

Introducing New Victims Assistance Coordinator

▲ by Jasmine Salazar

I always knew that my Catholic faith and my profession would be driving forces in my life, but I never knew I would end up where I am today. Growing up in Brooklyn as the child of immigrant parents and the product of a Catholic education, my Catholic values were heavily instilled as part of my make-up. The drive in me to serve others, especially the vulnerable, was also reinforced by the Redemptorist community at my parish of Our Lady of Perpetual Help (OLPH), Sunset Park, and the Vincentians who worked closely with the Jornada Movement.

A Redemptorist Brother, who was assigned to OLPH during my teen years, was the one who planted the seeds of curiosity for social work. He would always say to me, in my years when I always found a cause to argue for: "Jasmine, since you like to argue so much, you would be good as a lawyer, or a social worker."

And planting a small seed like that, sparked my curiosity. Throughout my life, I was closely involved in different ministries in the church, while my faith also accompanied me through the turbulent years of adolescence and the challenges of figuring out who and what exactly I wanted to be in my young adulthood. As I began my studies in psychology and social work, I knew, somehow in the end, I wanted to give back to my Catholic faith community that had always journeyed along with me.

As a social worker, working with families in providing them with services in different settings that included the courts, schools and a community family center, was a challenging and rewarding experience, in that I was a firsthand witness to suffering, as well as a witness to the strength of the human being and the capacity to overcome adversity. Simultaneously, I was involved in youth ministry, where I often witnessed the mercy of God and the power of His healing touch, to help those in pain push through and face life with hope.

But these two worlds always seemed separate; it was always the world of "ministry" and the world of "social work." Then, in 2009, an opportunity was given to me to begin working with the Diocese of Brooklyn. I was to become the assistant to the chancellor and coordinator of office operations. In this capac-

ity, I began to gain even more insight into a serious problem that our Catholic Church was struggling with, that of sexual abuse. This is where I learned of the Charter for the Protection of Children that was passed in 2002 by the U.S. bishops and how the Charter put in place protocols to ensure the protection of children. Working in this capacity, I was also able to meet and collaborate with Sister Ellen Patricia Finn, O.P., who had made a tremendous contribution to the groundwork and development of the victims assistance ministry in our diocese. In addition, I was able to meet and collaborate with members of the Diocesan Review Board, who always demonstrated a serious commitment to the investigating of allegations of sexual abuse committed by a clergy member.

Earlier this year, I was asked to be the new victims assistance coordinator for the Diocese of Brooklyn. It is with a great sense of honor that I have come into this role, knowing the amazing efforts Sister Ellen made in establishing the foundation in this ministry. It is also a very humbling experience to be given the opportunity to accompany those who are on their journey towards healing. I am humbled by the trust that has been placed in me, not only by our diocesan bishop but also by the survivors, who have taken a chance in reaching out and trusting me by sharing their experiences.

Since childhood, it was always inculcated in me that I must be a reflection of Jesus' love in this world. It is my hope and prayer that the Lord use me as His instrument to be a reflection of His love and compassion, to be able to accompany those that are suffering and to be a vehicle in which hope can be restored in another's life and in another's faith journey. It is my hope as well that anyone who has suffered the atrocities of being victimized by a clergy member may be able to reach out, in order to know that they are not alone and should not face this journey alone.

I close with expressing the sincerest gratitude for being given the opportunity to finally join the two worlds that always existed in me, and now be able to feel whole in giving back as a social worker within my faith setting.

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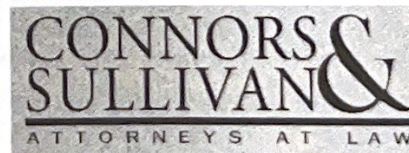
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