



Healing, Learning & Growing Newsletter

From the Office of Assistance Ministry



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Archdiocese of Chicago

Spring has sprung, new life has begun!

Welcome to our newsletter, which is intended to provide victims-survivors of sexual abuse and their families with updates on services and office initiatives.

This issue of the newsletter is dedicated to the Healing Garden Project. Here is what the Cardinal has to say:

Hurting—Healing—Helping

The voices of those who have been sexually abused as children are often heard only years, even decades, after the children have been hurt. In meeting with those who have been abused, I have heard again and again their heartfelt concern that no other child suffer as they have. This is why whatever has been learned from these tragedies has to be remembered and relearned year after year.

Healing is a personal journey that cannot be programmed. It is a natural process, aided and strengthened by God's grace. A garden is a place where physical nature provides the context for grace to work. It is my prayer that our new healing garden will be such a place for everyone, but especially for those whose lives have been hurt by sexual abuse on the part of those who abused their own office in the Church.

When a hurt person is healing, he or she becomes free to help others. Not trapped in the terrible crime once done to them, not exhausted by personal struggle, a victim of sexual abuse is free and strong when able to help those whom God gives them to love.

That's how, with God's providential help, this healing garden can enter into the lives of survivors of abuse and into the very life of the Church herself.

Francis Cardinal George, OMI

Support Groups: One More Step in the Healing Process

Our office will once again be offering support groups free of charge to victim-survivors of sexual abuse. Support groups have proven to be a positive step on the road to healing from the impact of sexual abuse.

If you're reluctant to join a group, you're not alone. It's pretty common to fear your story is unique and no one will listen to you, believe you or understand. Until you attend, it can be hard to imagine how satisfying it feels to freely share your experience with others and have them listen, understand, and support you on your healing journey.

Our next group is slated to begin after Labor Day and will be held Saturday mornings. Want to learn more about it? Or attend the groups? Call Tom Tharayil (312)534-8267 or Ruth Robinson at (312) 534-8256 for information.

Mission Statement

The Archdiocesan Office of Assistance Ministry's mission is to provide pastoral care, support, and resources to victims-survivors of sexual abuse and their loved ones in their efforts to achieve psychological, emotional and spiritual healing. For more information about the Office of Assistance Ministry, visit the office's page on the Archdiocesan web site at www.archchicago.org.

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Introducing.....

My name is Tom Tharayil and I am the new Director of the Office of Assistance Ministry (OAM) of the Archdiocese of Chicago. I am a board certified, licensed clinical social worker with over 15 years of clinical experience. I have worked in agencies, hospitals, and in private practice, with individuals, couples, families and groups. I am also an adjunct professor in the School of Social Work MSW program at Loyola University. Last year I was invited by the OAM to lead several 12 week groups for adult male victim-survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

The stories shared in these groups genuinely moved me. Their stories were marked by struggles with trust, relationships, and challenges with substance abuse. I was saddened that their childhood reflections were often filtered through the shame and hurt that comes with sexual abuse. However I was also inspired by their resiliency and brave work to reclaim their lives.

I witnessed men acknowledge their anger, hurt, and sadness, while refusing to let this define the rest of their lives. These men worked, not to forget, but to learn how to integrate their past into their own complex story. Many of the participants used therapy, self-help groups, readings, journaling and prayer to help them reconstruct a better life. I found it interesting that many of the men continued to seek solace by going to church regularly as they struggled with the church. I carried their experiences with me through the interview process for this position.

As the Director, I hope that the office of Assistance Ministry continues to reach out and help the men and women who remain silent about their sexual abuse. It is my hope that support groups, retreats, spiritual counseling, psychotherapy and our Healing Garden will offer a variety of options to connect with us and journey through their healing process no matter what stage they may find themselves in.

I personally invite you to contact the Office of Assistance Ministry to learn how we may be able to help you. I can be reached at (312) 534-8267 or ttharayil@archchicago.org.

What the Healing Garden Project means to me...

One of the most important things to me has been the need to reach out to other victim-survivors and do anything I could to assist them in their healing. Although I tried in many ways over the years, I felt great frustration having never been able to succeed.

When the request came to be on the committee, I saw it as an opportunity to finally be part of a positive tool for recognizing and helping other victim survivors. For me, there is a fine line between the benefits to the image of the Catholic Church and to the healing journey of victim- survivors.

Working with the healing garden committee has been part of my healing journey. It was obvious to me that I was in a very different stage of healing than the others on the committee. My fear and distrust issues were around every corner. Over time I realized no matter how different we may have been, we shared a common thread as victim-survivors. After a slow progression, I was able to express my opinions knowing I wouldn't be judged, and that my voice spoke for others like me.

Because of the bond we formed, I felt acceptance, understanding and concern. I found hope and purpose from the ashes of my despair and shame. There is no doubt in my mind that I have spiritually grown. I hope that will happen for others who experience the healing garden. Although the tragedy of the past can't be changed, I have gained strength by being a part of this healing project.

Donna Johnson Polencheck

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Healing Garden Update.....

I am so happy to report the initial phase of construction of the Healing Garden of the Archdiocese of Chicago has begun. The Healing Garden will have three major features. First, it will be a beautiful garden space where a visitor may reflect on God's healing goodness as found in nature. There will be over 25 different species of plants, trees and bushes beautifully arranged for year-round enjoyment. The Healing Garden, once complete, will improve and beautify the area directly west of Holy Family Church on Roosevelt Road in Chicago.

Secondly, the Healing Garden will display several texts related to healing from the tragic consequences of childhood sexual abuse, including a Bible passage, quotes from the USCCB Dallas Charter for the Protection of Children and Youth, and a personal reflection from Cardinal George. These texts are very important for any visitor to the garden who seeks healing and reconciliation from individual stories of sexual abuse and its long-lasting effects.

Lastly, there will be a bronze sculpture of the Holy Family to highlight to any visitor to the garden the sacred bonds that exist within our individual families, and our wider community. When a child is safe and secure, he or she may flourish and grow the way God intended. Our planning committee felt, where sexual abuse changed and broke apart family relationships, the survivor of abuse constantly yearns for and desires to get back what was lost - the innocence and the feeling of safety and security - so the survivor may once again, flourish and grow the way God intended.

It is my hope, and the hope of our entire planning committee, that any visitor to the garden will feel better too.

.....from **Michael Hoffman, Chairman, Healing Garden Planning Committee**

“Together in this healing space, may we find within ourselves a place to feel free: free from fear, free from shame and free from judgment.”



Community Support for the Healing Garden

Since our founding in 2006, Signature Bank has been committed to serving our community and supporting local charities. One way Signature has worked towards this goal is through our monthly “Jeans Day.” On the first Friday of every month, employees donate a minimum of \$5 each to that month’s designated charity, and in return, are allowed to wear jeans to work. In addition to our generous employee donations, the Bank matches those donations 100% to double the contribution! This month, employees chose the **Healing Garden Project at the Chicago Archdiocese** as their charity. \$400 was raised for the regular upkeep of the Healing Garden in support of childhood abuse survivors.

Editor’s Note: Signature Bank and employees: Thank you so much for your generosity! Gail

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FAMILY SUPPORT GROUP



Something to think about this spring: Are you the spouse, parent, sibling, adult child, or close friend of someone who was sexually abused as a child? Are you looking for ways to support that loved one and let him/her know that you care? Are you struggling with your personal need to come to terms with what the victimization of your loved one means for you, your family, or for your relationship with him/her?

If any of these questions ring true to your own experience, we at the Office of Assistance Ministry would like to offer you an opportunity to pursue your own healing journey that might parallel that of the victim/survivor.

The group will be lead by a licensed clinical social worker with years of experience working with victim/survivors and their families. The meetings are held at the Quigley Pastoral Center in Chicago on four consecutive Saturdays from 10:00-11:30. There is no charge for participation.

We anticipate starting another group in the spring of 2011 and encourage you to consider whether this opportunity would be beneficial for you. If so, or if you have questions regarding the content or format of the group, please call Kathleen Leggdas, Clinical Specialist at 312-534-5268 or email your questions to kleggdas@archchicago.org.

Call sooner, rather than later, so that you can put these dates on your calendar and make a commitment to meet and talk with others who share your experiences.

Spring Session

Saturday, April 30 Saturday, May 7, 14, 21

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Looking Ahead.....

Support Groups Spring 2011

Fall support group sessions for victim-survivors:

Look forward to them after Labor Day. Exact dates to be announced later in the year.



On-Going for Kids
Office for the Protection of Children & Youth

**Office for the
Protection of Children
and Youth**

*Have a Blessed
Easter Season*



You are welcome to visit our website:

www.archchicago.org and click on

Protecting Children

If you wish to receive this newsletter via e-mail, please provide your email address to Ruth Robinson at

rurobinson@archchicago.org