



# Healing, Learning & Growing Newsletter From the Office of Assistance Ministry



November, 2009

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Archdiocese of Chicago

## Introduction: Who Are We and What Are We Doing

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

### A Little History

Greetings from the Office for the Protection of Children and Youth (OPCY) in the Archdiocese of Chicago!

This office opened in 2003, following the passage of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Its original mission was to provide training for children, youth, ministers, educators and others in ways to maintain a safe environment for children and young people.

In 2006, the office was reorganized to include the Office of Assistance Ministry (OAM) and the Office for Child Abuse Investigations and Review. The Office of Compliance is the newest addition to the office. *Continued on page 2.....*



### People You Should Know

- ⇒ Gail Volunteer Editor / Victim-Survivor
- ⇒ Jan Slattery Director, OPCY
- ⇒ Matthew Hunnicutt, MA, LCSW Director, OAM
- ⇒ Mayra Flores Assistant Director, OAM
- ⇒ Kathleen Leggdas, MEd, LCSW Clinical Specialist, OAM

### Services offered by the OAM

**Support Groups:** We sponsor 12-week support groups three times a year at different locations throughout the Archdiocese of Chicago.

**Family Groups:** These educational groups are designed to provide support to family members (parents, spouses, adult children, loved ones, siblings) as they support their loved ones through the difficulties associated with sexual abuse trauma.

**Day of Reflection:** This is an opportunity for victims-survivors to meet with Assistance Ministry staff in dialogue and discussion.

**Healing Weekend:** Two-day retreat scheduled for fall of 2010. More information to come.

**Healing Garden:** This is an initiative sponsored by the Archdiocese through Assistance Ministry, with a committee spearheaded by survivors.

For more information on these programs that are available to you and your family members, see page 3.....

### 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](http://www.archchicago.org).*

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# Healing, Learning & Growing Newsletter

## A Little History *Continued from page 1*

The Archdiocese of Chicago has long been a leader in offering assistance to those who have suffered sexual abuse by a clergy member or church employee, with its Victims' Assistance Ministry formed in 1992. Now known as the Office of Assistance Ministry, it works under the umbrella of the Office for the Protection of Children and Youth, and has provided services to many victims-survivors and their families.

While the Archdiocese of Chicago has made significant progress in preventing clerical sexual abuse of children and in offering assistance to victims-survivors and their families, there is still work to be done.

As director of this office, I believe that what the Church is doing to reach out to victims-survivors of clergy sexual abuse and keeping children safe is changing the culture of the Church, and with continued diligence, it will change the culture of our society. Some data I'd like to share with you:

- *The US Catholic Church has trained more than 1.7 million clergy, educators, employees and volunteers in parishes on how to create safe environments and prevent child sexual abuse.*
- *The US Catholic Church has prepared more than 5.7 million children to recognize abuse and protect themselves.*
- *The US Catholic Church has run criminal record checks on more than 1,500,000 volunteers and employees, 163,700 educators, 51,000 clerics and 4,950 candidates for ordination.*

We are committed to changing our environment, inside and outside the Church, to one in which children are safer. The Archdiocese is committed to this ministry, and to the protection of all God's children.

- Jan Slattery, Director of the Office for the Protection of Children & Youth

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## HEALING GARDEN

A small group of clergy sexual abuse survivors has been working in cooperation with the Archdiocese of Chicago's Office of Assistance Ministry to create a healing garden.

Francis Cardinal George has approved the creation of this healing garden to help victims-survivors of clergy sexual abuse and others who may have suffered from tragic events in their lives.

A Planning Committee is moving ahead with design ideas for the garden. If you and your family members or loved ones would like to offer any ideas or feedback regarding what you would like to see at this healing garden, please contact Mayra Flores, Assistant Director of the Office of Assistance Ministry at 312.534.8256 or by email at [mflores@archchicago.org](mailto:mflores@archchicago.org)

The creation of this healing garden is a real and symbolic attempt to break the silence related to childhood sexual abuse. We hope to hear from you.

Sincerely,

*Michael*

Chairman, Healing Garden Planning Committee

## Vision Statement

The creation of this healing garden is an attempt by us, clergy sexual abuse survivors of the Archdiocese of Chicago, to heal, learn and grow from the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual harm done to us. We wish to reach out to you who may have suffered from any tragic event that has left your hearts broken, just like ours. 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.

# Healing, Learning & Growing Newsletter

## SUPPORT GROUPS

The Archdiocese of Chicago through the Office of Assistance Ministry (OAM) sponsors therapy groups throughout the year. *These groups are for any adult survivor of childhood sexual abuse.*

Licensed professionals, experienced in working with victims of sexual abuse, conduct separate group sessions for women and men.

### **Best of all? It is free!**

Participation in the adult therapy groups is not limited to those who were sexually abused as minors by a priest or deacon. The abuse may have been perpetrated by a family member, acquaintance or stranger.

Therapy groups for adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse will meet for twelve consecutive weeks beginning the first week of November 2009.

Sessions for men will be held on Chicago's Southside; sessions for women in Evergreen Park. Support groups for survivors of sexual abuse have been an ongoing service from the Office of Assistance Ministry since its inception in 1992.

### **Interested in attending?**

Call or email

Kathleen Leggdas at 312/534-5268

kleggdas@archchicago.org

or

Matt Hunnicutt at 312/534-8267

mhunnicutt@archchicago.org



## FAMILY EDUCATIONAL GROUPS

The Archdiocesan Office of Assistance Ministry offers an educational program for family members.

**Who?** Family members of those who were sexually abused as children by priests, deacons or other employees of the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Chicago.

**What?** This program focuses on education regarding church related sexual abuse of minors and includes open discussion among group participants.

**When?** Held twice a year. Four 90 minutes sessions are held on designated Saturdays. 10-11 a.m. The next session is scheduled to begin in November.

**Where?** The Archdiocese Pastoral Center, 835 North Rush Street.

**Other Important Info:** Participants will be asked to commit to all four sessions so that the continuity of information and group cohesion are not affected by absences of group members.

### **Best of all? It is free!**

Parking will be available at Holy Name Cathedral lot at State Street and Superior.

### **Interested in attending?**

Contact: Kathleen Leggdas at 312/534-5268

**“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.”**



*Healing, Learning & Growing*

# Healing, Learning & Growing Newsletter

## Highlights from the Day of Reflection

The Office of Assistance Ministry held its first Day of Reflection at Techny Towers on Saturday, October 3, 2009.

The purpose of this gathering was for the OAM staff to meet with victims-survivors and their families in order to reflect on their needs, and how the office can respond more effectively to aid in people's journey to wholeness and healing.

After introductions and a brief exercise in communications led by Kathleen Leggdas, Michael and Vince shared their poignant personal stories with the group. For those family members present, this was the first time they had heard other victims-survivors tell their stories. It was moving and emotional, brave and inspiring. Matt and Kathleen then led small group discussions about the panel's presentation to allow participants to process what they heard.

Next there was a brief overview of what the Archdiocese of Chicago is doing to continue its outreach to victims and their families. In addition to what has been mentioned in this issue, more details will be covered in future issue of this newsletter.

After the lunch that was provided in the cafeteria, some participants took time to enjoy some fellowship in the lovely garden surroundings of Techny.

The rest of the afternoon was dedicated to assessing and determining victims-survivors' and their family members' needs. Participants were fully engaged in developing ways the office could better use its resources to reach out to them.

One of the most inspired discussions came as a result of how to promote the office's services to every victim that needs them. The participants were particularly focused on "getting the word out" about the OAM, with some creative suggestions.

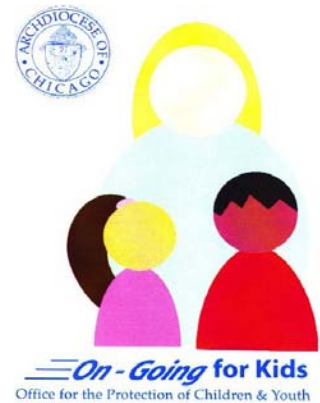
Even though the number of attendees was relatively low, those present – including the staff – found the experience worthwhile and meaningful.

We intend to offer more one-day experiences such as these as well as the weekend retreats every other year. Please watch for calendar updates in future issues of the office newsletter for more information. Peace.

Care, support and resources for victims-survivors of sexual abuse by church personnel of the Archdiocese of Chicago.

## Looking Ahead.....

- Day of Reflection feedback coming in the November issue
- Support Groups Spring 2010
- Healing Weekend Fall 2010



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

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<http://www.archchicago.org/ProtectingChildren.htm>

If you wish to receive this newsletter via e-mail, please provide your email address to Mayra Flores at [mflores@archchicago.org](mailto:mflores@archchicago.org)