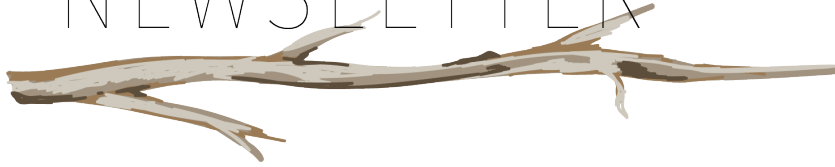


No. 1 April 2022

HOPE & HEALING NEWSLETTER



My dear friend, you are not alone!

I welcome you to the first edition of the Hope and Healing Newsletter. Hope and Healing is a ministry in the Diocese of Albany dedicated to the caring for and accompanying of survivors of sexual abuse and their families and friends, and anyone affected by stories and reports of abuse. Survivors are most welcome to be in touch with Frederick Jones, our Assistance Coordinator, whose contact information appears on this page. All conversations with Frederick are strictly confidential and he can assist anyone who wishes to report incidences of abuse or to seek counsel or assistance in coping with it personally or finding help for others. You may also choose to consult with some of the other resources you will find here and in future newsletters.

Some of the stories you will read about in these pages may be shocking and upsetting, but they are all true and each of them is unique, as are the experiences of all survivors. As the title of this newsletter announces, there is hope for healing for all survivors. First of all, you may be assured, that whatever may have been your experience, you are a beloved child of God. So many survivors suffer in silence and for many years, often blaming themselves, fearing they will not be believed or taken seriously. The good news is that this does not have to be your story. There is hope, and your spirit will be uplifted as you hear more about other survivors who share their stories and how they have found paths to healing.

No doubt you are aware that sexual abuse can occur at any age, not only among children, and in many circumstances that we do not hear about from the media. No one

should have to feel ashamed, cast aside or beyond hope because their abuse suffered was from a priest or a parent or may have occurred long ago. Our friends in the Hope and Healing ministry are dedicated to assist you and your loved ones. Since I became bishop of Albany eight years ago, I have made it one of my main goals to reach out to survivors, to protect those who are vulnerable and to bring those who have abused to full account by every means possible. I wholeheartedly lament and apologize for the systemic failures that for too long placed other priorities above the survivors themselves, whom I pray for every day.

I hope that something you read in this newsletter will light a spark of hope in your heart or for someone you will share it with. The best thing that we can do is accompany one another in our pain and grief, opening our hearts to our merciful Lord who said, “where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in your midst” (Mt. 18:20).

One more word. I realize that for many who may have experienced abuse in a Catholic church or church school setting, the thought of trusting again in members of the same church which made them suffer so much may be a bridge too far. Please take some consolation in knowing that those in our ministry will meet you where you are, wherever you are on your life’s journey. We are people of faith who believe in a loving God, whose own Son suffered for sins he never committed. We make no judgments of anyone’s faith or lack thereof. We just want to be present and to offer a helping hand or some means towards the next step. May you be blessed just for who you are and find hope in the mystery of life yet to unfold.

+Bishop Ed

RESOURCES

Victim/Survivor Support Group Third Monday of the month 6:30 – 8 p.m. Central Online via ZOOM

If you are interested in participating in this virtual/online session, please contact Paula Kaempffer (651-291-4429 or kaempfferp@archspm.org) to obtain the ZOOM invitation. Join with other victim/survivors of sexual abuse who share a similar experience and who want to provide each other with support, affirmation, hope, and empowerment.

Victim/Survivor Support Group for those Sexually Assaulted by Clergy as Adults First Monday of the month 6:30 – 8 p.m. Central Online via ZOOM

If you are interested in participating in this virtual/online session, please contact Paula Kaempffer (651-291-4429 or kaempfferp@archspm.org) to obtain the ZOOM invitation. Join with others who were sexually abused by clergy when they were adults. There are others who share a similar experience and who want to provide support, affirmation, hope, and empowerment. Often there is another layer of healing that is needed for these victim/survivors. This group is about providing a safe, confidential environment for those who want to heal from the trauma of sexual abuse. We can help in our own healing and benefit from the experience of others in accomplishing this.

Support Group for Family, Relatives or Friends of Victims of Clergy Sexual Abuse Second Tuesday of the month 6:30 – 8 p.m. Central Online via ZOOM

Family members/relatives or friends often do not have anyone to talk with about their loved one’s abuse. They wonder what to say or not say. What is helpful? What makes the situation worse? What do the victim/survivors need or want from loved ones? What is the best way to support victim/survivors? These questions and many others are often asked by those who stand by. If you are interested in participating in this virtual/online session, please contact Paula Kaempffer (651-291-4429 or kaempfferp@archspm.org) to obtain the ZOOM invitation.

TRIGGER WARNING: The following contains descriptions of sexual abuse, suicide, suicidal ideation, and self harm.

Hello.

My name is Ringo, I am a male survivor of childhood sexual abuse. There are three things I hope you will gain an understanding of from me sharing my story. First, many people do not understand that men can be victims too. Secondly, I want to share the effects the abuse had on me, and lastly, if you have been through similar experiences that I have, I want you to know that help is out there if you look for it. I had three abusers, but by far the worst was my own mother. Her abuse lasted from age five until I was age fifteen, when she unexpectedly passed away. The abuse included her taking nude photos of me until the age of ten.

When I was in first grade, we had a lesson on “stranger danger” and “bad touch.” This was considered important because a nearby town lost a young girl who has to this day never been found. So it was explained to us that it was a huge lesson. One thing we were told that stuck with me for years was that parents are safe, and will never touch kids in a bad way. This was stated by my teacher and backed up by a police officer known as “Officer Friendly.” This fueled my silence for many, many years.

At age twelve I resorted to self-harm as a coping mechanism, cutting myself with a razor blade on areas that no one would see and being careful to not cut too deep. By age fourteen I had my first suicidal ideations, and made my first plan to kill myself, which at that time I could not go through with.

When my mother passed away, I thought that what she did was over, so it should not affect me. I bottled up my emotions for many years, and for a time stopped cutting myself.

At age 25, I started to remember the abuse, and I started to cut myself again. A close friend brought me to a crisis center, with fresh wounds. I was forced to see a suicide prevention counselor even though I stated I was not suicidal. They also told me that they only really helped women, that it does not happen often to men anyway, and that they did not believe

a mother could be an abuser. They made a referral for me to see a therapist outside their agency, who for a few reasons just did not work out. I then attempted to get help at an office that had a cheap sliding scale, but none of their counselors specialized in sexual trauma, so therapy did more damage than good at that point. I gave up on therapy, and continued to bottle my feelings once again. My silence fueled in part by the new messages given to me by the crisis center.

In 2014, I started to experience flashbacks of the abuse while I was intimate with my wife. My son started asking questions about my mother, and I could not deal with the flood of memories. I started once again to self-harm. I pushed my wife away, and tried to avoid physical intimacy. April 3rd 2016, my wife offered to give me a divorce. I refused, and disclosed to her for the first time about my sexual abuse. We had been together for just a few months shy of ten years at this time. A few weeks later, I posted for the first time online, anonymously, to a website called Reddit about my experience in a forum called “Men Get Raped Too.” With the help of my wife, I researched places that offered counseling for survivors of sexual assault. We learned about SACVAP (Sexual Assault Crime Victims Assistance Program) in Troy. I was nervous to call due to past experience with counseling, and it was not until August 2nd of 2016 that I walked into their office seeking help. Despite the help I was receiving at SACVAP, I made one more attempt on my life. On August 21st of 2016 I decided I was going to jump from the Green Island Bridge. A series of circumstances lead to a total stranger chatting with me for well over an hour to make sure I did not go through with my plan. I have had no suicidal thoughts since 2016, and the last time I caused self-harm with a razor blade was September 19, of 2016.

I have developed a strong support system, which includes my wife, my sister, and one of my Aunts who have all stood by me through my darkest days. It has been a very long journey to get to where I am today, where I can feel comfortable talking about this. I share this in the hopes that in the future fewer will go through similar experiences.

Please reach out to us at hopeandhealing@rcda.org if you have any comments.



CONTACT

If you or someone you know might benefit from receiving this newsletter to their email, reach out to us at hopeandhealing@rcda.org.

If you have any comments or questions about information in this newsletter please send them to hopeandhealing@rcda.org.

To report Clergy abuse or seek support please contact:

Frederick Jones, LMHC
Diocesan Assistance Coordinator
Assistance.coordinator@rcda.org
518.453.6646

Reporting your abuse committed by Clergy to the Assistance Coordinator allows you to tell your story in a supportive environment. The Assistance Coordinator will help you access therapeutic and/or spiritual counseling needed to help you move toward healing. As a matter of policy, the Assistance Coordinator will alert the appropriate law enforcement agency of your report. The Assistance Coordinator is your primary point of contact with the diocese and stays in contact with you through the whole process.