

## Child Protection Task Force marks 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary

This year marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the St. Joseph's Child Protection Task Force (CPTF). As part of our activities, CPTF will be bringing a Youth Motivational speaker to Grand Rapids students, offering the Annual Healing Service, expanding awareness of child sexual abuse, and providing valuable resources to parishes in the Duluth Diocese.

Since its inception, in 2002, the Child Protection Task Force (CPTF) has worked to provide education, resources and healing to those affected by abuse. "The work of the CPTF has been rewarding when we reflect on what we have accomplished in the past ten years," stated Kay Furlong, CPTF member. "We take our work very seriously and it is often taxing emotionally, psychologically and physically." The work in the community by the CPTF to address sexual abuse was cited in the tri-annual audit of the Duluth Diocese by the USCCB in 2011.

### A Task Force is formed

Fr. Tom Radaich, then Pastor of St. Joseph's Catholic Community in Grand Rapids, called together a group of parishioners and community leaders in 2002 to form the task force with the purpose of creating a safe environment for children. Members were experienced in child protection issues, including social services, therapy, court advocacy, and education. The mission statement was established: *"To work for protection and healing from childhood sexual abuse, within our parish, community and Diocese."*

Members of the task force, including Fr. Radaich, met with Bishop Schnurr. A key discussion point was to establish a clear reporting policy in the Diocese. "We felt, in order to properly educate our staff and volunteers, provide standards and expectations, and foster a safe environment for our children within the church community and to work actively with community agencies, we needed a clear message," said Furlong.

In the following year the task force created initiatives, tools, and education for St. Joseph's parish and the community. In 2003 a resource guide was published and distributed in the Grand Rapids area. This guide listed contact numbers for Support Within Reach (formerly Itasca Alliance Against Sexual Assault), area therapists experienced in providing information, support, and education concerning sexual abuse and assault, and contact information for the three lay people identified as Diocesan Victim Assistance Coordinators.

### Safe Policy for Children

Work began on the development of a Safe Policy for Children. With resources gathered from other Catholic and Protestant churches, the public schools and other organizations, the CPTF members drafted a policy that would complement that of the Diocese of Duluth and be unique to this parish. Karen Karls, CPTF member stated, "All of our volunteers, staff and anyone having contact with children are required to, not only, complete the Diocesan protocol, but must also read and agree to St. Joseph's Policy for the Protection of Children and Young People." The Safe Policy was created with a provision for discouraging social networking between adults and youth. Fr. Jerry Weiss wrote an introduction stressing that it and the policy of the Duluth Diocese be viewed as supportive of each other. The diocese Youth Protection Training program, knowledge and use of the two policies, and a background check are required for all personnel and volunteers working with youth at St. Joseph's school and parish. The policy is reviewed annually and approved by the Pastoral Council.

**Healing the Broken Heart**, offered at St. Joseph's in 2004, uses the format of The Ritual of Lament healing service for survivors of sexual abuse first presented in Cleveland, Ohio. The service is open to the public, abuse survivors, their families and friends, all who have been hurt by the betrayal of abuse, all of us who seek forgiveness and healing, and all who love the broken Body of Christ. Amanda Ysen, Executive Director of Support Within Reach commented, "This is a very powerful service and new people come every year." Healing the Broken Heart is offered annually during Lent at St. Joseph's.

### Help for Families and Friends of sexual offenders

In an effort to assess and provide unmet needs in the community, the CPTF looked to local professionals for guidance. Furlong explained, "After a meeting with local Probation officers working with both adults and juveniles, we learned that there were no available resources in the area for the family or friends of an offender if professional counseling wasn't affordable." CPTF designed brochures and business cards that would be available to law enforcement, social workers, schools, and the community at large, to discreetly hand to family and friends of sexual offenders. A partnership was formed with The Institute of Psychological and Sexual Health, Duluth, MN, and arrangements were made to provide a cell phone that would be carried by an Institute therapist at all times. Anonymous, free consultation would be provided to anyone who called 24 hours a day. Information about this service was included in the Help for Families and Friends of Sexual Offenders brochures and cards, along with, contact information for Support Within Reach, Stop It Now, MN, and self-help information provided by CURE-SORT of Okemos, MI.

"We have been fortunate to have such a supportive faith community," stated Gwynne Bobich, CPTF member. "Funding for this, and other projects, has been donated by the Council of Catholic Women at St. Joseph's." Support Within Reach expanded their support services to include the non-offending family members of sex offenders who are secondary victims themselves, so the cell phone carried by therapists at The Institute was no longer necessary and was discontinued in April, 2006. A new brochure was designed by Support Within Reach and funded, in part, by St. Joseph's Council of Catholic Women.

### Illuminations comes to Grand Rapids community

Fr. Ray Chase, director of Spiritual Development for Children at Catholic Charities in Baltimore presented Illuminations, a program centered on the artwork of a young man who was a victim of sexual abuse, to the Grand Rapids community in 2006 and again in 2007.

This was the first time that the nationally known program was offered outside of a major city. Illuminations was presented to educators, law enforcement, social workers, therapists, foster parents and members of the general community.

Father Ray returned to Grand Rapids in April 2011 to lead four days of workshops and prayer services coinciding with Lent, Child Abuse Prevention Month, and Sexual Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month. He gave the reflection at the annual Healing the Broken Heart service and presented a day-long workshop entitled In the Eyes and Soul of a Child (The Impact of Child Maltreatment on Spirituality) for an audience of clergy, parish staff and professionals. The following day's workshop at the Blandin Foundation auditorium, In the Words of the Offender, was attended by members of law enforcement and professionals in the field of child sexual abuse. Costs for all the events were covered by grants and donations.

Building on the response from Illuminations, a meeting was held at St. Joseph's to gather area professionals dealing with education and counseling and was conducted by Christos Petsoulis and other therapists from The Institute in Duluth. In response, an Introduction to Understanding the Dynamics of Sexual Violence was presented by therapists from The Institute.

In 2008 CPTF and Support Within Reach co-sponsored presentations by John Crudele to students at the Grand Rapids High School and then to youth, parents and other adults at St. Joseph's. He addressed the difficult choices faced by young people today in regard to sexuality and the importance of chastity. "John has a way of connecting with youth on a level that they engage in with enthusiasm and humor," stated JoAnn Ryan, CPTF member. "At times you could have heard a pin drop." John returned to speak to students at the Grand Rapids Middle School and St. Joseph's in 2009.

CPTF has repeatedly discussed the issues of bullying, sexting, and Internet concerns. Support Within Reach staff members, working with law enforcement and other area professionals, have begun an educational program in the schools called Let's Chat - Getting Real with Teens Regarding Sexual Violence. This panel presentation includes a representative from Support Within Reach, Itasca County Attorney's Office, Itasca County Sheriff's Office, and Itasca County Probation. "This presentation helps students to understand the ramifications of sexual offending and victimization. In order to get real information to the students, we utilize a taped interview with a juvenile sex offender that discusses how his choices impacted his life, his family's life, and his victim's," stated Ysen. "When speaking to our youth, we many times wonder if we are getting through to them. By pairing the taped interview with real people, who work in this field, we can communicate on the same level with the students and make a real impact in preventing sexual violence."

### **Current CPTF initiatives**

To make information accessible on a regular basis, the names and contact numbers for the Victims' Advocates in the Duluth Diocese are published monthly in St. Joseph's bulletin along with a request for prayers for the work of the CPTF and support agencies. Victims and support systems are included in the Prayers of the Faithful and a new social justice space was made available for information and announcements in the church gathering space.

### **Programs to be offered by the CPTF in 2013 include:**

- The annual Healing the Broken Heart service for all those affected by abuse will be on Tuesday March 12<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm, St. Joseph's.
- The Mexican Fiesta, fundraiser for Support Within Reach, will be on Monday April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 4:30-7pm at St. Joseph's.
- Pam Stenzel, Catholic Youth motivational speaker. Presentations will be offered to youth and parents/adults on May 1<sup>st</sup> at St. Joseph's and 9-12<sup>th</sup> grades at Grand Rapids High School on May 2<sup>nd</sup>. You can learn more about Pam at [www.pamstenzel.com](http://www.pamstenzel.com) and all are invited to attend the presentation at St. Joseph's.

For more information on programs, events and offerings, and templates of the CPTF's Safe Policy and Healing the Broken Heart service, and community resource guide, visit St. Joseph's web site [www.stjosephscatholic.org](http://www.stjosephscatholic.org) or call (218)-322-4592

**Support Within Reach** Sexual Violence Resource Center can be reached at 1-866-747-5008 and [www.supportwithinreach.org](http://www.supportwithinreach.org). National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-HOPE and the Online Hotline at <http://online.rainn.org/>

The Child Protection Task Force (CPTF) seeks to prevent and heal child sexual abuse in our community. The mission "To work for protection and healing from childhood sexual abuse, within our parish, community and Diocese" serves to guide this committee. The mission includes creating new initiatives and forming partnerships with other community groups who work in education, awareness and prevention of child sexual abuse. Membership is comprised of parishioners, staff, professionals and community leaders who meet monthly at St. Joseph's Church. For more information visit [www.stjosephscatholic.org](http://www.stjosephscatholic.org) or call (218) 327-4592