



The Diocese of Knoxville

Living our Roman Catholic faith in East Tennessee

MEDIA ADVISORY
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The Diocese of Knoxville partners with McNabb Center on sexual assault reporting

(KNOXVILLE)-- The Diocese of Knoxville has announced that the McNabb Center, the region's leading nonprofit provider of mental health, substance use, and social and victim services, will serve as the diocese's new sexual assault victim's reporting provider, the first point of contact for anyone wishing to report a possible sexual abuse claim against the diocese.

"This is a positive step for our diocese, but most important it is a new path forward for anyone who feels that they have been a victim of abuse," said Bishop Richard F. Stika. "We are pleased and grateful that the McNabb Center has agreed to take on this vital role as an independent third-party agency."

The agreement between the diocese and the McNabb Center was announced after several months of detailed discussion.

"Sexual abuse is often difficult to talk about and we want to encourage individuals to report and receive support and assistance," says Catherine Oaks, director of victim services for the McNabb Center.

"Calls from the reporting line will be responded to compassionately by a master's level clinician uniquely experienced and trained within our victim services division of McNabb."

This partnership with McNabb and the Diocese of Knoxville will provide an independent avenue for individuals to report sexual abuse and receive information on how and where to access support and treatment as needed.

In the Diocese of Knoxville, the coordinator maintains a vital role in making sure any abuse victim is treated with dignity and respect, and the coordinator will follow all mandatory reporting laws.

(more)

The diocese's previous victim's assistance coordinator, Marla Lenihan, a licensed mental health therapist from Oak Ridge, served in that position for 20 years. Ms. Lenihan died in March following a battle with cancer. Father Douglas Owens, pastor of All Saints Catholic Church and a vicar general of the diocese, served as the interim coordinator while the new agreement was being developed.

"Marla did a remarkable job for our diocese for two decades. She was compassionate and had a great understanding of the challenges faced by abuse victims. We are indebted to her service," Bishop Stika said. "It is unique to partner with an independent outside agency, but we believe it's the right thing to do. The McNabb Center shares our desire to offer dignity and a voice to those who have been victimized."

The new phone line to the McNabb Center's victim's assistance coordinator is (865) 321-9080 and will be activated December 27. The coordinator will respond to all reports within one business day.

The Diocese of Knoxville, established by Pope John Paul II in 1988, includes more than 70,000 registered Catholics worshipping in 51 parishes in 36 counties in East Tennessee.

The McNabb Center, previously known as the Helen Ross McNabb Center, is the region's leading nonprofit provider of mental health, substance use, social and victim services. Since 1948, the McNabb Center has proudly served individuals with the most needs and fewest resources. Today, the McNabb Center delivers support to more than 36,750 people throughout East Tennessee each year.

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