



Blessed

by Teresa Hartnett

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As a survivor of clergy abuse as a child and teen, I am blessed to have access to the Arlington diocesan outreach ministry by Pat Mudd and, later, Adlin deCardi under the leadership of Bishop Paul Loverde and Vicar General Fr. Mark Mealey OSFS. I'm grateful for the opportunity today to acknowledge the role of these two social workers in a program where listening is a ministry that reveals miracles.

The Arlington ministry is entirely about listening. Anyone who listens to survivors is knowledgeable and wisely sensitized to issues faced by people whom they seek to help. Importantly, that starts at the top with our Bishop and Fr. Mealey, but it has been daily cultivated by trained social workers selected for the skills and experience they can offer.

From first encounters with Pat and Adlin at prayer services or Masses or other events, survivors find interactions are geared toward listening and gentle welcome. Soon after the first encounter, survivors are encouraged to share their stories for the sake of their own healing and that of others. Over time, some opt to share their faith experience with groups (e.g., deacons, therapists, youth ministers) hosted by Pat and Adlin to help sensitize them in their work; these training sessions have also included renowned experts. What any listener learns is what few understand: Survivors of abuse, no matter how wounded, have remarkable stories of courage and faith that inspire other survivors as well as all believers. In this sense, listening helps survivors heal while it enlightens those devoted to our healing.

In Arlington, this enlightened listening is social work in action within a rich ministry that gives survivors many choices. At the outset, survivors have access to a referral list of many different therapists and other services, like biofeedback, which have been recommended by other survivors. With feedback from a survivors' committee, Arlington tests and refines many different ways to reconnect with the Church. For example, there are Masses, but also prayer

services for those who find Mass triggers traumatic memories. Some survivors participate in services or retreats, others write, others speak. In support groups survivors share experience and wisdom, and great friendships have flourished. Some survivors opt to meet privately with staff and a priest or Bishop only. Choices help participants avoid feeling trapped by a “one size fits all” approach. In this collaborative spirit, the Arlington ministry has matured and grown diverse and constant and stable—something else survivors sense and appreciate.

There’s something particularly holy in Arlington’s commitment to listening to survivors. As a writer (therefore storyteller) by trade, I am keenly aware that, as Christians, we are, after all, a storytelling people. What is Scripture but a story told by witnesses who record all the ways God keeps His promises, despite the darkest suffering, in particular lifting up His Son from seeming defeat by evil to triumph and new life in Resurrection? These are the same promises made to us who were abandoned as children to evildoers. As the Arlington ministry listens to our stories, they and we witness together His promises coming true all these years later in our healing and reconciliations.

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We offer spiritual mediation, pastoral training and survivor partnerships to inspire and energize Christian ministries:

- *Advancing Christian awareness of child protection, child abuse and its aftermath*
- *Brokering early ventures in healing dialogue among persons and within groups*
- *Facilitating shared plans, guidelines and resources for long-term progress*
- *Counseling one-on-one survivors, family members and those in ministry*
- *Delivering spiritual programs for small and large group events*