

**Heart of Sorrow, Heart of Wisdom:
A Memorial of Hope and Renewal for the Sexual Abuse Tragedy**

*“Even in our sleep, pain that cannot forget
Falls drop by drop upon the heart,
Until in our own despair,
Against our will, comes Wisdom, by the awful grace of God.”*

Aeschylus, Agamemnon

Artist Statement

This is a memorial inspired by beauty, though a beauty not simply of the seen. This is a beauty that at once addresses human suffering and is infused with hope.

The wounds of the sexual abuse tragedy, for the survivors, for the Catholic church, for untold numbers, run deep. This memorial is an attempt to respond to such depth in a reflective and contemplative manner.

My overall desire and hope with this memorial proposal are that it serves as the basis for dialogue and engagement between all concerned. Thus, what is being presented is done so not as a finished product but in the hope that it may serve as a beginning of a process expressive of a tangible sense of mutual concern and shared effort.

While there are premises of faith underlying this memorial, to conceive of such a project implies being faced with the stark and searing awareness that the very symbols of faith were used as instruments of abuse. This alone is unequivocal reason to avoid the use of such symbols. The underlying intention is to evoke a dignified and healing presence that is meaningful and moving for believer and non-believer alike.

Samuel Fuller, O.F.M. Cap.
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Summary of the Proposal / The Background

With this exhibit, the work of this memorial moves from a course project to a public proposal. The culmination of this work as a course project was to arrive at a final design. Part of this process entailed meetings with a member of Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), the archdiocesan Office of Pastoral Support and Outreach, a psychologist who works with abuse survivors, and a landscape designer. For this exhibit, the final design was made into the model on display and a written proposal was composed. It is hoped that this exhibit may be part of the healing process that underlies the conception of the memorial.

The inspiration for this proposed memorial came in part from the articulation of beauty given by Alejandro R. Garcia-Rivera in his book *'A Wounded Innocence-Sketches for a Theology of Art'* particularly as it applied to the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington. Here, beauty is not something visually 'beautiful' but rather as a transformative presence that responds directly to human suffering. With the reflective and contemplative atmosphere created by the memorial, one is given the opportunity to move from the isolation of suffering to a communal and shared experience infused by the inherent dignity of the human person. This movement from fallen to redeemed sensibilities can present the discovery of a sense of innocence. This is not the innocence of immaturity or naivete but a "a radical openness to being more". As such, this touches on the very nature of the abundance and the generosity of hope. It was this 'radical openness' that I found so compelling.

Why not a memorial that responds directly to human suffering and offers a movement from fallen to redeemed sensibilities in terms of the sexual abuse tragedy? Why not express such a radical openness through the paradigm of 'Earth and Sky,' with the memorial sunken into the ground and with a highly polished black granite reflecting the sky? Such a phrase expresses a fundamental unity and compassion that embraces all human experience, suffering and hope. All this is underscored and amplified with the circular design.

The blackness of the granite is richly symbolic. Yet it is expressive, first and foremost, of the evil of sexual abuse and of the denial of it. There must be an authentic statement of such evil to allow for movement beyond it. Yet once brought before the light of day, placed beneath sky and before time, the opportunity for healing is also present. Radical openness allows for transformation. Within the blackness of the granite is also the reflective capacity to image the sky and to be transformed by what it beholds, whether a winter sky, a fall day, or the human face.

The Design

Having arrived at the overarching paradigm and the parameters for such a memorial, it remained to decide what it would hold. A conversation with a survivor provided the insight that to offer an environment of trust, there would be no barriers or vertical facades.

The four slabs of granite are also symbolic and play a key role in the memorial design. Securely set and precisely located, they serve with sober solemnity as witnesses to all that has happened and all that is desired. Literally grounded in the here and now and situating the unity of earth and sky, they anchor the experience of those present. Two slabs are inscribed; one with Matthew 25:40 (*Truly, I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these members of my family, you did it to me.*), the other with the quote from Aeschylus as given above.

In addition, there is a section of the memorial with three ornamental trees to express the poetic and organic, to offer the healing quality of creation. There is another section, equally sized, with a fountain for a sense of continual rebirth and cleansing. The fountain would be of a cascading effect with the water moving to a gathering area.