
Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse: A Call to the Catholic Faithful in Canada for Healing, Reconciliation, and Transformation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse: A Call to the Catholic Faithful in Canada for Healing, Reconciliation, and Transformation arises as a response by the Catholic bishops of Canada concerning the need to update and expand their efforts at safeguarding pastoral environments and to improve responses to complaints regarding the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults. Drawing on the experience of the leadership of the Catholic Church in Canada, on the expertise of numerous professionals, on the insights of victims, and on the latest canonical requirements of the Holy See, the present document will be an indispensable resource to those – be they clergy, consecrated persons, or laity – who, in view of their specific ecclesial responsibilities, hold positions of authority and have oversight of pastoral staff and volunteers. This document will also be of interest to the Catholic faithful at large as they participate in the Church's efforts to undergo the purification and transformation which have become urgent in order for the Gospel to continue to be faithfully and credibly proclaimed and lived out in every community and at all levels of society.

PART I – THE EFFECTS OF SEXUAL ABUSE ON THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CANADA

Chapter One: Lessons Learned and Recommendations (p. 21)

This chapter outlines some of the lessons that bishops in Canada have learned in dealing with the issue of sexual abuse and demonstrates their continued commitment to its prevention and to the protection of minors in a series of recommendations stemming from each lesson.

- *Lesson One: The Need for a Pastoral Encounter with Victims of Clergy Sexual Abuse (p. 22)*
In the first encounter with a victim, at the moment of the complaint, every effort must be made to express deep remorse, to make clear that what the victim experienced should never have happened, and to ensure the victims does not feel responsible.
- *Lesson Two: The Need to Understand Sexual Abuse Properly (p. 25)*
Knowledge in this area has grown, thanks to research. We now appreciate the high risk of recidivism and are better positioned to act in the interest of public safety.
- *Lesson Three: The Need to Respond More Effectively to Allegations (p. 30)*
Whenever allegations involve a minor, the police must be informed. Church leaders will cooperate fully with civil authorities in their investigation.
- *Lesson Four: Dealing with Offenders (p. 32)*
In addition to the sanctions which a secular court can impose, the Church has stricter policies, including dismissal from the clerical state. We understand that public safety must be a top

priority as we continue to learn how to live within the tension that exists between justice and mercy as well as how best to respond to public expectations.

- *Lesson Five: The Need for Better Safeguarding Practices and Training* (p. 34)
All pastoral personnel must be sensitized to the experience of victims. They must be instructed in appropriate boundaries and understand the requirement only to interact with minors in places which are open and visible to other adults. Everyone should know where to access the diocesan policy and how to make a complaint.
- *Lesson Six: The Effects on Clergy, Members of Institutes, and Laity: Coping with Shame* (p. 37)
Innocent clergy and religious are conscious of how others can view them with suspicion. This has negatively impacted ministry in some places and has also dampened morale. The laity too are ashamed and embarrassed by the sins and crimes of Church leaders.
- *Lesson Seven: The Need for Better Initial and Ongoing Formation* (p. 41)
All candidates for ministry and volunteers must be properly screened using background checks, police checks, and (when appropriate) psychosocial evaluation(s). An ongoing commitment to human and spiritual maturity must also be made by those who are already in ministry.
- *Lesson Eight: Learning About the Legal Process* (p. 44)
Inadvertently, legal proceedings can re-traumatize victims and can obstruct the attempt on the part of Church leadership to convey compassion to victims. Mediation offers an out-of-court alternative which some have found less adversarial and more personal.
- *Lesson Nine: A Call to Greater Authenticity* (p. 48)
There is an evident call to all members of the Catholic Church to engage in a process of regaining credibility. Although the response to this call starts by addressing past failures, it must be followed by action.

Chapter Two – The Healing of Individuals and Communities

This chapter highlights some points from recent research and experience regarding certain aspects of the trauma of survivors.

- *The Impact of Sexual Abuse on Victims: Acknowledging the Hurt and Its Effects* (p. 50)
Victims experience numerous psychological repercussions and behavioural manifestations (“clusters of trauma”) which affect the whole of their lives. These effects are often compounded when the offender was seen to represent God in the victim’s eyes.
- *The Healing Process: Its Challenges and Complexities* (p. 51)
Counselling, spirituality, and community support are essential to the healing process. Forgiveness in relation to healing is complex for victims: while it can further healing, no one should be pressured to forgive or to move on artificially.

- *The Wider Implications of Sexual Abuse* (p. 57)

The effects of sexual abuse on the victim's family and parish community must not be forgotten. In addition, sexual abuse has changed the environments where youth are served both in the diocese and other Catholic institutions.

Chapter Three – The Road Ahead (p. 62)

This chapter discussed the distinguishing features of a cultural shift within the Church.

- *Policies and Protocols for the Protection of Minors* (p. 63)

Policies and protocols are necessary for safeguarding environments, responding to complaints, assisting victims and the wider community. They should be comprehensive, up to date, and regularly audited.

- *Increased Episcopal Awareness of Responsibility* (p. 64)

- *A Bishop Does Not Act Alone* (p. 65)

Bishops must accept the assistance and expertise of many to ensure the safeguarding of pastoral environments.

- *Respect For Civil Laws and Authorities* (p. 65)

Bishops are subject to the laws of the land as well as the laws of the Church.

- *Communion With the Universal Church* (p. 66)

A commitment to the safeguarding expectations and norms of the Holy See is an expression of communion with the Universal Church.

- *Communion With Fellow Bishops* (p. 66)

The protection of minors is a major national priority of the Episcopal Conference in Canada.

- *Communion With the Faithful* (p. 67)

Bishops must remain attentive to the voice of the Spirit speaking through the laity.

- *Accountability* (p. 68)

Bishops are not immune to rendering an account for their actions with respect to the safety and wellbeing of younger generations and the integrity of the Church.

- *Transparency* (p. 70)

Transparency facilitates accountability insofar as it ensures that the decisions and actions of those being held accountable are being communicated in a timely, open, efficient, and truthful manner.

- *Preventing Sexual Abuse: A Call to Conversion* (p. 71)

Within the Church, the goal of prevention is first and foremost a call to conversion. Firstly, this entails identifying long-standing institutional practices linked to sexual abuse; and secondly, it involves transforming those practices, ensuring that they are more closely aligned with the Gospel and the Church's mission.

- *Changing Conditions* (p. 73)

The abuse of minors has also uncovered the evil of clericalism with its focus on the privileges and prerogatives of authority. Changes in the way ministry is exercised must be discerned and authority must be understood as ministry of service, not of power.

- *Renewing the Face of the Church* (p.74)

Renewing the face of the Church is a journey which begins with the acknowledgement of failure; it is followed by the express desire for the forgiveness of sinful behaviour; and it is confirmed by the experience of grace within the community of believers.

PART II – GUIDELINES (pp. 77 ff.)

The **Guidelines** are intended to assist the leadership of the Catholic Church in Canada with the task of strengthening their policies and protocols relating to the safeguarding minors and addressing complaints. Each section of the **Guidelines** is followed by a commentary intended to assist bishops and major superiors or those equivalent to them in law in applying the **Guidelines**. The core of the **Guidelines** are the Canonical Provisions in Section Three (p. 86-92) and Basic Elements for Applying the Canonical Provisions in Section Four (p. 93-101).

PART III – RESOURCES (p. 102)

Lists resources intended to assist anyone engaged in pastoral ministry with minors, in particular those responsible for developing both policies for the protection of minors, including the provision of training and raising awareness, and protocols for responding to complaints of sexual abuse. Whenever possible, resources are provided in both official languages. The list is organized in the following categories:

- 1) Practical Guides (p. 103)
- 2) Education/Training Programs (p. 110)
- 3) Resources from Episcopal Conferences and the Holy See (p. 113)
- 4) Government Resources in Canada (p. 115)
- 5) Agencies Promoting the Protection of Minors (p. 123)
- 6) International Human Rights Engagement (p. 125).

APPENDIX 1 – CANONICAL PROCEDURES IN CASES CONCERNING NON-ORDAINED MEMBERS OF INSTITUTES (p. 127).

This section outlines specific differences in the canonical provisions as they would apply to non-ordained members of institutes.

APPENDIX 2 – CHECKLIST FOR AN ANALYSIS OF THE GRAVITY OF AN OFFENCE (p. 131)

Provides a list of points which the bishop or major superior must consider following the preliminary investigation in preparing his opinion (*votum*) for the Holy See.

APPENDIX 3 – RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION POINTS (p. 132)

A complete list. the sixty-nine recommendations and action points related to the lessons learned in Chapter One.

GLOSSARY (p. 144)

The definition of specialized terminology or terms used in the document which require nuanced explication and careful use.

WORKS CITED (p. 154)

A list of Works Cited divided into two sections: Church-Related References and Other References.

ENDNOTES (p. 165)

