

# Annual Child Protection Report

## Protecting Innocents

The victimization of children is a very real and present danger in our culture. Glance through any newspaper, watch the nightly news broadcasts or tune in to an evening news magazine show and you are likely to confront frightening stories of adult predators, anguished communities and shattered young lives. Most shocking in these revelations is that the predator is often one trusted by the family and community: a teacher, coach or even a priest. Scattered in the wake of these events are damaged lives, destroyed trust and families suspicious of anyone who interacts with children. From everything we have discovered in the last decade concerning this problem of child sexual abuse, one might come to doubt the possibility of maintaining safe and nurturing communities where caring adults and children may interact and grow together.

The Diocese of Arlington is committed to maintaining environments within our parishes and schools where children can be safe to grow in grace and wisdom. Through policies established by Arlington Bishop John R. Keating in 1991 and strengthened by Bishop Paul S. Loverde, it is hoped that child sexual abuse can be prevented in any youth activity within the diocese. The Policy for the Protection of Children and Young People and the Prevention of Sexual Misconduct is a comprehensive and systematic program designed to protect children. The programs that are required throughout the diocese are fully in accord with the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The child protection policies and programs of the diocese were established to protect children by following five principles.

## Know the Warning Signs

While child predators can come from any socioeconomic class or educational level, they have one thing in common. The common factor is a specific group of behaviors known as "grooming." Grooming behaviors are behaviors that attempt to form a bond of dependence between the perpetrator and the victim. The purpose of these behaviors is to make the child hesitant to reveal the abuse.

— "Physical grooming" consists of behaviors that desensitize the child to the touch of the perpetrator and confuse the child about boundary violations. "Physical grooming" often includes tickling and wrestling.

— "Emotional grooming" includes behaviors that seek to make the child dependent on the abuser. "Emotional grooming" might include gift giving or allowing the child to participate in activities that parents would not allow, such as the sharing of alcohol or drugs or exposure to pornography.

— "Community grooming" consists of behaviors that seek to gain trust from the community that surrounds the child. The perpetrator seeks to become trusted by the community and depended upon to assist in child activities. This allows the perpetrator greater access to children. If the abuse should later come to light, "community grooming" lends to deniability as members of the community come to the defense of the abuser.

To recognize these grooming behaviors and to take immediate and prudent actions when they are recognized requires that all persons who work with children be trained to recognize the dynamics of grooming behaviors. All employees of the diocese, parishes and schools, and all volunteers who work with children receive child safety training through the "Protecting God's Children" program. This four-hour training seminar is considered one of the most effective training

programs in the country and is used in over 60 dioceses. It also includes continuing training for professionals and annual refresher training for all volunteers who work with children. In the current reporting period, over 4,500 adult employees and volunteers received "Protecting God's Children" training. Over 15,000 employees and volunteers have received "Protecting God's Children" training in the diocese since its introduction, and now serve as watchful sentinels ensuring that children's interactions with adults are appropriate and safe.

## Control Access

No one has a "right" to volunteer to work with children. In fact, there are some people who must be kept away from children. To maintain the safety of children, each and every person who interacts with them must be thoroughly vetted and approved. Every employee and all volunteers working with children must complete criminal background checks. These checks include state and national criminal record searches and a search of the Central Registry of the Virginia Department of Social Services. In the current reporting period, over 4,200 employees and volunteers underwent background checks; over 15,000 diocesan employees and volunteers of the diocese have completed these checks since August 2004.

A formal application process for anyone working with children is vital. As a part of this formal application process, references are checked to ensure that past behaviors are not overlooked. A formal interview is also required so that the Church's commitment to the safety of children can be clearly expressed and the programs in place to protect children can be explained.

## Monitor Programs

All programs sponsored by the Church must be reviewed and approved by principals and pastors. This review process ensures that those adults involved have completed all training and background checks and are approved to interact with children. This process also helps ensure that sufficient adult supervision is being used to safeguard children.

Monitoring also involves the direct supervisor interacting with all programs. This includes visiting classes, observing programs to ensure that all policies are being followed, and securing or monitoring areas where children could be isolated.

## Being Aware

Studies have indicated that over 90 percent of children who have been sexually abused do not reveal that abuse has occurred. Recovery from sexual abuse is largely influenced by the type of abuse and the length of time over which the abuse occurred. It is acutely important that young people advise their parent or another safe adult as soon as they become uncomfortable or frightened. Being aware of what is going on in young people's lives, while primarily the role of parents, is also a role shared by other trusted adults.

Preventing abuse is the role of adults, and child programs that might shift the burden of responsibility to children should be avoided. However, programs that encourage children to confide in parents and other trusted adults can be effective in revealing abuse or potentially abusive situations, and can limit contact with predators. Research indicates that children who had been abused who had been previously trained in safety programs reported their abuse at four times the rate of children who had not received training.

The Diocese of Arlington provides such training in "Formation in Christian Chastity," which is a part of all religious education programs and Catholic schools' curricula. Since the program was begun in 2005, over 45,000 children have received training. This training can be reviewed at [www.arlingtondiocese.org/offices/protect/](http://www.arlingtondiocese.org/offices/protect/).

## Communicating Concerns

Once inappropriate behaviors have been noted in the actions of some adults, this issue must be directly addressed. Employees and volunteers are trained to address their concerns to the individuals involved in interactions with children that seem to be inappropri-

ate. They are guided in these discussions by the Code of Conduct, which is required to be received and signed by all persons within the diocese who interact with children. These are clear guidelines of what are considered appropriate and inappropriate behaviors when interacting with children. They are also trained to address these behaviors with supervisors if such behaviors continue.

If child abuse is suspected, employees and all volunteers will report such suspicions to Child Protective Services for the appropriate city or county. All personnel of the diocese are mandatory reporters under diocesan policy and have an obligation to report suspicions of child abuse. Once suspicions are reported to civil authorities, personnel also report to Church officials to ensure immediate actions are taken to maintain the safety of the children under our care.

These five principles — knowing the warning signs, controlling access, monitoring programs, being aware and communicating our concerns — constitute a comprehensive approach to keeping children safe from any person who might seek to harm them. Maintaining these programs and improving them is the goal of the Office of Child Protection and Safety for the Diocese of Arlington. With the help of the thousands of volunteers and employees of the diocese who work with young people, we can prevent this danger in the lives of our children.

## Report of the Diocesan Victim Assistance Coordinator

### Outreach to Victims

In June 2004, Bishop Loverde appointed Pat Mudd, A.C.S.W., as the victim assistance coordinator for the diocese. This appointment is in compliance with the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, which directs each diocese to have a person to coordinate outreach to victims, including the pastoral care of anyone who reports having been sexually abused as a minor by a priest or diocesan employee.

According to Article 1 of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People:

"Dioceses/eparchies are to reach out to victims/survivors and their families and demonstrate a sincere commitment to their spiritual and emotional well-being. The first obligation of the Church with regard to victims is for healing and reconciliation. Each diocese/eparchy is to continue its outreach to every person who has been the victim of sexual abuse as a minor by anyone in Church service, whether the abuse was recent or occurred many years in the past. This outreach will include provision of counseling, spiritual assistance, support groups and other social services agreed upon by the victim and the diocese."

In order to fulfill this mandate, the victim assistance coordinator has developed a list of therapists with experience in treatment of sexual abuse. These include clinicians from Catholic Charities as well as in private practice. They work in various parts of the diocese and speak a number of different languages. In addition, a group of diocesan priests and religious have received some specialized training and are available to help victims/survivors with spiritual assistance. These resources are available to assist those abused by clergy, religious or lay employees and volunteers of the Church, as well as those abused by family members, acquaintances or in other circumstances.

During the reporting period from Oct. 12, 2005, through Oct. 13, 2006, five victim/survivors, previously unknown to the diocese, came forward to make allegations of sexual abuse or misconduct against three priests of the diocese. In each case, the abuse or misconduct was alleged to have occurred in the 1960s or 1970s. Two of the five allegations predated the founding of the diocese in 1974.

Two of the five allegations were against a deceased priest previously identified by other victims/survivors. Two of the five allegations were against a priest who was serving in a parish; that priest has been placed on administrative leave pending completion of an inves-

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## To Report an Allegation

To report an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor, people are directed to:

1. Immediately call Child Protection Services (CPS) and/or their local police authorities and;
2. If the abuse concerns any member of the clergy, diocesan employee or volunteer, then call the victim assistance coordinator at 703/841-2530.

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tigation of the allegations. The remaining allegation was against a retired priest who is not permitted to serve in any ministry.

In addition, five victims/survivors who currently reside in the diocese reported allegations of abuse by diocesan priests in other dioceses in the United States. Four victims/survivors reported allegations of abuse by religious order priests in other dioceses. In keeping with diocesan policy, the victim assistance coordinator offered all of the above victims the opportunity to report their allegations to victim assistance coordinators in their respective dioceses.

The diocesan victim assistance outreach is also open to victims/survivors of abuse by family members, acquaintances, in inappropriate adult relationships, or other circumstances. During this past year, 41 victims/survivors requested assistance in these areas.

The diocese encourages victims of abuse to report their abuse to appropriate civil authorities. The victim assistance coordinator is required by diocesan policy, as well as the fact that she is a mandated reporter, to report incidents of child sexual abuse. The diocese also facilitates the reporting of allegations of clergy sexual abuse to the diocese where the priest is incardinated.

The diocese has offered to assist any victims/survivors of abuse with help by referrals, counseling, as well as spiritual assistance. In addition, victims/survivors are encouraged to attend the diocesan-sponsored victim support group, Masses, prayer services and evenings of reflection at Dominican Retreat House for their support and encouragement. Bishop Loverde, Father Mark Mealey, O.S.F.S., V.G., and Mudd, have offered to meet with victims to be of assistance and support to them.

In addition to the requests for services received by the victim assistance coordinator during the past year, Mudd continues to offer assistance to victims/survivors who in previous years had reported allegations of abuse. In order to access previous child protection reports go to [www.arlingtondiocese.org](http://www.arlingtondiocese.org).

## Masses to Pray for Healing For Victims/Survivors of Abuse

In June 2004, Bishop Loverde first called the diocesan community together to pray for healing for victims/survivors of sexual abuse. Since that time, 17 such Masses have been celebrated — and attended by over 1,100 people — throughout the diocese, from Arlington and Winchester to Fredericksburg and the Northern Neck of Virginia. Bishop Loverde has been the principal celebrant at 12 of the Masses; deans and other priests of the diocese have offered the remaining Masses. During the reporting period identified above, six Masses to pray for the healing of victims of sexual abuse were celebrated at the following parishes: St. Frances de Sales in Purcellville on Oct. 13, 2005; Our Lady of Good Counsel, Vienna, on Nov. 7, 2005; Church of the Nativity, Burke, on Feb. 7, 2006; St. Luke, McLean, on April 26, 2006; Holy Family, Dale City, on June 12, 2006; and St. John the Apostle, Leesburg, on Oct. 12, 2006.

As part of the diocesan outreach to victims/survivors of sexual abuse, the victim assistance coordinator has presented a brief overview of the services available through her office at the end of each of these Masses. The Masses have been followed by a reception that enables victims/survivors to speak with Bishop Loverde; Father Mealey and Father Terry Specht, director of the Office of Child Protection and Safety; and Mudd.

## Prayer Services

In addition to the Masses to Pray for Healing for Victims/Survivors of Abuse, the diocese has also had seven prayer services for this intention since April 2005. As at the Masses, the diocesan victim assistance coordinator shared information on the work of this ministry and a reception follows. The prayer services included an opportunity for victim/survivors to offer testimony about their journey toward healing and reconciliation. Over 100 have attended these prayer services to pray for healing for victims/survivors.

During the last reporting year, there were four

prayer services held in the following churches: St. Ann Church, Arlington, Jan. 7, 2006; Christ the Redeemer, Sterling, March 11, 2006; St. William of York, Stafford, May 20, 2006; and St. Thomas à Becket, Reston, Sept. 30, 2006.

## Support Groups for Victims/Survivors of Sexual Abuse

In the fall of 2006, the diocese began a support group for victims/survivors of sexual abuse. Mudd facilitates the group with another counselor. The group meets at Our Lady of Good Counsel, Vienna, and St. Ann Church, Arlington. There will also be two meetings at Dominican Retreat House in McLean. During this reporting period, the support group met in September and October 2006 with five people in attendance at each meeting. Victims/Survivors of Sexual Abuse are invited to join this monthly support group.

Catholic Charities Family Services staff in Arlington and Fredericksburg have offered to conduct a 10-week therapeutic support group if there is sufficient interest from six people to attend.

Bishop Loverde, Father Mealey, vicar general, Father Specht, director of the Office of Child Protection, and Mudd will attend the support group meetings on March 5 and May 7. Victims/survivors are invited to attend a light meal, discussion and a prayer service. For reservations call Mudd at 703/841-2530.

## Spring 2007

The schedule of upcoming services for the victim assistance ministry is published at right. All members of the diocesan community are invited to pray for healing for victims/survivors of abuse at the upcoming Masses and Prayer Services. In addition, victims/survivors are encouraged to attend these events as well as the upcoming support group meetings.

If you are a survivor of sexual abuse and would like to report your abuse or seek the services of the diocesan victim assistance coordinator, please call her at 703/841-2530.

## Masses and Prayer Services To Pray for Healing for Victims/Survivors of Sexual Abuse

**Monday, March 26, 7:30 p.m. St. Charles Borromeo**, 3304 N. Washington Blvd., Arlington. Mass — Bishop Loverde to preside. Reception to follow.

**Saturday, April 14, 10 a.m. Good Shepherd**, 8710 Mt. Vernon Hwy., Alexandria. Prayer Service — Rev. Mark Mealey, O.S.F.S., to preside. Victim Testimony. Reception to follow.

**Monday, June 11, 7:30 p.m. Our Lady of Angels**, 13752 Mary's Way, Woodbridge. Bilingual English/Spanish Mass — Bishop Loverde to preside. Reception to follow.

## Monthly Support Group For Survivors of Sexual Abuse

**Monday, March 5, 6 p.m. Dominican Retreat House**, 7103 Old Dominion Dr., McLean. Bishop Loverde to attend. Reservation required.

**Monday, April 2, 7:30 p.m. St. Ann Church, Lower Level**, 5300 10th St., Arlington.

**Monday, May 7, 6 p.m. Our Lady of Good Counsel, De Sales Hall**, 8601 Wolftrap Rd., Vienna. Bishop Loverde to attend. Reservation required.

**Monday, June 4, 7:30 p.m. De Sales Hall, Lower Level, Our Lady of Good Counsel**, 8601 Wolftrap Rd., Vienna.

On March 5 and May 7, reservations will be required four days prior to the support group meeting as a light meal will be served. Please note Bishop Loverde will attend these support group meetings. The time is 6 to 9 p.m.

Catholic Charities will offer a 10-week psychotherapy group for survivors of childhood sexual abuse in Arlington and Fredericksburg. Registration required.

For information call Pat Mudd, A.C.S.W., victim assistance coordinator, at 703/841-2530.

## What Was I Thinking Of?

By **PATRICIA MUDD**  
Special to the **HERALD**

It was May 2004. I had just returned from a very restful vacation at the Outer Banks of North Carolina and was working my way through the many e-mails that accumulate when you are away for a week. I was in my 30th year of working for Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Arlington when I received a summons from my boss, Steve Luteran, to come and chat with him. He wanted to talk about a conversation that he had with Arlington Bishop Paul S. Loverde and Father Mark Mealey, O.S.F.S., about assistance needed in the Office of Child Protection. After a number of additional discussions with Steve, the bishop and Father Mealey, I agreed to accept the position of victim assistance coordinator and continue my work as associate director of Social Services for Catholic Charities. What was I thinking of? Some days I still ask myself that question. The following reflection may shed some light on the answer.

I grew up in Arlington in a family that believed in helping the poor and needy. My college years with the Daughters of Charity in Emmitsburg and my social work training led me to Catholic Charities. They seemed to hear the cry of the poor. They listened to the plight of a woman in a crisis pregnancy considering an abortion. They had foster homes for special needs children whose parents could not care for them. A look at the history of Catholic Charities in our diocese shows a commitment to marginalized and forgotten people. They taught me to listen and try to respond to those people who were unheard in our community. My years in Children's Services taught me to see children of God who needed counseling, prayers, support, encouragement and spiritual assistance.

When tapped on the shoulder to work with victims/survivors of abuse, I was honored but a little frightened. This was a new program with the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People for guidance. Coming from Catholic Charities, I was used to volumes of standards for everything we did. Victim assistance was a new ministry in the Church and we had to chart our course as we went along. I have worked with victims of sexual abuse before, but the last two and a half years have taught me to listen to survivors and learn from them of their needs. I have met many wonderful people who struggle daily to heal from the horrors of abuse. They have shared their journey and in the process taught me many things. After listening, I have tried to develop an assistance ministry that meets their needs and helps them to heal from the tragedy of abuse. We have prayed together for their healing. I have gained much from them and survivors tell me they value our time together. My work with survivors of child sexual abuse has put me in touch with people who are wounded and yet precious in the eyes of God. Their struggles to heal and to find God again are absolutely amazing.

Since you may not have had the opportunity to talk with a survivor of sexual abuse, I want to share some of my experiences. The search for a spiritual dimension in their lives is ever persistent. I have met survivors who were raised in good Catholic families, yearning for God and the Catholic community of their youth for themselves and to share with their children. Victims have asked me to go with them to talk to a priest when they were afraid to go alone. Survivors have told me that their conversations with good priests enabled them to return to Mass and the sacraments.

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# Annual Report of the Catholic Diocese of Arlington's Child Protection Advisory Board

This is our third annual report. The Catholic Diocese of Arlington's Child Protection Advisory Board was formed at the direction of Arlington Bishop Paul S. Loverde in late summer of 2003 as a unique effort to assist the diocese in organizing a proper approach to the protection of children in the Arlington Diocese. Specifically, our board serves in an advisory role to the diocesan bishop in the formulation of child sexual abuse policies and procedures. The diocesan effort was directed pursuant to the Catholic Diocese of Arlington Policy on the Protection of Children/Young People and Prevention of Sexual Misconduct and/or Child Abuse established in 1991; and in conformity with the word and spirit of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People and The Essential Norms for Diocesan/Eparchial Policies Dealing With Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests or Deacons, approved by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops at its November 2002 general meeting. The formation of the Advisory Board is not required by the Charter. It is a unique effort by Bishop Loverde to bring the voice, vision and experience of qualified, independent, professional members of the Catholic community to support the development of proper background checks and awareness training programs designed to protect children from abuse, sexual exploitation and neglect.

The function of the Advisory Board is to look at how the diocese responds to an allegation and what services are offered to victims and survivors, as well as clergy who are guilty of sexual abuse. We also reviewed the diocesan sexual misconduct policy and assisted the diocese in creating the "safe environment" for children that the Charter envisioned. In addition, the Advisory Board promotes healing for victims and survivors and recommends speakers and educational programs for employees and volunteers of the diocese. In order to accomplish this, the Advisory Board reviewed existing programs and established new programs specifically for this purpose.

Since its conception, it has been the goal of this Advisory Board that the child protection program and programs for victims and survivors in the Diocese of Arlington are among the most effective in our national Catholic community. The second audit report published in spring 2005 found the Diocese of Arlington is in full compliance with all aspects of the Charter. The third audit, published early in 2006, affirmatively demonstrated an elevated level of attention to internal controls issues and included establishing procedures for validating the existing programs. We are very encouraged by the 2006 audit results and urge Bishop Loverde and other diocesan leaders to continue to strive toward more transparent accountability. It is the Advisory Board's belief that we now serve as a model diocese in the actual implementation of the Charter.

The Arlington Diocese has not been and will not be immune to bad actors acting badly within our diocesan family. However, efforts by the diocese and parish leadership demonstrate a robust, proactive effort to prevent the abuse of our most precious assets — our children.

The key elements in supporting the Charter are background checks to help control access to children, training to increase awareness and a code of conduct. The code of conduct is an important tool allowing everyone involved in youth programs to clearly distinguish inappropriate behavior. It allows all of us to work off the same page with the same understanding of what is expected, what is accepted and, most importantly, what will cause concern. It is a clear, concise guide for those who work with children. The code of conduct, training and background checks also make it difficult for those who intend to harm children to continue behaviors that are integral to abuse.

The Advisory Board has encouraged an open and supportive outreach to victims/survivors of sexual abuse and has monitored the diocese's victim assistance efforts by receiving periodic reports from the victim assistance coordinator. During the period of Oct.



12, 2005, through Oct. 12, 2006, five victims/survivors came forward who were previously unknown to the diocese with allegations relating to three priests. One priest is deceased and had been previously identified by other victims/survivors. One priest was serving in a parish and removed from ministry pending an investigation of the allegation. One priest was no longer active at the time of the allegation.

Since June 2004, the Diocese of Arlington has celebrated a total of 17 Masses to Pray for Healing for Victim/Survivors of Sexual Abuse, with Bishop Loverde

presiding at most of the Masses. In addition, the diocese has celebrated seven prayer services with Father Mark Mealey, O.S.F.S., V.G., presiding at most of them. A special feature of the prayer services has been the sharing of victim testimony and efforts to heal and be reconciled to the Church. The Masses and prayer services have been held throughout the diocese. A reception follows each of the services and provides victims/survivors an opportunity to meet the bishop, Father Mealey and other priests in attendance. During the current reporting year, six Masses and four prayer services were held.

The bishop hosted two evenings for victims/survivors of abuse at Dominican Retreat last year. The first was an evening of reflection and the second a listening session. Both were well received and appreciated by survivors.

With the encouragement of the Advisory Board, the diocese began to offer a monthly "drop in Support Group" for victims/survivors of sexual abuse in September 2006. Support Group meetings were held in September

and October 2006 with five people attending each meeting. Monthly meetings are scheduled through June 2007.

The original Advisory Board members were appointed to the board between August and November 2003, with five year appointments. Advisory Board members are: Jim Byrne, Esq., chairman; Mila Tecala, L.C.S.W., vice chairperson; Father Dennis Kleinmann; Richard Perry, M.D., secretary; Patricia Dalton, Ph.D.; and Jim McGuire. Bishop Loverde appointed Dr. John Dillon in August 2006 to fill an additional position on the Advisory Board. In December 2006, Bishop Loverde appointed Teresa Hartnett to the Advisory Board.

The Advisory Board would like to again commend the outstanding efforts and achievements of Father Terry Specht, director of the diocesan Child Protection and Safety program, and Patricia Mudd, A.C.S.W., victim assistance coordinator for the diocese. Our board continues to provide counsel to the bishop to ensure that our diocese is in full compliance with all aspects of the Charter and that its child protection program and programs for victims and survivors are among the most effective in our national Catholic community.

Very respectfully submitted,  
James M. Byrne, Esq., chairman  
Mila R. Tecala, LCSW, vice chairperson  
Richard Perry, M.D. secretary  
Patricia Dalton, Ph.D.  
James McGuire  
Fr. Dennis Kleinmann  
John Dillon, M.D.

*Hartnett is not included as a signatory because she was appointed to the board after the end of the reporting period.*

Live  
Jesus  
2007

## JESUS, THE BEATITUDES & ME™

*A Morning of Lenten Reflection & Renewal  
Through the Lens of Salesian Spirituality*

Saturday, March 17, 2007  
8:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

*Registration and  
Continental Breakfast - 8:00 AM*

Our Lady of Good Counsel  
Vienna, Virginia

### "THE BEATITUDES"

Rev. Lewis Fiorelli, OSFS

*Reflections on the wisdom and maxims of St. Francis de Sales*

### "JESUS, THE BEATITUDES and ME"

Rev. James Greenfield, OSFS

& Rev. Dr. Lucy Hogan

*The reality of living the beatitudes in today's world.*

### CELEBRATION OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST

Rev. William Metzger, OSFS, Presider

*Suggested contribution to the Oblate Ministries: Equal to at least 1 hour's wage.  
Pre-Event Registration Required by 3/11/07 - Continental Breakfast Included*

Registration & information for Live Jesus 2007 on the website at [www.oblates.org](http://www.oblates.org)  
Or call OLGCA at 703-938-2828, x110; Directions at [www.olgca.org](http://www.olgca.org)

### REGISTRATION FORM

Mail to: Live Jesus 2007 c/o Our Lady of Good Counsel, P.O. Box 97, Vienna, VA 22183

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ or E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Parish: \_\_\_\_\_



# A Telephone Call Helps One Victim Heal

*The following reflection was written by a survivor of sexual abuse.*

## Special to the HERALD

I first spoke to Pat Mudd the Monday after our Holy Father, John Paul II, had died. Seeking a service for him, I came upon a section of the Diocese of Arlington's website that mentioned a victim assistance coordinator. "Window dressing," I scoffed, thinking of my vain attempts over the years to work with another diocese, the diocese of my childhood. A year later, I would look back and chuckle, recalling a grade school nun carefully enunciating, "It's the unconfirmed saints who make the great miracles." John Paul the Great is not yet a saint, but a year after I first began to talk to Pat, and through her to Father Mark Mealey, O.S.F.S., and through them to Bishop Paul S. Loverde, I would see a miracle his death brought to my life.

My first call to Pat was not so upbeat. I asked something pointed about the dressing of windows. I know I said I had no idea why I was calling. Pat was prepared. The diocese could offer a list of skilled therapists, some Catholic and others not. She had a list, also, of several types of other support — spiritual guidance from specially trained priests, a therapeutic support group, a non-therapeutic support group, Masses offered for my healing, prayer services offered if I no longer felt comfortable at Masses with priests, assistance speaking with the diocese of my childhood, meetings with her, meetings with Father Mealey, or a meeting with the bishop. If this was window-dressing, it sure was a crowded window.

For several months I would tentatively agree to attend a Mass or prayer service to meet Pat, but I would just as routinely find a reason not to go. What was the point? I had failed to inspire change in my childhood diocese, when all I cared about was ensuring children were safe from what had happened to me and to far too many friends from my youth. I was prepared to tend my personal burden alone. What could a prayer service or Mass do for me that a good rosary couldn't? Later, when I did attend the prayer services and Masses, I heard the diocese had trained tens of thousands of adults to protect children. A ghost that had haunted me for years began to recede.

I was, before Pat coaxed me into dialog with her, jaded. Besides a futile prior effort with the Church, I had "done my time" in therapy with well-meaning counselors and had successfully, not without some effort, avoided the pressures there and elsewhere to sue the Church, which for reasons of my own did not seem a prudent course for me. I had devoured published works, which offered the most cutting-edge help through the years as a helpful crutch, yet it could so easily have become an identity; when victims cannot find enough safety in faith settings to renew a relationship with God what alternatives do they have? Central as it was, the therapeutically sound literature, however, never supported my desire to remain Catholic. My healing and my Catholicism ran in parallel, seemingly irreconcilable tracks.

In the end, what saved me was surviving two serious physical illnesses, just barely in the second instance; recovery followed a terrible struggle during which every day I woke to lean entirely on Christ and to manage each day with sometimes terribly flawed and often comical results. Surviving those heart-breaking months was a miracle itself, and what I gained was a sense I had been given life anew. It left me giddy, gleeful to have even a life hobbled by wounds. But I had been taught something far more central to my Catholic journey by heroes I had met who suffered from illnesses similar to mine and whose struggle with the effects would be difficult and lifelong. The message of their example said something to me that the Church was not yet saying to survivors of sexual abuse by priests. Being ill, or wounded, can render us uniquely kind and aware, reveal our heroism as much as our weaknesses, and cultivate in us a defining thirst for justice and, sometimes, an absolutely steadfast in devotion to Christ. Our suffering can make us particularly good friends, neighbors, siblings, children, spouses, colleagues, role models and community leaders.

So, what was the problem? You may wonder why I

called Pat at all. I wondered the same thing, but I still dialed the phone.

It was not as if, the day I called her, I had any doubt I was Catholic. The road had been circular and confused, admittedly. For long periods I would attend Mass and savor the faith of my mother and my father, of my grandmother, of history itself. Then, exhausted from the spiritual grief I felt every time I walked into a church and saw a priest, or a child, I would for months actively endeavor to leave the Church — to become any other kind of Christian. Maybe even a Buddhist. If the welcome and kindness I found in these other communities had been enough, I would have stayed. Yet, I kept trudging home.

Sometimes I returned when I found a gentle priest in the pulpit whose understanding of the scorched heart made him safe — from afar. Other times, my return involved reading or observing some spiritually fulfilled Catholic. Sometimes my return could bring me no further than to drive by a church on Sunday because I could not bring myself to enter for Mass. Or, it meant I attended daily Mass but could not endure what felt like a throng of unknowing on Sundays; was I sure children were not being abused in the back corridors — or, as I had been, in the confessional? Sometimes, the best I could do in a week was keep sweet company with the Eucharist in the silence of adoration. Sometimes, seeking safety in anonymity, I drove to attend the earliest and most unpopulated Masses in different churches on Sundays. No matter how backwards or sideways, I returned home because the ache in my heart knew my spiritual journey had only one destination despite all the tangents I was trying, only one resting place, only one truth despite all the lies that comprise and then follow the experience of child sexual abuse, only one answer for all the confusion and struggle, only one true love — and that was the Eucharist.

The reason I called Pat remains a mystery. The result is clear. Now, I am deeply grateful to Bishop Loverde for choosing Pat, an experienced social worker, to be sitting by the phone the Monday after Pope John Paul II died. I am grateful to the bishop, and to Father Mealey, for their steadfast charity to-

ward all, not just toward the people who fit a mold that makes it easy to offer care, but also toward marginalized survivors who have had to endure not only childhood horrors but also shocking misrepresentations by news media and voyeuristic television shows, misinformed speakers and poorly trained therapists with false agenda, weak courts and uninspired legislatures, as well as disgruntled therapists, colleagues, friends — even former spouses in divorce proceedings claiming they got stuck with damaged goods.

The social momentum for misconception about us survivors is the same as any false view of the meaning of suffering. By contrast, the bishop, Father Mealey, and Father Terry Specht are leading good and holy priests to be the antidotes to the evildoing of predators who hide in priests' clothing, offending the holy Roman collar while breaking hearts and spirits of children entrusted to them. A good and holy priest is dedicated to finding the broken hearted, which is the humble offering God prefers to any burnt sacrifice. It was Father Mealey who first reminded me that my suffering was, indeed, redemptive; I had never heard my past cast in such esteem, offering a chance for joy and hope. It was both Father Mealey and Bishop Loverde who pointedly assert, service after service, again and again, what most of the world otherwise denies. I can hear their voices now assuring me that we survivors are not to blame, that we are innocent of this crime. I did not think I really cared enough to need to hear this, yet to be a survivor and to hear this truth spoken by holy priests and to be able with time to internalize what they say is to be restored.

I do not know why I called Pat, but I do know that because I did I can witness this truth: In our bishop and bishops like him, and in Father Mealey and priests like him, and in Pat and laypersons like her, the Catholic Church lives its right leadership as fearless witness to injustice — and as messenger of hope — for yet another group of society's pariah whose suffering has meaning and whose hope is indeed found in the healing graces of Christ. To live in this diocese is proving to be a matter of joyful identity — and conviction.

## What Was I Thinking...

(Continued from page 28)

The unresolved spiritual dimension can leave victims overwhelmed with grief. Often I find that my ministry is about helping them get back on their feet. My work has included finding jobs for victims who were unemployed, locating resources for physical health care as well as mental health counseling, making telephone calls to the diocese or religious order where the abuse occurred to assist the survivor in reporting the abuse and requesting funds from the victim's home dioceses for counseling and other needed services. As the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops recommends, I also make referrals to skilled therapists for psychological counseling and priests for spiritual assistance. I have also spent time in the back pew of church after a Mass or prayer service with a victim who is crying her eyes out. I encourage victims/survivors to attend our support group as well as facilitating this group. Our ministry in the Diocese of Arlington is to victims of clergy sexual abuse, incest and violence on the streets. I have been with victims of abuse as they vented and cried over their anger at the abuse they have suffered in the Catholic Church and who can't let go of the anger until someone has heard it. Victims/survivors share their anger at the bishops who have not acted promptly to remove predators from the parishes and anger at family members who abuse them or those who attack them on the streets. Hopefully, this venting, listening and successful therapy leads to a place where they can move on with their lives. The diocese has developed a unique program of outreach to victims/survivors including Masses, prayer services, listening sessions and evenings of reflection at Dominican Retreat House as well as a support group to minister to victims of child sexual abuse. Our efforts seem to be striking a chord with some who are be-

ginning to struggle along the same road we did a few years ago, as we recently have had a number of requests from other diocese for information on our Masses, prayer services and bishop's special time with survivors.

It is two and a half hours from Winchester to my home. The drive home at 10 p.m. after a Mass to Pray for Healing for Victims/Survivors of Sexual Abuse is a lonely one, as are many drives home. The drive offers a time for reflection on the work of victim assistance and prayer for survivors and their families. When I took on this challenge, I thought there would be days that were heart wrenching and that I would go home exhausted. This certainly has been true. What I know now is that I have met some incredible people. Every person who seeks our help has an amazingly sad story to tell and needs our support, encouragement and prayers. They are survivors and have earned my admiration and respect because of that very fact. Our survivors are God's children and precious in His sight.

Several years ago, a group of priests were trained to be compassionate advocates for victims/survivors of child sexual abuse. These priests, along with Bishop Loverde, Father Mealey and Father Terry Specht, have spent many hours with survivors of abuse in an effort to encourage them in their healing and a renewed relationship with God. I feel blessed to assist these priests in their efforts to reach out to our survivors of child sexual abuse. They are committed not to leave anyone behind. Please join me in prayer for my work with our survivors of sexual abuse, for Bishop Loverde, our priests who provide spiritual assistance and for the skilled therapists who work for healing. I invite any child sexual abuse survivors reading this article to call me at 703/841-2530 with the hope that we can be of assistance to you.

**Mudd is the victim assistance coordinator for the diocese.**