

Please be sure to read paragraph 5 and consider writing a letter to the editor in response to the written statement from the Rockville Centre Diocese.

- Letters to the Editor may be mailed, faxed or e-mailed. Letters should be timely and brief, preferably less than 250 words. They will be edited for length, clarity and accuracy. Writers must include a full address and office and home phone numbers and mention special knowledge of a subject or relevant financial or political interest. Anonymous letters will not be printed. www.newsday.com/news/local/longisland/

Church abuse victims group starts LI chapter

National organization supporting those who were abused by priests to hold its first local meeting this weekend. Members say church wouldn't let them publicize group in church bulletins, ads.

Rockville Centre

SNAP group formed on Long Island.

Support group for those abused by priests to hold first confidential meeting this week

BY RITA CIOLLI STAFF WRITER

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After keeping silent for more than four decades, Beth McCabe stood confidently outside the headquarters of the Diocese of Rockville Centre yesterday as she described how a victims' support group is helping her cope with the lifelong anguish that she said began when a Catholic priest sexually molested her as a girl.

McCabe told her story publicly as the National Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests announced the formation of a Long Island chapter, to hold its first confidential support group meeting this weekend.

David Cerulli, a SNAP board member and head of the New York City chapter, said members held the brief sidewalk news conference because Bishop William Murphy "has steadfastly refused" to allow notices of SNAP meetings to be printed in parish bulletins or to allow the group to purchase advertisements in the Long Island Catholic, the diocesan newspaper.

In a written response, Sean P. Dolan, the diocese's director of communication, said the church's support of victims is "unwavering and includes counseling and support as well as the prayerful support of the Catholic people of Long Island." However, the written statement, without naming SNAP, said the diocese "cannot stand as partners with groups of individuals who seek to divide and further the pain of victims."

McCabe, 55, said she was 11 when her parents invited to dinner a priest, now deceased, who was serving in the Oblates of Mary Immaculate order. As he taught her how to use his camera, she said, he began fondling her. The inappropriate touching continued for two years. McCabe never told her parents or anyone else until news accounts of the scandal two years ago. She contacted the Long Island diocese, which began paying for counseling, a cost now picked up by the priest's order, she said.

McCabe, now the executive director of a Connecticut educational organization, said she hoped her story "would bring other victims out of their darkness and let them know they are not alone."

As McCabe and Cerulli spoke, about a dozen members of Long Island's Voice of the Faithful chapter held up pictures of abuse victims. VOTF also presented a \$500 check to SNAP to cover start-up costs. Those wanting more information about Saturday's meeting can contact Cerulli at snapoutreach@aol.com. Copyright (c) 2004, Newsday, Inc.