

Diocese-PCAR Partnership

The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape, seven local rape crisis centers, and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown recently formed a partnership to meet the needs of sexual assault victims and bring attention to the services available for survivors of sexual abuse. A grand jury investigation exposed child sexual abuse perpetrated by priests and religious leaders in the diocese.

A few weeks after the grand jury report was released, Chairman Josh Shapiro of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) announced funds from the Victims of Crime Act to assist the victims of abuse in the diocese's eight counties. Funds will support direct services for victims, including counseling, therapy, and trauma-focused support for adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

In order to identify the needs of centers and determine how to distribute the funds, a meeting was held between PCCD, PCAR, and local rape crisis centers. Leadership at the local rape crisis centers expressed an interest in working with the diocese in their efforts. At a strategic planning meeting, Bishop Mark L. Bartchak met with the centers. It was decided that PCAR and the local centers would be involved in writing articles for *The Catholic Register* and be interviewed for the weekly television program, *Proclaim!* to bring awareness to the issues surrounding sexual abuse and promote the services available for survivors. Jean Johnstone, the Executive Director of Catholic Charities for this area, has also worked to connect centers with their local Catholic Charities organization to ensure the needs of sexual assault survivors are met and to strengthen collaboration in the community. The diocese will continue to provide information to members about training and prevention efforts available in their county.

In May, Bishop Mark led three prayer services for victims and survivors of sexual abuse at the Saint Andrew Parish in Johnstown, the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Altoona, and Our Lady of Victory Parish in State College. Some of the local rape crisis centers attended these services. Local victim services centers are available in the diocese, including: Your Safe Haven, Inc. in Bedford County; Family Services, Inc. in Blair County; Victim Services, Inc. in Cambria and Somerset Counties; Centre County Women's Resource Center, Inc.; Clinton County Women's Center; Women in Need/ Victim Services in Fulton County; and The Abuse Network in Huntington County. For more information about your local center, call PCAR's toll-free hotline at 1-888-772-7227 or visit www.pcar.org.

The diocese, PCAR, and local centers are working together to raise awareness of the services available for survivors, and to assist in the healing process of victims and their families.