



Healing, Learning & Growing Newsletter

From the Office of Assistance Ministry

September, 2010 Volume 1, Issue 5

Archdiocese of Chicago

Autumn: In Spite of Seasonal Changes, Healing Goes On...

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

Ten Things Victims-Survivors Taught Us

- 1) It takes great courage for victims-survivors to come forward with his or her story after years, sometimes decades, of silence and feelings of shame.
- 2) We have learned that to victims-survivors it is so important to finally simply be believed.
- 3) In spite of their own pain and suffering, many victims-survivors are just as concerned that the Church prevents this abuse from happening to more children as they are about themselves and their own needs for healing.
- 4) While each individual's story is different, what is common is the violation of trust; some survivors trust absolutely no one, to this day, while others have been able to work through this pain with the help and support of loved ones.
- 5) We have learned that today there are methods of therapy that work particularly well with and for survivors of childhood sexual abuse and that individuals can be helped even after many years of unsuccessfully trying to simply "forget about it."
- 6) Very many victims-survivors have lived for many years with the belief that they were the "only one" to have been abused by a particular priest.
- 7) The abuse has robbed some victims-survivors of their faith. For some this means loss of their Catholic faith, but for others it means loss of any faith in a God at all.
- 8) We have learned that while some victims-survivors have been unable to succeed in various areas of life (marriage, employment, education, parenting, etc.) as a consequence of the great emotional/psychological harm, others have gone on to lead very healthy and productive lives. We have learned that between those two "ends of a continuum" there is as much variation as there are numbers of victims.
- 9) We have learned that to be privileged to hear an individual victims-survivor's story is a sacred trust, to be received with great care and pastoral concern.
- 10) We have learned that we still have much to learn. *Continued on page 4*

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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What has the Catholic Church done to effectively respond to sexual abuse by church personnel?

In recent years the Catholic Church has done more to protect children than almost any other organization in the United States.



Consider:

- 1) Safe Environment training is taking place in 193 dioceses/eparchies in the country.
- 2) Background checks are conducted on Church personnel who have contact with children. Over 2 million volunteers and employees, 52,000 clerics and 6,205 candidates for ordination have had their backgrounds evaluated.
- 3) All dioceses/eparchies have Codes of Conduct spelling out what is Acceptable Behavior. This serves to let people know what can and cannot be done as well as letting others know what behavior can be expected. It encourages the reporting of suspicious behavior.

The Catholic Church has worked hard to protect children. Much has been done but more needs to be done. Until child sexual abuse is no longer a part of society, the Church will continue its efforts to stop it.

Excerpts taken from an article on the USCCB website.

More about the Church's efforts.....

NATIONAL VICTIM ASSISTANCE COORDINATORS' CONFERENCE

On August 3, Assistance Ministry Coordinators from across the United States came to Chicago for a three-day conference. The purpose of the gathering, which takes place annually, is for those who are entrusted with serving victims-survivors of cleric sexual abuse to learn how to best carry-out this unique and special ministry.

This year, there were ten sessions, each one dealing with a distinct topic such as the effects of trauma, advocacy issues, and the stages of development of survivors' support groups. The presentations were all quite engaging and very well received.

Though the sessions were varied and the participants came from near and far, the one commonality was the sincere commitment of Coordinators from across the country to providing supportive and healing services to victims-survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

Support Groups:

We sponsor support groups several 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, significant others, 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 office staff in dialogue and discussion.

Healing Garden:

This is an initiative sponsored by the Archdiocese through Assistance Ministry with a committee spearheaded by survivors.

For more information on any of these services:

Call or email

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or

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Healing Garden Update.....

In 2002 and again in 2005, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops met to discuss the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church. Those meetings produced the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. This document directly addresses healing and reconciliation with victims-survivors, accountability and prevention of future acts of abuse. The Planning Committee chose two quotes directly from the Charter to be displayed in the Garden. These passages are informative to Garden visitors, and also helpful in healing the broken heart of an abused survivor.

“We feel a particular responsibility for the ‘ministry of reconciliation’ (2 Corinthians 5:18), which God, who reconciled us to himself, has given us. The love of Christ impels us to ask for forgiveness for our own faults but also to appeal to all – to those who have been victimized, to those who have offended, and to all who have felt the wound of this scandal – to be reconciled to God and one another.”

“We know that after such profound hurt, healing and reconciliation are beyond human capacity alone. It is God’s grace and mercy that will lead us forward.”

Personally, I feel the reference to the “ministry of reconciliation” relates to on-going and lasting efforts to reach out to victims/survivors, family members and loved ones. The Healing Garden of the Archdiocese of Chicago is a key component of those on-going efforts to make a difference in the lives of victims/survivors.

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



*Healing,
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**“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.”**



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Upcoming Support Groups

The Office of Assistance Ministry at the Archdiocese of Chicago sponsors professionally led support groups throughout the calendar year. These **free groups** are available to adults who have been sexually abused as minors.

The next support group will begin on Wednesday, Sept. 22 at 6:30 p.m. in downtown Chicago. It will be comprised of both men and women at various stages of healing. The group will meet for twelve weekly sessions.

The purpose of the group is to provide participants with a positive and supportive environment that allows each individual to use his or her own experiences and personal support systems in order to take control of their journey towards healing. The focus will be on how victims-survivors can heal, as opposed to each person's detailed account of the abuse.

If you or someone you know is interested in attending the group, please contact Matt Hunnicutt at 312-534-8267, or Ruth Robinson at 312-534-8256 for registration information.

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10 Things We Have Learned was Published by The National Review Board , May 2010

The National Review Board is an advisory group of 13 laypersons with expertise in such areas as law, education, media, and psychological sciences. The board was established in 2002, when the U.S. bishops adopted the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People to oversee efforts of the Office for Child and Youth Protection. The National Review Board is responsible for a three-year Causes and Context Study being undertaken by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice and due for release in 2011. The study looks at the clergy sexual abuse of minors problem to ascertain what factors led to it and how it can be prevented going forward.

Have a topic you want to know more about or an idea for an article? Ideas, suggestions and feedback are greatly encouraged. Send an email to: emilyoueditor@yahoo.com.

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You are welcomed 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

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



**Office for the
Protection of Children**