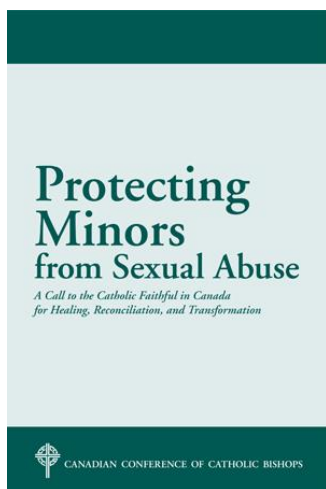


Ottawa, October 4, 2018 – Canada’s bishops today released a long-awaited set of updated and expanded guidelines aimed at protecting children from sexual abuse.



[*Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse: A Call to the Catholic Faithful in Canada for Healing, Reconciliation, and Transformation*](#) was unanimously adopted on September 27 during the annual Plenary Assembly of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB). Since then, bishops have taken time to familiarize themselves with its contents and to consider with their diocesan/eparchial staff how to ensure its implementation in their dioceses/eparchies as well as how best to inform and educate clergy, members of religious communities, and lay personnel.

In addition to a clear delineation of procedures in cases of sexual abuse, the 181-page document puts forward 69 recommendations inspired by nine lessons the bishops have learned through their collective experiences over the last 25 years.

Chief among these is that victims must come first. Bishop Ronald Fabbro of London, whose diocese has been rocked with multiple cases of clergy sexual abuse, served on the committee that developed the guidelines and shared his insights in a Foreward.

“Our highest priority needs to be our care for them,” he writes. “One of the key lessons I learned was that survivors and their families should be the centre of our attention. If we had listened to them and their cries for justice, many tragic failures of the past could have been avoided.”

In Edmonton, Archbishop Richard Smith welcomed the new guidelines as an important commitment on the part of Canadian bishops. He said he plans to comment in more detail next week, after people have had a chance to read the document and reflect on its calls to action. He noted that the Archdiocese already has an accredited program of abuse prevention which incorporates many of the recommendations in the CCCC document.

The guidelines underline the necessity for the Church to be held accountable for any and all instances of sexual abuse by those in ministry, he said.

“We also have to have our eyes wide open to the causes of all this. This will mean a readiness to ask direct and tough questions; it will mean launching investigations where needed, and these inquiries will need to involve laypersons with the appropriate expertise,” Archbishop Smith said. “These questions and investigations will enable our eyes to be wide open to the truth, to the facts, and this in turn will help us to see clearly the way ahead.”

Transparency and accountability are major themes in the CCCC document. One recommendation is that victims of sexual abuse who receive a financial settlement not be held to any confidentiality requirement – something that was common in years past, based on legal advice.

“It takes great courage for survivors to disclose their abuse,” writes Bishop Fabbro. “Survivors have taught the Church how to protect our children better. No survivors should be made to feel guilty for having disclosed the abuse they suffered. Our diocese has learned that we need to create an environment which encourages them to speak out. We have also learned that a culture of silence and a false concern for the Church’s reputation must be replaced by an entirely different culture, one of transparency and accountability.”

The document also reflects an evolved understanding of offenders. In many cases in the past, bishops relied on a clinician's assessment that an offending priest was fit to return to ministry after treatment.

"Today clinicians are better able to distinguish between situational offenders and those with fixed sexual proclivities who would always be at risk of reoffending. This has resulted in more reliable judgments and more appropriate precautions on the part of those responsible for dealing with offenders," the document states.

The new guidelines apply to all Catholic clergy (bishops, priests and deacons), as well as members of religious communities and also lay personnel who are working in Catholic parishes or Church organizations.

Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse has been in the works since September 2014, and draws on input from a broad spectrum of contributors, including survivors, lay women and lay men, as well as professional consultants with experience and expertise in psychology, social work, child protection, and Church and civil law. The majority of the experts consulted also have specific experience in protecting minors and vulnerable adults from sexual abuse.

In a statement announcing the release of the document, the CCCB said: "Canada's Bishops reaffirm their commitment to continue improving practices in their dioceses/eparchies with an emphasis on long-term prevention and pre-emptive action. The document brings the CCCB's existing guidelines (*From Pain to Hope*, 1992; *Orientations*, 2007) up to date with the latest laws in Canada and the most recent norms of the Holy See. Bishops will study and use the document to update diocesan/eparchial policies and protocols. In adopting the document, the bishops also agreed to establish a special committee to assist the CCCB in keeping its policies up-to-date and to make recommendations on emerging questions."

"The bishops acknowledge that the implementation of a document of this magnitude will take time, but the focused and transformative actions which will come of it will protect minors and promote the healing of survivors. All of Canada's bishops hope that survivors of sexual abuse will read *Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse* and see in it a real effort to listen and learn from them."