

November 13, 2015

We welcome and thank you for attending

Congratulations, Poznan! You did it! You organized this wonderful conference and brought experts on the issue of priest sexual abuse from across the globe. We are extremely honored to have a representative from the United Nations, Sara Oviedo! You will learn more about her great work later, as well as speakers and participants from thirteen countries.

We have heard of some of the courage shown by survivors across the world and we are gratified. We have heard of victims in Poland speaking out and we find it consoling and inspiring.

We share a common bond. It was not chosen by us and it has caused horrendous suffering for ourselves and our family members and loved ones. It has destroyed communities and split towns. Of course no one wants to believe it is true. We experienced it and we find it difficult to believe. We find it is difficult to admit. But we do admit it. It is embarrassing and painful but we tell because we must. We tell because too many children and vulnerable adults remain at risk and too many victims continue to suffer alone in secrecy and shame. But the victims are not at fault. The fault lies with the priests who raped us and their superiors who covered it up and enabled them and with those in the highest authority who refuse to take action to stop sexual violence by priests and employees of the Catholic Church.

During this conference we will speak our truths. It may be painful at times but it will also provide hope and inspiration and love. I don't know you yet but I love you. You are appreciated for being here and you belong. Allow me to say something to all survivors in this room. I am sorry for what you endured. It should not have happened. It is was not your fault. If it is still hurting, I promise that it will not always hurt so badly. Thank you for coming.

Please let us know if there is anything we can do to help you at any time during this conference. There is no stupid question. All questions are welcome and with so many survivors from so many places and so many experts from so many fields if no one knows the answer, we will work together to discover it.

Please know that the schedule is very full with few breaks. If it becomes overwhelming please take a break. None of the speakers will feel slighted if you step outside. Please respect your limits and take care of yourself.

Most of us in this room do not know many people. But I guarantee that there are people here who want to become your friend. Please introduce yourself to others. Please talk to those who are by themselves. (Without being pushy.) It is ok to be alone, too.

This is a difficult time for many of us so please don't feel that you are the only one feeling bad or confused. Make this conference your conference and take some risks and speak up. If you want to talk to the speakers please do so. They are here for you. If you want to ask questions or speak to a counselor please ask. You matter.

When speaking to others we ask everyone to keep one basic ground rule: Please do not ask questions that seek information about sexual abuse endured by anyone. If you want to tell about your experience, please do so. No one should be asked whether it happened to them, too, or where it happened, or when it happened, who was involved, etc. Survivors are welcome to tell and will be listened to. But no one should be confronted with this type of question. If any survivor wants to tell please know you are welcome to do so. You will be heard.

There are reporters and members of the media here. We invited them. Their work has been instrumental in all of us finding each other. We are extremely grateful to them for telling about abuse and sexual violence by priests. They mean no harm. They are easy to identify because they are wearing yellow name tags and the rest of us are wearing white name tags. We identified them clearly so everyone will know that if you speak to someone wearing a yellow name tag you are speaking to members of the press.

All of you are welcome! We are glad you are here. Thank you for coming.

Barbara Blaine
President, Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests