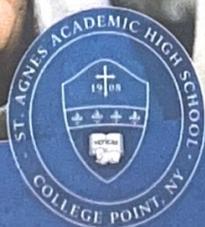


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# New Support Group For Male Survivors of Clergy Sex Abuse

The Diocese of Brooklyn's Office for Victims' Assistance is beginning a support group for men who were sexually abused by a member of the clergy.

It will be coordinated by Jasmine Salazar who heads the office. She is currently in the recruitment stage and is hoping to garner enough interest to begin the sessions.

### An Empowering Step

She said taking that first step for many men is difficult, but one that often becomes a life-changing experience. "Once they hear other members talk, it's empowering and it becomes easier. Someone may share their story and say, 'That's when I entered the darkness.' Then someone else will say, 'That's exactly how I feel.'"

People who join the support group set the rules and boundaries at the first meeting. "There is definitely a bond that forms and they begin looking forward to the sessions," she explains about several support groups already in existence. "In my experience, the support someone receives from another survivor does not compare to the support they get from someone who is not a survivor."

"One of the things that impedes the healing process is when someone feels alone. It's something they don't want to tell many people because they feel like there is shame attached to it. The ability to free themselves from that isolation helps so many survivors."

Salazar's position of Victims Assistance Coordinator was created after the church's history of clergy members sexually abusing minors made headlines in 2002. When the news broke, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops met on how to handle the crisis. The bishops passed The Charter for the Protection of Young People which includes guidelines for reporting crimes, preventing future abuse and reaching out to victims.

They also wanted to find the scope and depth of the abuse. They commissioned an independent survey conducted by John Jay College of Criminal Justice. The survey gathered information from church records across the country between 1950 and 2002. It concluded that there were credible allegations of abuse against 4,127 priests that involved people under the age of 18, which repre-

sents 4 percent of all priests serving during that time period. The results made it apparent that there was an urgent need to reach out to these victims, many of whom, had been keeping their abuse a secret.

Salazar does much more than coordinate support groups. She provides victims with information on how to report sexual abuse to authorities, she offers her own support, and she provides an array of resources, with the intention of placing victims on a path to healing. It's why she refers to the people she comes in contact with as survivors, not victims.

"To help in any way possible, to be able to offer someone relief, strengthens my faith," she said. "It makes me feel like I am an active participant in the Catholic Church. I have been doing social work for many years and I have always been amazed by people's capacity to heal. God's power is amazing."

### Acknowledgment

Another important step in the healing process is accountability. Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio invites survivors to meet with him. In a recent interview with NET-TV, the bishop said, "In Brooklyn, I have met with over 50 victims during the last 14 years. It is a heart-wrenching experience because you recognize the depth of the hurt that these people have experienced."

And Salazar attends each of these meetings.

"The bishop uses the opportunity to offer an apology on behalf of the Church and to acknowledge what the survivor went through. That is a very powerful moment. Often there are tears. Often there is almost a sigh of relief from the survivor," she said.

Salazar hopes the new group for men will bring the same success as recent sessions, which include a monthly prayer group, a spousal support group, and a parenting group for survivors. She has received positive feedback from many of the participants who also built strong friendships with fellow survivors.

"I start with where you are in your journey and go from there. If you want to reach out to me once and go, that's fine," Salazar said. "It brings to mind a running joke I had with a survivor. He would always see me and say, 'Hi Jasmine, I'm

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To report an incident of sexual abuse by a member of the clergy, call the confidential diocesan hotline: 1-888-634-4499.

## Fall River Diocese, Town Create Wildlife Sanctuary

WESTPORT, Mass. (CNS) — Richmond Pond in Westport is just a stone's throw away from the mouth of Buzzards Bay where it meets Rhode Island Sound, both leading to the Atlantic Ocean.

The beach area on the pond's south side was the spot where youngsters attending St. Vincent's Camp, a few miles to the north, would enjoy its pristine waters and sand.

With the closing of St. Vincent's Camp, the 24-acre beach site was not being used, except by local birds, fish and wildlife, specifically the threatened ploving piper.

In the spirit of Pope Francis' encyclical "Laudato Si'," Fall River Bishop Edgar M. da Cunha recently finalized the sale of the property to the Westport Land Conservation Trust, so that the organization can create the Richmond Pond Wildlife Sanctuary. The pond is one of only two coastal salt ponds in Westport.

### Contribution to Conservation

"This land has such a unique environment," Bishop da Cunha told *The Anchor*, newspaper of the Diocese of Fall River. "We felt it would be a good use for the property. I see it as our contribution to conserving various species of nature for years to come."

The diocese had been looking for a good way to use the land when approached by Westport Land Conservation Trust with its proposal to use the site strictly for conservation purposes. "It was a win-win situation," the bishop added, "a no-brainer. The neighbors, the town and the wildlife benefit from this."

Bishop da Cunha, the Westport trust's president, Trip Milliken, and others met at attorney Dorothy Tongue's office in Westport to sign the papers transferring ownership.

"Richmond Pond Wildlife Sanctuary will be managed to protect this ecologically significant coastal wildlife habitat," said a joint statement released by Westport Land Conservation Trust and the Diocese of Fall River. "(It) is a haven for the globally threatened and endangered piping plover. A variety of significant shorebirds are seasonal residents of the property including common terns, semipalmated sandpipers, and American oystercatchers.

"The sanctuary will limit public access to walking, beachcombing, bird-watching, nature observation and leashed dog walking with an eye on protecting the fragile wildlife habitat," the statement continued. "The property can be entered on by foot but parking is unavailable."

### Fruitful for Future Generations

Bishop da Cunha told *The Anchor*, "It is a good feeling to know that generations from now will be able to enjoy the land, the wildlife, the birds and the sea life there and that the diocese had a part in that."

"It shows a sign of our own commitment to protecting God's creation, as Pope Francis has asked us all to do."

The release also stated that Westport Land Conservation Trust also has secured the right to purchase the camp. The property is 82 acres with wooded uplands and has just over 10 acres with buildings that constitute the camp core.

## New Support Group For Male Survivors of Clergy Sex Abuse

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going to call you.' I would look at him and say, 'All right.'

"Well, it took him three years to make that call and now I hear from him a couple of times a week. I will always follow your pace," she said.

Equally as important as reaching out to victims is preventing future abuse. The Safe Environment Office at the diocese headed by Maryellen Quinn, ensures that anyone associated with the church goes

through a background check, agrees to the church's code of conduct, and completes a training course, called VIRTUS. Since 2003, the Diocese of Brooklyn has trained more than 70,000 people. Each year it trains approximately 50,000 students to teach them about sexual abuse.

If you are a male survivor of sexual abuse who is interested in joining the new support group for men, contact Jasmine Salazar by phone at 718-623-5236, or email [vacministry@diobrook.org](mailto:vacministry@diobrook.org) by Monday, Jan. 9.

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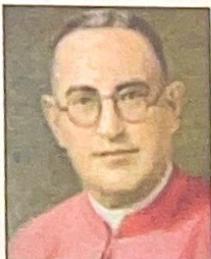
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*Msgr. Quinn was born on January 15, 1888, the day of the canonization of St. Peter Claver. His cause for canonization was recently endorsed by the U.S. Roman Catholic Bishops.*