

## EXPRESSWAY

OPINION

## Amid the scandals, I'm still Catholic

BY PAT MCDONOUGH

Sixteen years of Catholic education. A family life infused with the rich traditions of Catholicism. A Lynbrook parish where we worshipped and witnessed the Sisters of Mercy serve unselfishly alongside a faith-filled laity and dedicated clergy. Grace was laced through all of it and the desire to devote my life to ministry led to a 35-year career in the Diocese of Rockville Centre.

I've worked in our schools, parishes and diocesan offices as an educator, psychologist and director of youth ministry, always with talented teams of priests, religious and lay men and women dedicated to the mission of the Gospel. I married a high school religion teacher and our kids went to Catholic schools. I wrote a syndicated column for the Long Island Catholic newspaper, served on

dozens of diocesan committees, gave retreats and parish missions, and took Long Island teens on service trips to meet impoverished people, those whom Jesus loved.

I was all in, until I wasn't.

In 1995, a vulnerable, anxious adolescent struggling with his sexuality told me things about our parish priest that no one wants to hear. He asked me to help him because his parents wouldn't, couldn't or didn't know how. I brought the boy's story to the diocese, naively assuming that appropriate actions would be taken to help the priest and protect the boy. That didn't happen.

I was devastated to discover that the priest's abuse of a minor came without consequences. I grew despondent while the priest grew more brazen. He took his young victim to a gay bar where, at age 14, he was served a martini and molested by men un-

known to him. The priest continued to sexually abuse the boy in his rectory and at his lake house.

The torment continued until a suicide attempt brought the boy and his horrific history to a hospital where a psychiatrist listened. The Suffolk County district attorney listened, too, and that led to a grand jury investigation of sexual abuse and corruption within our diocesan clerical system. Its findings, published in 2003 on the heels of shocking revelations of similar episodes in Boston, showed an established pattern of abuse and cover-up in the Diocese of Rockville Centre. The notoriously inadequate statute of limitations that existed then prevented criminal prosecution of abusers and their protectors.

So here we are, 16 years later. The crimes of the church's hierarchy span the globe and reach the highest levels of episcopal power. I wonder how

many of the people left in the pews will consider joining millions of Americans who identify as former Catholics.

The temptation to flee institutional faith is real, but I can't give up on a church that offers what we call "the good news of resurrection" and real hope, a church that feeds, clothes, educates and cares for more people on this planet than perhaps any other nongovernmental institution.

Like so many others, I've been hurt by the hierarchy, but healed by the Gospel and the God it proclaims. Faith isn't about the clergy; it's about Christ, community, shared prayer and discipleship.

So I'm still Catholic.

This week on Ash Wednesday, the remains of burned palms blended with oil will be pressed into my flesh in the shape of a cross, connecting me physically and spiritually to all the saints and sinners of my

church, and to the God who loves us all. Somewhere deep in this simple ritual lies the unmatched mingling of mystery and the utterly mundane.

Brought together are ash and oil, the often disengaged and the most devout. We are all promised the possibility of change through Jesus. We are hopeful. We are cynical. We are eager. We are reluctant. We are God's. We are church. And I'm not leaving.



Reader Pat McDonough lives in Manhasset.

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## Why NY needs a permanent tax cap

This is how our state can rein in costs and help our squeezed middle class

BY ANDREW M. CUOMO

The middle class is the backbone of our nation — built on the premise that in return for hard work, prosperity and financial security are achievable. But the middle class is increasingly falling behind under the pressure of rising costs and stagnant wages. It is hard out there and we know it.

Now, our middle class faces a new and unexpected threat: the federal government. The Trump administration has tried to take away health care by dismantling the Affordable Care Act; it has undermined the organized labor movement that helped build the middle class; and it has put New York's communities and environment at risk with regressive policies like potential offshore drilling around Long Island.

The most significant economic threat to New York is the cap on state and local tax

deductions. While President Donald Trump promised a tax cut for the middle class, the capping of SALT deductions goes in the opposite direction — hurting about 530,000 taxpayers on Long Island, or more than a third of its taxpayers. It is an egregious act of partisanship that targets Democratic states to pay for tax cuts in Republican states, and it is particularly shameful that Republican representatives from Long Island failed to stand up for their constituents.

The administration's policies make the state's 2 percent cap on local property taxes even more critical for New York, where the property tax burden is more than two-and-a-half times the typical state income tax burden.

In 2011, after years of trying to rein in out-of-control property taxes — Govs. George Pataki, Eliot Spitzer and David A. Paterson all tried — we passed the first local property tax cap. The



DREAMSTIME

2 percent property tax cap changed long-term trends, and saved New Yorkers nearly \$25 billion. On Long Island, it has saved taxpayers \$8.7 billion, with the typical Nassau taxpayer saving \$7,611 and the typical Suffolk taxpayer saving \$6,284.

By every measure the tax cap has been a success, but that success is not guaranteed if it does not remain in place.

That's why in this year's budget I call on the State Legis-

lature to make the 2 percent property tax cap permanent. I will not sign a budget that does not include a permanent tax cap.

Our middle class simply cannot sustain a return to the days of skyrocketing property taxes, especially in the face of the challenges and uncertainty emanating from Washington. So let's cap it for today. And keep it for tomorrow.

And let's not stop there.

Let's cut the income tax rate once again for middle-class New Yorkers. And let's fight SALT until the federal government rolls back this devastating assault on our state and its taxpayers.

In New York, we have not forgotten the middle class and we stand with middle-class families more than ever in the face of the federal assault. Since I took office, we have prioritized groundbreaking initiatives and investments to lift up hard-working families and reduce obstacles to prosperity.

We have made too much progress to turn back now. It's time that the State Legislature enshrines the 2 percent local property tax cap — a fundamental principle of fiscal responsibility — so that we can send a message loud and clear to the middle class that says New York is on their side.



Andrew M. Cuomo is governor of New York State.