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### Chaplains Window Dressing in American Prisons

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The [headlines](#) screamed, “Vicious, Feared Attack Leaves PA Inmate Comatose.” The article began,

*“If his diary and witness accounts are to be believed, Nicholas Pinto endured months of physical, sexual and mental abuse in prison. Guards roughed him up, made him stand naked in a cold cell for hours at a time and taunted him relentlessly. A fellow inmate raped him night after night, beat him when he resisted and stole his possessions.”*

The setting was the Lackawanna County Prison in Scranton, PA. The cast of characters could randomly be picked from any number of prisons from Maine to



California, except, that is, for chaplain, Rev. William B. Pickard. Fr. Pickard, a priest of the Diocese of Scranton, served the prison for 26 years, often risking his own safety and reputation by advocating for human rights.

Prison Reform, Rev. William Pickard, Diocese of Scranton, sex abuse, Maine State Prison, Sheldon Weinstein, Lackawanna Cty Prison, <http://scribd.com/stanmoody>, <https://moodyreport.wordpress.com>, Nicholas Pinto

Pickard wrote a letter to the Lackawanna County commissioners on March 30, 2010, four months before the assault, complaining that administrators at the prison had failed to investigate Pinto's allegations of sexual assaults and denial of medical treatment.

On August 8, 2010, Pinto, in protective custody, was assaulted by a violent prisoner who was supposed to be in lockdown, knocked to the floor and had his head stomped on 15 times. His face was shattered, he suffered brain injuries and was left comatose. Complicity on the part of staff was alleged.

Fr. Pickard, in attempting to visit Pinto in Intensive Care at the Community Medical Center, was detained by a guard at the door and placed on Administrative Leave for allegedly trying to push the guard aside, a charge he denies.

On October 6, 2010, Warden Janine Donate announced that Pickard had been [permanently banned](#) from the prison in the interest of getting "...a fresh start."

On November 18, Warden Donate was herself granted a "[fresh start](#)" following the suspension of 3 guards and a supervisor.

As a former chaplain at the maximum security Maine State Prison, I know what it is to be put on "trial" for standing up for human rights. On August 24, 2009, I encountered Prisoner Sheldon Weinstein on the B-1 corridor of Solitary Confinement, more gently known as Segregation. Within two hours of my requesting toilet paper for him, he died of a ruptured spleen.

What to do? Occasionally in the past, I had been warned by prison administration that I was to focus on doing "chaplain things", as opposed to advocating for human rights, despite that advocating for human rights is universally considered to be the first responsibility of a prison chaplain.

Learning the hard way that Maine has no clergy/client privilege between chaplain and prisoner, I could come to no other conclusion but that chaplains in the Maine prison system are more window dressing than substantive. They are employed to administer programming and perform such inane duties as distributing greeting cards and the recent dedication of a memorial to a prison warden who died in the line of duty in 1863.

On May 22, 2009, I published an internal memo that outlined the systemic cultural issues leading to the Weinstein death. On June 9, 2009, those same issues were confirmed by a report published by the legislative watchdog agency, OPEGA.

As it turns out, my recorded observations of Weinstein's condition and the circumstances surrounding his death are key elements in the State's criminal case and the civil matter about to be filed on behalf of the Weinstein family.

Just shy of 2-years later, the Weinstein case remains "under investigation".

After 3 attempts by administrators to build a personnel case, I resigned my position. One day later, Commissioner Magnusson of the Maine Department of Corrections asked me to rescind my resignation in the interest of engaging me to assist him with prison reform efforts. Having failed to connect any further, the legislative Appropriations Committee cut my position from the budget effective May 29, 2010.

The shroud of secrecy continues to envelop the prison system in America. In Maine, all avenues to transparency have been severed, including all prisoner advocacy positions.

I stand in solidarity with Fr. Pickard. As with him, I have stood my ground in defense of belief that every human life has value, including that of the least among us.

Oh yes; by the way, Pinto and Weinstein were sex offenders, Pinto not yet tried on federal child pornography charges; Weinstein having served 6 brutal months of a 2-year sentence.