, My Father” for the Anthony Shadid Award for Journalism Ethics.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

Scott Allen
Assistant Managing Editor for Projects
The Boston Globe

To access the series online, please use the following links:

Part 1:

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2017/08/16/father-father-children-catholic-priests-live-with-secrets-and-sorrow/mvYO5SOxAxZYJB8XxiaoN/story.html>

Part 2:

<http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2017/08/17/father-father-priest-son-takes-his-case-directly-pope/g8ObYa0NATZy3itVSzdfIM/story.html>

Sidebar 1:

<http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2017/08/16/invisible-legion-suffering-stories-children-priests/efaOxtdfRdjAYUadqECAYJ/story.html>

Sidebar 2:

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2017/08/17/love-and-loss-shadows-children-priests-try-connect-with-their-fathers/iNKRwvhza1SWSRWY5HtbrN/story.html>