



NEWS

# Kidney transplant links 2 clergy abuse survivors



By PIONEER PRESS | [news@pioneerpress.com](mailto:news@pioneerpress.com)  
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Phil Saviano spent years fighting for the victims of clergy abuse, an effort spurred by his own bitter experience at the hands of a priest.

Later, with Saviano's health slipping after a long battle with AIDS, he turned for support—and a new kidney—to the very network he helped nurture.

No fewer than seven clergy abuse victims answered Saviano's appeal, and the only match, Susan Pavlak, donated her kidney on Wednesday in a procedure carried out in a Boston hospital.

It all began more than a year ago, when doctors told Saviano, of Roslindale, Mass., that his kidneys were failing. To avoid a life that depended on regular dialysis, Saviano needed a transplant—and the wait time for a kidney from a deceased donor could have been too long.

Saviano, who once led the New England chapter of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, had several friends in the organization who went through tests to see if they could be a match. Family members also got tested, but everyone was disqualified.

Earlier this year, the 57-year-old Saviano put out another plea—this time on SNAP's national e-mail list. Several more people volunteered to help, including Pavlak, 55, of St. Paul, Minn.

"She did this without even knowing Phil and with knowing very little about him," said Cyndi Desrosiers, an abuse survivor who lives in Newmarket, N.H.

Desrosiers, who was abused in the same central Massachusetts diocese as Saviano, was the first of his friends to be tested. Another friend, Ann Hagan Webb, also volunteered to help Saviano.

"Nobody deserves one more than he does. He's fought for all of us," said Webb, who helps lead SNAP's New England chapter.

In all, seven clergy abuse survivors were tested, but only Pavlak turned out to be a match. She and Saviano have known each other for less than two months, said Jim Saviano, Phil's brother.

"Our family is so grateful," Jim Saviano said, adding that he and other family members were disappointed they couldn't be donors. "I know the struggle he's been going through with his AIDS and everything else he's been going through."

Jim Saviano said Wednesday evening that both patients were recovering well from the surgery. He said his brother was resting comfortably and was passing urine, a key test for kidney transplant patients. "It was a very successful operation," he said.

Pavlak isn't a member of SNAP, but was on the e-mail list and is friends with SNAP members in Minnesota. As a teenager, she was abused by a former nun who had become a teacher at her Catholic high school. Saviano's struggle with AIDS was also familiar to Pavlak, who has lost friends to the disease.

She met several of Saviano's friends Monday at a dinner in the Boston area attended by all seven of the abuse survivors who had volunteered their kidneys, Desrosiers said.

"It was so good for him to spend time with her. Often people don't meet their donors," Desrosiers said. "His comment to me was, 'Now I have to figure out what to do with my life to give back.' It's just the kind of person he is."

Dr. Arthur Matas, director of the kidney transplant at the University of Minnesota, said people who need kidneys are searching for donors more often through social groups, community groups and religious groups.

"Over 80,000 people are waiting for a kidney in the country right now and the waiting times are getting longer and longer," Matas said. "People on the waiting list are highly motivated to find a living donor."

Dr. Martha Pavlakis, medical director of kidney and pancreatic transplantation at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center where Pavlak and Saviano had surgery, said Saviano's prognosis is excellent.

"His kidneys are failing, but he's getting a transplant before having to start dialysis," Pavlakis said. "Pre-dialysis transplants generally do better."

The Boston hospital has done more than a dozen kidney transplants on AIDS patients with promising results. Saviano and Pavlak's story has inspired many within the network of those who have survived abuse, said David Clohessy, SNAP's national director.

"Hundreds of thousands of people have expressed sympathy and compassion for clergy sex abuse victims, but rarely do we see such a generous and literally life-giving sacrifice by someone who suffered so much," he said.



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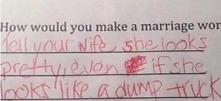
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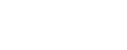
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