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

March, 2010 Volume 1, Issue 3 Archdiocese of Chicago

Lent, A Season of Forgiveness, A Season of Hope

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

Upcoming Support Groups

Announcing a new round of support groups for adults who suffered sexual abuse as minors. We ask for your help in reaching people who can benefit from this opportunity. We invite you to consider attending the new group, or inviting a family member to join the family group. Please feel free to attend, even if you have already participated in past groups.

Men's group

Where: downtown location with easy access to public transportation.

When: 1st Session, Tuesday, March 16th, 6:30-8 PM continuing for 12 weeks

Women's group

Where: Evanston location

When: 1st Session, Monday, March 22nd, 5-6:45 PM continuing for 12 weeks

Family group Educational group for family members of those who have been sexually abused as minors.

Where: Downtown location with easy access to public transportation.

When:1st Session, Saturday, March 13th, 10-11:30 AM continuing for 4 weeks

The Office of Assistance Ministry (OAM) sponsors the groups. The purpose of the groups is to provide participants with a **positive and supportive environment** that allows each individual to use his/her own experiences and personal support systems to take control of their journey toward healing. The focus will be on how one can heal, as opposed to each individual's detailed account of abuse.

The group is open to all individuals regardless of race, religion and/or cultural background. Ideally, we are hoping to have 10 people for each group.

For questions regarding the group structure and/or process, please contact Matt Hunnicutt at 312-534-8267 or **mhunnicutt@archchicago.org**, or Kathy Leggdas 312-534-5268, or **kleggdas@archchicago.org**.

For more information on our office, please visit: http://www.archdiocese-chgo.org/departments/assistance_ministry/assistance_ministry.shtm

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.

Inside this Issue:

Support Groups.....1

Mission Statement.....1

Introducing.....2

Healing Garden.....2

More Healing Garden.3

Forgiveness.....4

Looking Ahead.....4

Contact Info.....4

Healing, Learning & Growing Newsletter

Introducing.....Leah McCluskey

My name is Leah McCluskey and I am the Director of the Office for Child Abuse Investigations and Review here at the Archdiocese of Chicago. In this office we receive all allegations of the sexual abuse of minors by clergy, lay employees, and volunteers of this archdiocese. Along with a representative from the Office of Assistance Ministry, I meet with individuals who come forward to report that they were sexually abused as minors. I also work with other archdiocesan offices to present allegations to the accused. Investigations are conducted upon the receipt of allegations.

I am humbled every day by the strength, resilience, and hope that I see in those who have been affected by the abuse of children in our church. In this office, we are committed to listening to those who come forward to report sexual abuse, and ensuring that these matters are investigated with thoroughness and care so that children and adults are safe in our parishes and schools.

Please feel free to contact me at (312) 534-5205 or email **lmccluskey@archchicago.org** if you or someone you know has questions or concerns to share.

Peace be with all of you.

Healing Garden Update……..

There has been an exciting development regarding the Healing Garden. Francis Cardinal George has issued a letter to all of the Archdiocesan priests regarding the Healing Garden project.

The Cardinal is thoroughly endorsing this project. He is requesting the continued support of the parishes in the quest to assist all victims of abuse in their healing journey. In upcoming weeks, watch your parish bulletin for more details on how everyone can help to make this project a reality.

Groundbreaking will begin sometime this spring.

Support Groups:

We sponsor support groups 3 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 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 any of these services:

Call or email

Kathleen Leggdas at 312/534-5268

kleggdas@archchicago.org

or

Matt Hunnicutt at 312/534-8267

Mhunnicutt@archchicago.org

Healing, Learning & Growing Newsletter

More about the Healing Garden.....

The creation of this Healing Garden symbolizes a deep commitment to the healing and reconciliation process for the entire Archdiocese during a most painful period in our history. Serious harm was done to innocent children and their families. And yet, through the grace of God, we can reconcile ourselves to our past, heal our broken hearts, and learn the importance of protecting children and their families, so we may never again allow these abuses of trust and power.

The garden will feature several themes. There will be an identification marker that this is Church property and as such, is a sacred space, dedicated to the victim/survivors of clergy sexual abuse. This may include an engraved plaque identifying the clergy abuse problem and apologizing for it; possibly taken from an existing public statement issued by the U.S. Conference of Bishops. Another engraved marker at the entrance will be the vision statement developed by the planning committee.

The walkway into the garden will include brick pavers engraved with the names of each parish within the Archdiocese of Chicago. This will create an impressive symbolic representation of the entire Archdiocese, reaching out together for the healing and reconciliation of childhood sexual abuse survivors. It will also serve as a visual reminder acknowledging past abuse, and the continuing efforts to aid the victim/survivors, and family members in the healing process.

The clergy sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church should shine a light on sexual abuse in our society. The Archdiocese of Chicago can and should take a leadership role in raising awareness of this terrible topic. A Healing Garden that is enjoyed, talked about, preached about and incorporated into overall ministry, can provide hope, comfort and inspiration to so many people.

.....from Michael H., Chairman Healing Garden 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."

Healing, Learning & Growing

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Forgiveness, An Important Part of Healing

Forgiveness…….the Restoration of Love

Forgiveness is a God given gift that emanates from a healthy soul. It is born from suffering, contemplation and freedom from anger and hate. Many abused individuals go through stages of intense anger, hopelessness and various degrees of despair. When one achieves the inherent ability to forgive, one recognizes that love is stronger and more lasting.

I do believe the very last stage is the ability to realize the weaknesses in other individuals. That recognition can repair the damages to one's soul and rebuild one's spiritual life. Overcoming hate, anger and intense pain comes about when love is recognized as more powerful. The ability to carry on a meaningful and spiritual life after any abuse is dependent on one's ability to see the power of love.

The definition of forgiveness becomes easy. It is the restoration of God infused love.

Anyone who has been abused needs to let go of the anger, make room for love and forgiveness will ultimately follow. It is not easy to attain but once the seed is planted the ultimate result is a lovely rose. Opening your heart and soul is the key in the process. God is just waiting to help.

Submitted By: Lois Z., Victim/Survivor of abuse.

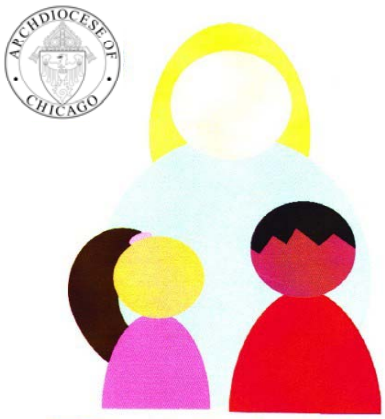
Thank you Lois for sharing you thoughts and feelings with us.

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

Looking Ahead……

Support Groups Spring 2010

Healing Weekend Fall 2010



Office for the Protection of Children and Youth

Have a Blessed Easter Season

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: emailyoureditor@yahoo.com.

Archdiocese of Chicago

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You are welcomed to visit our website:

http://www.archdiocese-chgo.org/ProtectingChildren.htm

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

rurobinson@archchicago.org