

Response to the book: Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse

Evangelization Group Proposals — Discussion with Father Jay

The evangelization committee met on November 4th to discuss the November 1, 2018 letter from Bishop Greco and the document from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops — *Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse — A call to the Catholic Faithful in Canada for Healing, Reconciliation and Transformation*.

As a result of these initial discussions in addition to previous meetings in which the topic of sexual abuse within the church were brought forward — we proposed the following recommendations that will be brought to Father Jay so a constructive and collaborative plan for healing and reconciliation and transformation can occur within our parish.

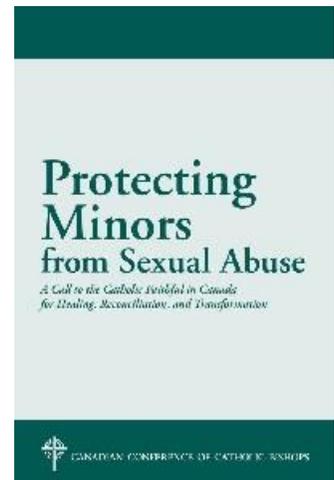
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Proposals for Action

1. Make people aware of the letter from the Bishop and the document from the C.C.C.B. Father Jay discussed this at every Mass on the weekend in Holy Family and St. James. In addition, Father has put this document in English and French on the Diocese website and printed Bishop Greco's letter in the bulletin.
2. Members of the evangelization committee have passed out the instructions to link with this document at the end of Mass and have sold 18 copies of the book version to parishioners.
3. We will ask that the bulletin will provide a phone number to sell books to additional interested parishioners in the future.
4. All members of the evangelization committee have copies of the book and will study this and pray over this document in the next week. Each member will bring back their impressions —

questions and points that they feel are of critical importance to them from their study. This information will be reviewed and then a summary document will be created.

5. This summary document will be discussed with Father Jay.
6. We will then use this document to form the basis for a presentation which will be used as an educational tool and means to open dialogue on the C.C.C.B. document.
7. We propose that the evangelization committee will then meet with small groups in the church to offer this presentation. These groups could include the C.W.L., the Knights of Columbus, the parish choir, the women's group, the outreach group, financial council and Catechism teachers for example.
8. After these smaller group meetings we would then propose a larger meeting open to everyone interested to discuss this presentation.
9. The evangelization committee members stressed their role as listeners in these discussions — showing compassion and not judgement. In addition, the members would carefully note concerns and proposals raised at these meetings. These ideas would be summarized and brought forward to Father Jay and the parish as a whole in term of a summary document [*while protecting individual confidentiality*].
10. A plan would then be created with Father Jay and the people in the parish to implement recommendations in the document and recommendations from the parishioners to transform our community to ensure that we do our utmost to protect not just minors but all people who worship in our community.



11. We will provide this action plan to the parishioners so they will know that their voice will be heard, and we are moving forward in a collaborative and transparent manner.

— *St. Mary's Holy Family & St. James Parishes Evangelization Group*

Summary of Small Group Discussions St. Mary's/Holy Family and St. James

The members of the evangelization committee and Father Jay have met with small groups which included parishioners from both St. Mary's Holy Family in Kensington and St. James in Summerfield.

We gathered their thoughts on the recommendation and action points put forward in the book "*Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse*", provided help on how to access further resources about this topic from the parish and dioceses' web — site and gave everyone a copy of the 69 recommendations and 9 action points. As well the book was made available for sale.

Parishioners expressed their thanks for the opportunity to participate in these sessions and comment on these important issues.

The committee decided to organize the parishioners concerns under the lessons learned headings used in the C.C.C.B. document.

Lesson 1: The need for a Pastoral Encounter with Victims of Clergy Sexual Abuse.

Members of the community [*in and out of the church*] must be willing to accompany victims on their journey without imposing expectations on them.

The church's reluctance to step up and apologize to parishioners in spite of the many confirmed cases of abuse which may have prolonged the problem.

The church was initially preoccupied with liability and image rather than concern about healing and accompaniment of abused people in Christian charity.

Why did it take so long for the Church to acknowledge the problem and take action?

Lesson 2: The Need to Understand Sexual Abuse Properly.

Father Jay feels that a significant shift in the attitude by the hierarchy of the church occurred around 2005. Prior to that time there was a tendency to dis-believe the accuser and after that time the church treated every complaint as valid and worthy of prompt action and investigation.

We need to be careful about the definition of abuse — it is easy to condemn an innocent act for example a touch on the shoulder or hand or a hug to someone who is suffering.

The trauma of abuse frequently results in invisible wounds that damage the survivors' image of God and ability to relate to God.

People wanted to emphasize that there is no connection between being a homosexual and pedophilia.

We worry that we are no longer able to give a hug.

Would there be less abuse if priests were allowed to marry?

Lesson 3: The Need to Respond more Effectively to Allegations.

Although there was absolutely no evidence discussed of any wrong doing by Fr. Smith while he was here, given what we now know, questions were raised around the possibility of our children having been placed in vulnerable situations.

A Priest from our parish was accused and not charged for sexual misconduct before he came to this parish. People are worried that this was known by the Bishop and covered up.

We must ensure victims coming forward are received in a non-judgmental pastoral encounter and they are welcomed and commended for their courage.

People were upset and disappointed that the Bishops moved sexual offenders into a new parish and did not notify the members of that community.

If a priest is accused — he needs a safe living space as he is required to leave church property in less than 24 hours.

People in the parish need to know clearly that there is a safe place for them to talk in confidence.

We always need to protect the accused — they are not necessarily guilty.

We must confront evil directly and open this up for full analysis before we can begin to heal. Several people felt that the cover-up by the church seemed as bad as the abuse.

We need to protect Priests and volunteers in parish from false allegations.

Lesson 4: Dealing with Offenders.

What should we do if a convicted pedophile (*a layperson*) joins our worship community?

Greater transparency means as well that all members of the diocese are informed about actions taken in cases of confirmed abuse.

Why did the Bishops send child abusing Priests to new parishes without informing the new parish?

It became clear that the Bishops and major superiors were ill equipped to handle allegations and unprepared to accompany survivors on the path to healing.

Lesson 5: The Need for Better Safeguarding Practices and Training.

We all have to be more aware of who is in your environment and what they are doing.

We need to have a community that protects each other — this means if we have suspicion or knowledge of abuse we should report this to protect everyone in the community.

The parishioners should be made aware that a priest is suspected of previous abuse of children.

Can we train parents to detect the signs of abuse?

We need to develop better screening and education for candidates for ordained ministry.

People felt that we must work together as laity and the clergy in our church to bring about healing and improve safety.

We need to do more work on reconciliation and help all those who have been directly and indirectly affected by this crisis.

People who are working with children should have additional training so they can detect the early signs of a child at risk or who is being abused. This improved training will allow earlier intervention.

Father handed out the 2014 forms for ***Strengthening the Caring Community*** and outlined the two levels of security that are possibly required for some volunteers while others require a less intensive security check.

A person in the Parish will be required to ensure we comply with the proper security checks for all those who volunteer. father says Priests have not been the ideal choice in the past for this task.

What do you think can be done at the parish level?

Lesson 6: The Effects on Clergy, Members of Institutes, and Laity; Coping with Shame.

There was a lengthy discussion on the priesthood and the future of the Church, issues included: — Marriage of priests — Ordination of women — Lack of priests, which weakens the Church but also adds to the loneliness and isolation of each individual priest, being unable to share issues with one other.

People feel a deep sense of disappointment and shame because they are Catholic. We need a change from within. We care a great deal about the church, but we have been met with coverup and lack of accountability.

The burden of a priest hearing the confession of a brother priest's crime and Church secrecy may be part of the problem, but the confidentiality of the confessional is too important to change. Even the accusation of abuse is a burden that the person may have to bear for life and there have been examples of people who were proven innocent later becoming depressed and suicidal.

Many people feel bad or shame or embarrassment in the general public or work place when the Catholic Church abuse situation is discussed.

The 24-hour rule for the Priest to leave his parish home seems harsh when it is based only on an accusation.

The problem of sexual abuse in the church was not caused by the laity so why do we need to be involved in fixing this issue?

Father Jay noted that a lot of hurt has occurred in the church because of the sexual abuse problem.

Even when found innocent some people still treat an accused as if they are guilty.

Lesson 7: The Need for Better Initial and Ongoing Formation.

The abuse of minors by the clergy and religious has also uncovered the extent and evil of clerics with its focus on privileges and prerogatives of authority and the expectation of some clergy and religious to be treated as entitled, superior and untouchable.

The unquestioned authority which was given by Catholics to priests and the Church has been shaken and is a major adjustment which will take time to find its level for both church authorities as well as the laity. The contradiction of being a priest distributing the sacraments and at the same time carrying the guilt of having caused such hurt. It is the responsibility of the bishops to assign priests: some of them have made errors in that regard.

Lesson 8: Learning about the Legal Process.

Non-disclosure is another change which is being addressed, in the past legal advice was to keep as much information as possible out of the public and this could be accomplished by non-disclosure documents, but the Church wants that to stop as part of its commitment to transparency.

People felt a deep sadness for victims — talked of ways to reach out and all agreed that money does not fix their suffering.

The system of canon law emphasizes repentance and forgiveness.

How much damage has been done?

Lesson 9: A call to Greater Authenticity

The book indicates that the Church has and is changing with regard to its self-examination. In the past the focus was protecting the priest and now it is protecting the victim. This is very evident as the Church's new policy is "one strike you're out" with regard to sexual abuse convictions but as in most big changes the challenge will be in producing results.

Once again, a general feeling that the bringing to justice of priests for the crimes they committed is one thing, but it should also include investigation into the decisions, made by Church authorities, which may have allowed the crimes to continue.

One parishioner was involved in several days of meetings about abuse in the church 8 years ago. No action was undertaken- only if the parishioners push this issue is there hope of change.

Many people have left the Catholic church because of the sexual abuse issue. When we were kids, we were taught that Priests and teachers could do no wrong.

People expressed frustration as this issue has been discussed on more than one occasion and no concrete action seems to take place.

Many people felt that a much greater effort must be made for transparency in all the church actions around abuse.

We need accountability at higher levels in the church and we need to fully embrace the principles of truth and reconciliation. Evil happens because we hide secrets in the dark — it is time to open up the church and stop hiding.

Some people believe that this crisis has caused people to leave the church and /or lose their faith.

Transparency on behalf of Church leadership was discussed and deemed extremely important going forward.

We need transparency to protect the good/ innocent priests. Secrecy and cover-up are driving people away from the church.

The sex scandal in the church has come to the surface in the 80's: why didn't the Church react before?
Is there a new relationship between the laity and the clergy?

General Comments and Suggestions

Father reviewed the suggested protocol if abuse is suspected;

Call your local police or R.C.M.P.

Call Father Lyndon Hogan and or your parish priest and expect a return call and or action in less than 24 hours. An accused Priest is removed from church property — his orders are suspended and if convicted he may be removed from the Priesthood and in all cases will never have an active ministry with children again.

People say where else can I go if not to my church that I love?

Father Jay handed out the 2014 forms for *Strengthening the Caring Community* and outlined the two levels of security that are possibly required for some volunteers while other require a less intensive security check.

Father Jay spent time teaching participants how to reach and use the website of both our parish and the dioceses. As well he taught how to use these sites to link to other important reference texts for this important issue.

The document is easy to read. the table of contents is clear and concise. This book invites us to consider sexual abuse carefully and to recognize the role we all play in the work of healing and safety of others and ourselves.

Hopefully this whole exercise has informed the people of what the church has already done to correct the problem. Left to be done in how to implement the pertinent recommendations in the parish.

Teachers suggested that they incorporate the idea with children that they should notify a trusted parent or adult if anyone asks them to keep a special secret or if they are scared or hurt by an adult.

The Bishop sent out a letter to the parishes regarding the issue of the abuse of minors in the church. Why is it that other parishes never heard of this document and why shouldn't all parish have to deal with this issue?

In the modern world of rapid transportation and communication — why not consider a common house for a number of Priests so they will have additional support and be less lonely.

A suggestion was made that one Sunday each year be devoted to the victims of abuse and to the continued effort to eliminate it inside and outside the Church.

Allowing priests to marry does not in any way address the problems of sexual abuse of children.

It is difficult to find teachers — we struggle to make it work — the new recommendations may require us to share a common room and /or ask for volunteer parents to help

People felt like a dark cloud hangs over the Church, but they do not want to run away from the community and values of the Catholic church. It is hard for Priests to discuss this situation.

The Church is changing and becoming more flexible.

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Implementation of Recommendations from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops — Holy Family and St. James Parish

Our Bishop, Richard Grecco, in his pastoral letter of November 2, 2018 stated, “every parish is expected to have a committee to coordinate the protection of vulnerable adults and youth with such practices as police checks and volunteer registrations.”

In the document *Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse*, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops states “ It is recommended that each parish within the territory of a diocese have their own up-to-date safeguarding policies and that a copy be provided to the local bishop for his records.

This is our response to these requests.

1. We wish to make sure that Police checks and volunteer registrations are done properly and that a member of our parish is responsible for overseeing this.
2. Publish the names of diocesan committees and members who deal with protecting minors and the vulnerable on the parish web-site and on our bulletin board in the church on our church bulletin.
3. Place contact names and phone numbers for Father Hogan or his designate on the parish web-site and church bulletin board.
4. Distribute the 69 recommendations and 9 action points from the C.C.C.B. document *Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse* to all interested in an open general parish meeting and place these as well on the parish web-site and have copies available at the back of the churches.
5. We will offer extra prayer times for victims of abuse during our church year. We will hold special times for reconciliation, special masses, veneration of the cross and times of atonement in our parish. We will hold special days of

prayer on this issue and we will have a special collection to raise funds to assist in the cost for counselling and supporting victims of sexual abuse by the church.

6. Parish members should feel able to ask questions about committee members and volunteers in our church ministry.
7. We will implement and update a diocesan safeguarding policy conforming to the highest standard of responsible ministry, including instruction on appropriate boundaries in pastoral relationships [for example a published code of conduct]
8. Place the safeguarding policy of the diocese on our parish web-site and print this as a booklet to be available at the back of our churches.
9. We must ensure that all parish staff receive proper safe-environment training, including how to recognize signs of abuse and how to report sexual abuse.
10. We must work toward a new understanding of the role of clergy in society and the spiritual underpinnings necessary for healthy ministry.
11. We must promote and encourage ministry to children and youth with proper safeguards in place.
12. We must work toward a culture of dialogue at every level in the diocese.
13. We continue to pursue institutional practices which foster accountability, transparency and responsibility.
14. We must make sure that we regularly review these safeguarding policies and update them as necessary.
15. We want to schedule get-acquainted sessions with new priests assigned to our parish. This would be a time for the priest to learn more about our parish and for the people to learn about and share with their new Priest.

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Outline of Diocese Resource Materials and Committees regarding Sexual Abuse of Minors

We have been made aware of and examined the document *Strengthening the Caring Community Program 2010-2011* which is dedicated to securing a safe environment in our parish. This document is based on one from the Archdiocese of Toronto [2005] and a reference manual developed by Volunteer Canada.

The Misconduct Advisory Team has been established in our Diocese. [2011] This team develops and keeps current our diocesan policy for action related to complaints of misconduct or sexual abuse. To contact the team contact Father Lyndon Hogan, Bishop's delegate 902-368-8005.

We expect the Diocesan Committee for Strengthening the Caring Community will work on and publish a parish Code of Ethics this year.

All of these documents and further details about these committees and their work is published on the Diocese of Charlottetown web-site.

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Concluding Statements

We acknowledge the victims in these issues of abuse and want to emphasize the need for the entire Church community to say **“We are sorry for what has happened to you. This will let us begin the process of transformation and healing.”**

Parishioners have participated in these important discussions. We have heard the call repeatedly for greater accountability in our churches. This is expressed clearly in the C.C.C.B. book.

“Accountability refers to the obligation of one party to answer for how it fulfils its responsibility to another. It is not primarily about accepting blame for something that goes awry, but about delivering unaccepted and shared commitments.”

Another repeated call by the people was for transparency. Once again, the C.C.C.B states,

“Transparency comprises a commitment to communicate with sincerity and honesty. It facilitates access to information to those who are entitled to receive it and welcomes external input in the development and implementation of policies and protocols.”

Anger has been expressed about the abuse of trust many people feel with their Church leaders. From the C.C.C.B. “the evil of clericalism with its focus on privileges and prerogatives of authority and the expectation of some clergy and religious to be treated as entitled, superior and untouchable.” has hurt us all deeply.

It has been a real privilege to hear parishioner’s voices and record their thoughts, their fears and their love for the Catholic church. It has been wonderful to hear the words of wisdom, honesty and hope from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and our parish Priest.

We acknowledge the Jesus Christ is the “Word.” With God’s help, let us listen to the “Word” and work together, laity, clergy and church leaders to protect minors and the vulnerable from all forms of abuse.

Now is the time to put these recommendations into practice in our parishes!

Let us begin to implement these recommendations sooner rather than later.

Praise be to God!

— *St. Mary’s Holy Family & St. James
Parishes Evangelization Group*

Father Frank Jay, Pierre Jahier

Aldona O’Brien-Jollimore

Don Clark, Karen Clark

Paul Brown, Michael Pasatieri

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