

A time to tear down, and a time to build up

Last night was both, for the victims of former Catholic school teacher John Merzbacher, who terrorized students at the Catholic Community School in South Baltimore in the 1970s. They held a vigil for prayer that their abuser stays in prison, and to remember their classmates who died, including one who committed suicide. You can read the story [here](#).

Despite the anger and frustration that is certain to fester over the abuse they sustained, it was a beautiful, peaceful gathering. They offered words of encouragement to each other and their families, and to victims who may still be suffering alone. Father Timothy Dore, a Conventual Franciscan I wrote about last week, offered a long, thoughtful prayer that showed more gratitude to God for the blessings they had than anger over the unspeakable horrors the victims describe suffering.

After interviewing some participants after the vigil at the local Knights of Columbus Hall, I stopped by the school again, which seemed quiet. I stood outside a window to a room where Elizabeth Murphy was raped when she was 11. While I was there, a kid whizzed past me on a scooter, seemingly without a care in the world, a stark contrast to the grown-up kids who had filled the same sidewalk just an hour before. One victim told me she hoped that the vigil would remind her classmates of some of the good things that happened during middle school, too, like birthday parties. It couldn't have all been bad, could it? she asked.

Many students expressed sorrow not for themselves, but for their parents who worked so hard to pay for their Catholic education. Besides for the abuse, they lost three years of English education during formative years, and many of them struggled with school after that, a victim said. They have a petition to keep Merzbacher in prison; consider adding your name.