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SEXUALLY ABUSED AS A CHILD, THE REVEREND DEBRA RHODES, AN EPISCOPALIAN, STANDS WITH SURVIVORS, HAS AN URGENT MESSAGE FOR MARYLAND LAWMAKERS

*The Rev. Rhodes' **Survivors Stories** episode starts streaming today*

Baltimore, MD (March 28, 2023) – Long before the Reverend Debra (Debbi) Rhodes studied scripture at seminary she focused on state and federal statutes as a New York City attorney and writer. God, she shares in the latest episode of ***Survivors Stories***, entered and saved her life in 1988 when she became clean and sober; addiction was directly tied to an early childhood on Long Island that was shattered by sexual abuse. Decades later it is still painful to recount that repeated abuse by men (including an extended family member and her pediatrician), but the courageous Episcopal cleric-survivor-advocate wants Maryland survivors to know she stands with them and that she prays for passage of the Child Victims Act of 2023 (pending before the General Assembly).

Drawing on her own harrowing journey that saw innocence stolen before she turned nine, the Rev. Rhodes, 61, urges legislators weighing the reform measure to consider, “*People, survivors, repress things because it would destroy them to remember before they’re ready. It might be 2, 10, or 25 years, you have no control over that. It needs to be okay for that remembering to take place and (for survivors) not to be penalized for the time it takes.*” She recalls her dehumanizing experiences in the survivor-impact video, that serves in part as an urgent, heartfelt message for Maryland lawmakers – and the state’s governor – who have the opportunity to eliminate the age-limit and statute of limitations for filing civil claims of childhood sexual abuse against perpetrators and enabling entities.

Co-founder (along with her husband, Father Robert Antony Rhodes) of the Community of Mary, Mother of the Redeemer Church, currently based in Indiana, the Rev. Rhodes said like so many other survivors, for decades after the abuse she became withdrawn, self-doubting, and self-destructive. “*I grew up thinking of myself as damaged goods, like I was innately bad. All I felt was pain.*” Today, love, faith, prayer, and ministry – including counseling violent offenders at a nearby prison – are sources of enrichment and joy.

“Throughout my life I’ve found that the more I serve others they actually minister to me; we need each other. And all survivors need time to remember and to heal,” she added.

Survivors Stories is presented as a public service by sexual abuse attorneys/advocates from Jenner Law, Grant & Eisenhofer, and Baird Mandalas Brockstedt Federico & Cardea, in conjunction with SNAP (Survivors Network of those Abused By Priests). The series premiered just before the state senate hearing on the proposed child victims reform legislation, and prior to the crucial court ruling paving the way for the interim release of the four-year Maryland Office of Attorney General investigation into systemic child sexual abuse within the Archdiocese of Baltimore. In its redacted form, that report is expected to soon be released.

Survivors Stories is part of the wide ranging public information effort that includes an online grassroots petition endorsing passage of the legislation. David Lorenz, of the state’s chapter of SNAP, hosts the petition campaign, and has been among the most outspoken supporters of the legislation, testifying before both legislative chambers.

Attorneys Robert K. Jenner, of Jenner Law; M. Elizabeth Graham, Grant & Eisenhofer; and Philip Federico, Baird Mandalas Brockstedt Federico & Cardea, commended Sister Debbi and all the participants in the survivor-impact series, many of who also appeared at the legislative hearings.

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Note: Portions of the Rev. Rhodes' video refer to self-harm; if you or someone you know is in distress, please reach out to any of the numerous prevention and crisis resources available, including the National Lifeline 9-8-8, that can be reached toll-free 24/7.