



# Listening & Learning: Stories of Survivors

## Hope and Healing in the Diocese of Albany

### A Conversation with Linda Sano

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Linda Sano's perspective was new for the Hope and Healing Committee. She is the sister of a survivor, a big sister. She is the oldest of four and was a mother figure to her siblings. It wasn't until she was an adult, when her one brother was in his 30's, that she found out he was abused by a priest of the Diocese of Albany when he was a freshman in high school. She said this priest used to take boys to the "Y" to swim. She remembers her brother saying at times, "maybe I won't go," but she encouraged him to go and now that she knows what happened, she carries guilt. Sharing that with our committee, brought her to tears. Tears that showed a great deal of pain, but possibly also healing. She doesn't have to suffer in silence anymore.

She said her brother struggled with shame for years. He turned to drugs as a coping mechanism and was diagnosed with AIDS and his challenges continued. With the help of Narcotics Anonymous he eventually got clean and sober. Then, a cousin his age had a horrible death. That was a painful time for their family and her brother started using again. He died a short time later. That was 29 years ago.

Her brother's abuser recently died. According to Linda, seeing that obituary in the paper was, for her, the straw that broke the camel's back. She said it crushed her emotionally. That's when she heard about the first Hope and Healing Mass that the Diocese offered. It was at Saint Gabriel's Church in Rotterdam. She decided to go, then changed her mind, and says the night before the Mass, it felt like the Holy Spirit was working through her, so she ended up going.

She told the Hope and Healing Committee, very honestly, that she did not feel like she got a lot out of the Mass itself. But after the Mass, she talked with one of the mental health professionals and was grateful to have someone to talk to. She described it as very validating and very affirming and continues to meet with him today. She also met later with Bishop Edward Scharfenberger and Assistance Coordinator for the diocese at the time, Frederick Jones. She says it has been healing for her to be able to talk about her pain, and to tell people about her brother, a man she describes as gentle and loving.

When Frederick Jones later emailed to ask if she would share her story with the Hope and Healing committee, she agreed. She wants people to know that abuse does not just impact the victim. Everyone who knows and loves that person is affected.



When asked why she decided to share her story, Linda said her sharing started when she was asked years ago to be an RCIA sponsor at her church. RCIA is the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, a program designed to help people become Catholic. Linda was a sponsor, and the woman she sponsored burst into tears as Linda shared with her about her brother. She connected with Linda's story because she too had a painful experience and had been suffering in silence. Hearing Linda's story, she knew she was not alone. Linda says things like that keep happening. She feels that the Holy Spirit acts in mysterious ways and she has a very special relationship with the Spirit who gives her strength and courage.

Like so many other victims that have shared their stories with us, Linda still believes in God, still appreciates that connection. Unlike some others, Linda is still practicing her Catholic faith. When asked why, she said she doesn't really know. She does belong to a group of five women, one of whom is her spiritual mentor, who connect through prayer and call themselves prayer warriors. That helps.

Linda also discussed the idea of forgiveness, admitting that she struggles with that. She said many wonderful friends have told her if she can forgive it will be better for her, but she is not in that place yet. Spiritually, she is not ready.

When asked what she feels the Catholic Church can and should do to help the healing, she said validate the survivors' and their families' stories. Basically, believe them. She also feels it is important, as other survivors have said, for the church to apologize that the abuse occurred. Apologize to the survivors, and apologize to their families, to their loved ones and do it often. It needs to be heard.

We thank Linda for her willingness to share her story and her pain. We thank her for the courage to come forward and we pray that by the grace of God, more will start walking with survivors on the road to healing.