

# Cambridge Chronicle

*America's oldest weekly, since 1846*

---

## Mack performs “Conversations with My Molester” at his church

By Andy Metzger  
Cambridge Chronicle: March 23, 2012

Cambridge — It's the kind of thing that would have been completely unbelievable a decade ago, but Cambridge playwright Michael Mack is performing a one-man show at his Harvard Square Catholic church about sexual abuse he suffered decades ago at the hands of a priest.

“I was delighted that the parish is going to be the venue for hosting this,” said Barbara Thorp, director of the Office of Pastoral Outreach and Child Protection for the Boston Archdiocese.

Mack will perform “Conversations with my Molester” at Saint Paul Parish on Mount Auburn Street on Thursday, March 29 – the first performance he will give in a church.

“This is kind of a new angle on the play because it will be in a Catholic church, which is kind of where it all began – though not that church,” Mack said, over tea at the S&S Deli and Restaurant on Thursday.

It all began in the spring of 1968 when Mack was 11 years old, having moved from northern Virginia to his aunt's house in North Carolina when his mother went to a mental hospital. Mack

said he has been working on the script in one way or another since shortly after the local priest – who was about as old as Mack's dad – violated his trust.

“The anger that I felt was toward myself,” he said. “I have no memory of feeling anger towards him.” Mack said the play is a completely accurate telling of the abuse, and Mack's effort to have



Michael Mack, who is performing a one-man show called “Conversations With My Molester,” stops for a photo at St. Paul's Catholic Church in Harvard Square on Sunday afternoon, March 18, 2012. (Wicked Local staff photo by David Gordon)

that conversation with his molester. He said that at one point he had 35 different scenarios for how that conversation might go.

Mack loved the grandeur and ceremony of the clergy and dreamed of one day being a priest, but soon after the incident he quit being an altar boy and left the church. Mack joined the Air Force, and then went to MIT in 1985 to study management science. He finally started putting his imaginary conversations to paper when he switched his studies to poetry, studying under Nobel Prize winning poet Seamus Heaney and other greats.

In 2005, he typed the name of his abuser into a Google search engine and found that he had served a prison term for a nearly identical crime and was living only about a half hour's drive away in Central Massachusetts. Mack said the only fiction in the story is the abuser's name – changed to protect his family – and the small town he lived in, which becomes Worcester for the performance.

Mack worked up his courage and went to great efforts to have a conversation with his molester, though in the Thursday interview he was vague about whether he succeeded so that the mystery is not spoiled for those who go to see the performance.

When Mack's molester died he went to the funeral and buried his repulsion of the Catholic Church and got back into the habit of attending mass.

"I couldn't square what happened with that priest with what I believed," Mack said. He explained his belief as, "I believe with all my heart in something. I believe in something and I believe the church is a reflection of that."

Mack now believes that the Catholic church has stamped out sexual abuse with a zero tolerance policy but said he thinks its "much more prevalent" in society at large than people imagine.

At 11, he was more credulous. One spring afternoon, Mack was banging away on a church piano after mass when the priest molested him under the ruse of "helping to make a costume for a church play."

Both Mack and the priest left that small North Carolina town soon after that.

The story is a familiar one to Thorp, who has been a social worker reaching out to victims of clergy abuse since 2002 when the position was first created.

"It begins, as sadly many of these do, with a little boy... In a single moment that trust is betrayed and violated," Thorp said. She said she appreciated the story of Mack's own spiritual resurgence when he came back to the church after so many years. She was convinced of the play's merits after going to see it at the Boston Playwrights' Theatre. Though the play obviously delves into dark material, Mack leavens it with humor and ends it on an uplifting note.

"I think the closest we can come to truth is simply telling our story," said Mack. "I really do believe in the power of personal narrative."