



Guest Columnist

Prayers for Continued Hope and Healing

▲ by Jasmine Salazar

LAST YEAR THE Diocese of Brooklyn had its first Mass of Hope and Healing, which came at the request of a group of survivors of sexual abuse committed by clergy. This group of survivors planned every part of this Mass from selecting the readings, the music and other details of the evening. Experiencing this Mass will forever be etched in my memory.

When I took on the role of the diocesan victim assistance coordinator, I was aware that this would be a ministry that would challenge my faith, as well as my professional training as a licensed social worker. But knowing this intellectually and actually experiencing it are two different things.

Taking a Chance

I am well aware that when I meet with survivors, and they share their stories, they are taking a chance once again to "trust" someone. This trust does not come easy at all for someone who has experienced betrayal on so many levels. Experiencing their desire to continue to seek healing not only through therapy, but at times also through their faith, has been a profound experience.

Hearing the pain, and all the "fight" it takes to move ahead day by day, has impacted my faith in innumerable ways. Although I am always angered at the fact that innocence was betrayed, and promises to God were gravely violated, God has blessed me with the honor to accompany those who fight to heal, who continue their search for hope and wholeness and

witness the beginning of the healing.

In planning for the Mass for Hope and Healing, the significance of having clergy involved was stated in various ways by the group: "We would like to invite the clergy of Brooklyn. We know there are still good priests. We want to join in prayer with them because they too have been affected. It would be meaningful to have them standing in solidarity with us as we seek healing."

Manifestation of Blessings

Diocesan priests responded to this invitation, showing up in numbers. As they concelerated on the night of the healing Mass with Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio, survivors and their loved ones, alongside our priests and deacons, prayed for healing and hope for all who have been impacted by childhood sexual abuse. It was a manifestation of blessings that was experienced as we sang in one voice: "Do not be afraid, I am with you. I have called you each by name. Come and follow me, I will bring you home; I love you and you are mine."

Through all the hurt, suffering, anger and pain, the presence of God and the hope and healing that He can only give, was palpable amongst us all.

This group of survivors was not a one task-oriented group, for as the healing Mass ended, the next question was, "What will we do next?"

And the ideas were there: a yearly Mass, support groups for survivors and their loved ones, meeting other survivors, discussion groups on the topic of abuse committed by clergy,

and informing others of resources available to help survivors. It's obvious that since this group had so many ideas and determination to see them brought to fruition, they naturally evolved into the Survivors Advisory Committee of our diocese.

In addition, what an opportune time to have a group actively working on voicing the needs of and bringing more resources to survivors, especially when a movie like "Spotlight" has been released and gained so much attention.

Continuing the Discussion

Childhood sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, which is hard to discuss, has been brought to the forefront once again. This, of course, is positive since wounds do remain, and just as with abuse that is not spoken of, the trauma is compounded and the unattended wound will fester. "Spotlight" has given us a vehicle to continue the discussion in areas where it perhaps may have not been raised.

For those who have seen the movie, it may have triggered a lot of emotions for individuals that experienced the abuse firsthand, as well as for the lay faithful who have many feelings about what happened in their church and ask what is happening today. With this in mind, the diocese will be offering discussion nights throughout Brooklyn and Queens for those interested in talking about the film, their concerns and feelings, as well as to gain firsthand information on "what is happening now."

As we prepare to celebrate our second Mass of Hope and Healing on April 21, at 7 p.m. at Our Lady Queen of Martyrs Church, Forest Hills (see Page 26), I invite all those who have been impacted by childhood sexual abuse to join us as we gather to pray for continued hope and healing, as well as inspiration from the Holy Spirit in how best we can serve those who are suffering and are in need of healing.

Jasmine Salazar, LMSW, serves as the victim assistance coordinator for the Diocese of Brooklyn.

Seattle Archdiocese Settles Clergy Abuse Cases for \$9.1 Million

SEATTLE (CNS) — Eight women who were sexually abused as children by a former priest will receive \$9.1 million in a legal settlement announced by the Archdiocese of Seattle.

The victims were abused by Michael Cody from 1968 to 1974 while he worked at four parishes in Whatcom and Skagit counties.

Seattle Archbishop J. Peter Sartain said in a statement March 23 that he regretted the abuse the women experienced and that he hoped the settlement and the counseling provided by the archdiocese "will bring healing and give them a measure of closure so they can move forward."

Archbishop Sartain also said he had invited the women to meeting him "so I can offer them my personal apology. Our first priority is the protection of children and healing for past victims," Archbishop Sartain said.

"It is my firm commitment to build on the good efforts of the past and continue to take steps that will truly help victims of clergy sexual abuse to heal. The \$9 million settlement demonstrates our ongoing commitment to acknowledge and address the devastating impact of clergy sexual abuse and to encourage victims to come forward," the archbishop added.

Rand Jack, a lawyer for the victims said in a statement he hopes the resolution will lead to healing for the women. "I feel privileged to have helped represent these women and to have experienced their courage and determination. They have stood up for themselves and other victims of sexual abuse," Jack said.

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