



Healing, Learning & Growing Newsletter

From the Office of Assistance Ministry, volume 2, issue 2, August 2011



This newsletter was created to provide victims-survivors of sexual abuse and their families with updates on services and office initiatives.

Welcome

On June 9, 2011, 300 Victims-Survivors, their families, and clergy came together to pray for healing and to witness the dedication of the Healing Garden. For this issue, we asked attendees to share their reactions to the day. We'd like to hear from you too. Please let us know your thoughts and feelings about the Healing Garden.

Peace,
Assistance Ministry



"It is impossible to thank each person involved in making this day so successful. Each person volunteered for a job or a task because they believe in healing and reconciliation. Yet, there is still so much work to do. "On this day there was hope that walking together we might find healing and peace. Thank you to all for providing that hope to survivors of childhood sexual abuse, and families. "
Michael Hoffman Chair Planning Committee



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“As I was sitting in the Church during the prayer service, I was really moved. I would have never thought such a gathering, with the pain expressed, the presence of the Archbishop, the scripture proclaimed in a way I have never heard before would be possible.

“I was overwhelmed by it all. This was a long time in coming! I hope and prayed with all my might that it marks a new moment in this deeply wounded time in the life of our Church.

“I was touched by the courage of the survivors and their families. I was moved by the presence of the Cardinal who has led us through this devastating time. I felt proud of the men and women who serve on our victim assistance ministry.

I left the experience with a new appreciation of the power of healing and the possibility of hope even when a person is so hurt by someone they thought would be responsible for their well being.

“Since the dedication, hundreds of people have stopped by the Garden and I get to see them firsthand. I have been visiting with many of them. The Garden seems to be universally received as beautiful, peaceful and needed. People are particularly struck by the sculpture and the passages that they can read throughout the garden. Being a member of the planning committee for the Garden has been one of the great blessings in my ministry.

“I hope that the Garden can bring some peace and hope to our brothers and sisters who have had to face the heartbreaking reality of sexual abuse. I also pray it will be a place for priests to come to pray for the continued reform of the priesthood and pray for God's mercy on our bishops and priests who violated the sacred trust between the priest and the people he serves.”

“To everyone who made the Healing Garden a reality--God Bless you!”

Fr. Jeremiah Boland
Holy Family Parish,
Home of the Healing Garden

“I wanted to attend the prayer service to show my support of your Ministry and those who serve with you and those you serve.

“I feel that prayer is a very critical component to the healing process. We all need healing of some sort and being there with two or three gathered in His name would have been a very powerful experience.

“Your invitation and openness shows a real commitment to those you serve.”

Judith Speckman, Joliet, Illinois



“More than anything, I think the garden is a public, open-hearted response of the Archdiocese to those who have been hurt. “It says, “Your hurt is real, acknowledged and your healing is both a hope and our prayer. .While I hope both survivors and their families, as well as the curious, come to see the garden, I would be very happy to see it as a place where parents take their children for a summer sunning. That joy, beauty and new life is the ultimate purpose of the garden.”

Garden Designer



*...forgiveness is the fragrance
the violet releases as the foot
crushes it.*
Mark Twain



“The Healing Garden prayer service and dedication ceremony surpassed my expectations in many ways:

- ◆ the large number of people who attended the dedication
- ◆ particularly family and friends of the victim-survivors and representatives of the

clergy.

- ◆ the integration of both pain and healing into the prayer service
- ◆ the symbolism captured in the garden itself that reflects what the planning committee hoped to achieve

“I am proud to have been a part of this effort to provide a place for prayer, reflection and healing to those who visit.”
- Matt Hunnicutt

“Throughout this process, I have been most deeply touched by the passion and hope-filled persistence of the survivors with whom I have had the privilege of working.

“Thursday’s dedication was very powerful for me. The power of lamentation, expressing the deep pain of hurt and betrayal, but also our ultimate trust in God, was really made manifest in the prayer service, the dedication and in the potential for the resurrection of damaged lives expressed through the organic nature of the Garden itself.

“I pray that we will find ways to invite more and more victims of child and youth sexual abuse and others to visit the

Garden as a source of healing and perhaps as an entree into other resources we might offer to help them on their journey toward healing.”



Peace! Fr. Larry Dowling



And a note from the editor...

“Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it.”

Helen Keller

How do you heal ?

As a victim-survivor of clergy abuse, I often wonder how other people heal, how we get on with our lives, forgiving, and thus allowing ourselves not just to grow, but to flourish. Everyone develops their own method for healing.

One of the things that I do is volunteer my time to produce/edit this newsletter. Since October of 2009, I have experienced therapeutic benefit from sharing through this media.

Some write poetry, some dedicate themselves to a specific cause, such as the Healing Garden, others participate in group and individual therapy to find some healing and hope. Some people even use their anger as a tool to motivate.

So, how do you heal? Please share your method, or tools for coping. This can be a gift to other victim-survivors who may be at a stage in their healing where they feel lost. Often a suggestion from someone who has been through the same trauma can be a *life-saver*.

*Please share your thoughts/tools/tips/methods for healing to:
emailyoureditor@yahoo.com*

Healing garden a ‘permanent voice’ for victims

JUNE 19-JULY 2, 2011

Cardinal George dedicates new space at Holy Family Church

By Michelle Martin
STAFF WRITER

A garden is a place of growth and rebirth, and the Healing Garden of the Archdiocese of Chicago is intended to offer just that to victims and survivors of clerical sexual abuse, their families and loved ones and the wider church.

The garden, dedicated June 9 after an emotional prayer service in Holy Family Church, 1080 W. Roosevelt Road, was the brainchild of sex-abuse survivor Michael Hoffman, who chaired its planning committee.

It stands as a permanent testimony not only to the abuse that happened, but also to the efforts at reconciliation between victims and survivors and the church.

In his homily at the prayer service, the cardinal said that the voices of victims and survivors had too often been missing from discussions of the sexual abuse crisis.

“The garden is to be a permanent voice, not only in its plaques, but also in its presence year after year. It is also a permanent apology in its plaques and in its presence year after year, so that the apology that has been voiced in private and in public since 2002 will be permanently heard here,” Cardinal George said.

“And it is also a permanent commitment on the part of this local church, the Archdiocese of Chicago, to continue and to intensify the efforts to reach in a healing way those victims who want to survive,” he said.

The garden is tucked into an area just west of Holy Family Church on Roosevelt Road, and features more than 25 kinds of plants, trees and flowers arranged around a statue of the Holy Family donated by the Sisters of the Holy

Family of Nazareth.

Plaques along its pathways feature quotes from Cardinal George and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.

Hoffman, who said he spent some time sitting quietly in the garden the day following the dedication, said the archdiocese responded well when he came forward and reported abuse that had happened to him decades earlier.

He wrote a letter in appreciation of the staff of the Office of Assistance Ministry, and shortly after that was invited to meet with the cardinal.

“All that went as good as could be expected,”



Above, Donna Johnson-Polencheck, Michael Hoffman, Marian Sasseti and Joe Iacono read a prayer together during the service.

Hoffman said. “But there was that little emptiness inside me.”

After talking with the cardinal, the idea of a garden where victims, survivors and anyone else could sit and reflect took shape.

The process of developing the garden, and working as an equal with other survivors, staff from the Office of Assistance Ministry and two priests — Father Jeremiah Boland, administrator at Holy Family Parish, and Father Larry Dowling, pastor of St. Agatha Parish — in itself helped fill that emptiness, Hoffman said. He also credited Cardinal George with working hard and taking a leadership role on the issue.

“I hope other abuse survivors can be helped as well,” he said. “I don’t think I’m special. At least in this case, for this survivor, many, many good



On June 9, visitors tour the new healing garden for victims and survivors of clergy sex abuse located on the grounds of Holy Family Church, 1080 W. Roosevelt Road. Minutes before they attended a prayer service and dedication of the garden with Cardinal George.
Karen Callaway/Catholic New World

things have happened.”

Plans for the garden started in 2008, with much of the time devoted to finding a site.

Several donors stepped forward to help fund the project, including the family of attorney James Serritella, who has provided for the perpetual care of the garden in the name of his late wife, Ruby.

Asked if he thinks the presence of the garden will make a difference, committee member Vince Spurduto said, “I hope so. I really hope so. I think it’s a beautiful idea. It definitely can be an opportunity to reflect.”

Spurduto spoke briefly before the prayer service, saying that he had carried the secret of his abuse for more than 30 years before coming forward.

“The real power is in knowing and sharing the truth,” he said. “This

power is a freedom that defines us and lets us go free.” He acknowledged that not everyone was impressed with the idea of the garden.

“There are those who thought the garden was a beautiful gesture,” he said. “There are those who thought the garden was too little, too late.”

Still, he said, “This moment is historic. It is a defining moment, a defining moment for the church, its clergy, its laity, and victims and survivors.”

For more about the garden, visit www.healinggardenchicago.org.

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Above, people process out of Holy Family Church carrying candles and make their way to the site of the garden for the dedication on June 9.

“I am still reeling from the excitement of finally seeing the Healing Garden & sharing the opening day with everyone involved. The significance of its purpose & the heartfelt words of all the speakers were moving.”

- Donna P.

“I attended the prayer service and dedication of the Healing Garden in support of a friend who survived years of abuse from his parish priest, a man who was also a trusted family friend. This abuse had devastating consequences for my friend and for his family. I sat with my friend, his wife, his children, and their family members.

“I pray in deep thanksgiving for the courage and generosity of spirit demonstrated by survivors of clergy abuse who participated in the Healing Liturgy and in the creation of the Healing Garden. Their ability to forgive priests and bishops who were responsible for so much pain and such tremendous loss of innocence and trust is inspirational. Their witness and their ability to forgive challenges me to follow a daily practice of letting go of anger and forgiving others in my life and in the church. The garden offers a beautiful refuge for healing and reflection in the middle of our busy city.

“It was incredibly moving to hear the voices of those who suffered abuse from clergy reading scripture and offering both prayers of lamentation and prayers of hope inside a Catholic church with Cardinal George present. The selection of hymns brought us from sorrow into forgiveness and hope. Cardinal George’s words were sincere and offered comfort to those who have been so hurt by the church.

“I pray that bishops and church officials in our country and around the world continue to grow in their understanding of the shattering effects of clergy abuse on survivors and their families. I pray that all bishops will forever be compassionate and honest shepherds for those in their care.”

Mary Brennan Ziegler
Oak Park, Illinois

“Yesterday’s event was truly what it was meant for.

“It was wonderful to see the Church acknowledge a long overdue admission and to truly start the healing process. I am very honored to have been a part of that.”

Sincerely, Kevin Walsh

“This is a note of my impressions of the religious service at Holy Family Church of Chicago. There could not have been a more appropriate place to render a heart to the healing of those previously abused. The thought of a *garden* recalls a garden of long ago where Adam and Eve lost what was once precious to them.

“Now in this new garden of the Holy Family, grace is restored.

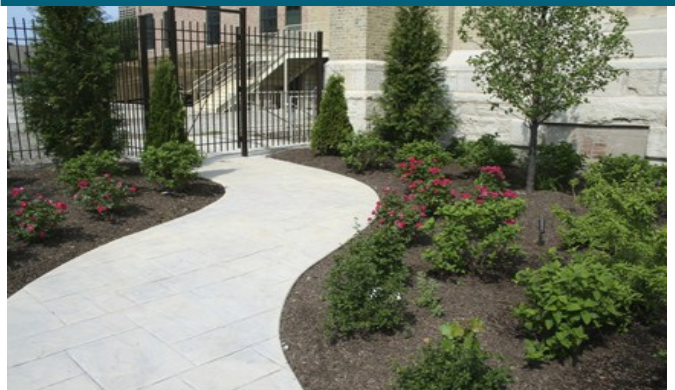
“As a Sister of the Holy Family of Nazareth, being present at this service of reconciliation and the visit in the garden of the Holy Family, I was deeply moved - for this blessing of the garden is where we, the Sisters of the Holy Family, share and assure prayer for those who seek healing.

“Our humble prayers are offered, for that is the purpose and mission of our Congregation: To humbly serve the needs of families. It is through the example and love of the Holy Family that we learn to forgive and regain our joy. It is our hope and prayer that all who visit here and pray, will find the peace and joy that this shrine offers.

“Be assured of our prayers offered in your intentions.”

Sr. Stella Louise, CSFN

Sr. Stella Louise Slomka. CSFN



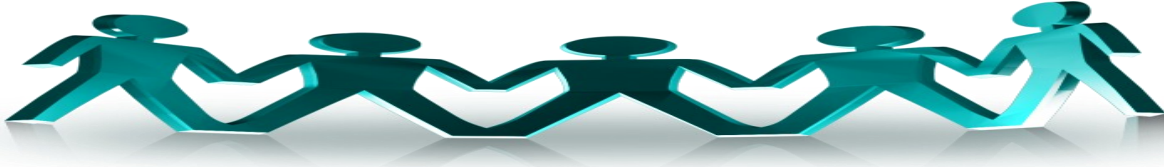
“The prelude was exceptional, and most moving for all. Sister’s voice was perfect for this occasion. Nice job! “

Jackie

Upcoming support groups and workshops

VICTIMS-SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE SUPPORT GROUP

The Office of Assistance Ministry of the Archdiocese of Chicago will be offering a free support group for adults who were sexually abused as children. The purpose of the group is to provide victim-survivors an opportunity to connect with others and to share their experience, strength and hope. The group will run for 10 consecutive Saturdays beginning on September 17th from 10:30 AM to 12 PM. An experienced licensed clinical social worker will lead the group at a downtown Chicago location. Due to the sensitive nature of the group, space will be limited. For more information, call Tom Tharayil at (312) 534-8267 or email him at ttharayil@archchicago.org.



Workshop for Family and Friends of Victim-Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse

When someone you care about begins to talk about their childhood sexual abuse, many of us don't know how to respond. What do I say? What do I do when they are having a flashback? Is it normal to feel impatient, angry, hopeless, and exhausted? Do others feel guilty for wanting this to end? Is it selfish of me to wonder who can I talk to?

Family and friends often share feelings of the trauma, shame, and powerlessness felt by the victim-survivor. Very often the best way to support a victim-survivor is to take care of yourself and get the support you need too.

If you have had similar thoughts, the Office of Assistance Ministry of the Archdiocese of Chicago would like to invite you to attend a free half day workshop for family and friends of Victim-Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse.

Kathleen Leggdas, LCSW, will lead the program. There are two dates available; Saturday, September 24 and Saturday, October 15, 2011 from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Parking will be available at no charge to participants. For more information, please call Kathleen at (312) 534-5268.

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.

To learn more about services, programs, or to receive the newsletter

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