

## **Victims group meets diocese official:**

### **The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, which is trying to organize a Rhode Island chapter, recommends sensitivity training for new clergy.**

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PROVIDENCE -- Two leaders of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests are asking that Roman Catholic Bishop Robert E. Mulvee allow abuse victims to provide sensitivity training to his newly ordained priests.

Yesterday afternoon the group's national leader, David Clohessy, and Landa Mauriello-Vernon, who heads the chapter in Connecticut, went to the diocesan offices at Cathedral Square with a letter intended for Bishop Mulvee.

Since the bishop is on a visit to Rome, Monsignor Paul D. Theroux, the moderator of the curia, accepted the letter on his behalf, saying he thought the bishop "would be open to arranging something."

The monsignor and Clohessy have known each other for at least 10 years, going back to when the priest was working for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and had helped set up some of the first meetings between bishops and abuse victims.

Mauriello-Vernon, 30, is a homemaker and mother of two who says she was abused by a nun during her senior year at a Catholic school for girls in Hartford. She said that even if the diocese already has a program in place to sensitize priests, it's important for the newest priests -- seven were ordained last Saturday -- to hear the personal stories of sexual abuse victims themselves.

"It's one thing to read a survivor's story. But to sit face-to-face and listen to a survivor's story, I don't think you can reproduce that in any way," she said. "It's great for the survivors because they know they are reaching out and helping someone learn from what happened to them, and prevent it from happening to other kids."

If anything, said Clohessy, hearing those stories may not only give the younger generation of priests the courage to come forward when they suspect something isn't right, but also make them more compassionate when they encounter other victims of abuse.

"If somebody is abused by a parent or a Scout leader, the odds are much greater that someone who is victimized will come to a young priest than a 78-year-old monsignor," Clohessy said. "That's why we need to reach the younger generation."

In their meeting at the chancery, Monsignor Theroux noted that Michael Hansen, a psychologist and director of the Diocese of Providence's office of human formation and outreach, has thus far held training sessions for coordinators in roughly half of the state's parishes to show them how to implement a "safe environment" program in individual churches.

Mauriello-Vernon said outside the meeting that the diocese could take the additional step of having survivors speak directly to parishioners, because, "You can't hear the stories without thinking, 'That could have been my daughter, or my son, or my grandchild.'"

She asked Monsignor Theroux if it would be possible for the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, which is trying to organize a chapter in Rhode Island, to place notices of upcoming meetings in church bulletins.

Monsignor Theroux said such announcements might be possible, but he said he and the bishop would probably want to meet with the chapter leaders before giving their OK.