

Report on Clergy Sexual Abuse Update

Introduction

In early 2019, Archbishop Michael Miller formed a Clergy Abuse Case Review Committee to look at historical incidents of clergy sexual abuse in the Archdiocese of Vancouver. The Committee was also asked to review systems and policies so as to find opportunities for improvement in how victims/survivors are cared for and how abuse is reported. A detailed report was submitted to the Archbishop and an Implementation Working Group (“IWG”) was established to implement the approved recommendations.

While the majority of the original 31 Recommendations submitted have now been implemented, the Archdiocese continues to take action for victims/survivors. Lay-led reviews of any new priest abuse reports are now standard and victims/survivors can

now report their experiences to an independent office staffed with social workers and counsellors. We are also tackling root issues like clericalism and the need for transparency to ensure that all community members understand that priests are not in any way above the people they are called to serve.

This update is provided as a part of the IWG’s commitment to publishing two Updates per year. While the Archdiocese is receiving fewer new reports of abuse, extensive work still remains to be done in order to better care for victims/survivors and increase awareness among all Catholics about clerical sexual abuse. Complacency can set in, but as a Church we cannot let that happen. Our goal is to put an end to clerical sexual abuse.

31 Recommendations

2019 Report on Clergy Sexual Abuse

<https://rcav.org/abuse-crisis/abuse-report/2019>

2020 Update Report on Clergy Sexual Abuse

<https://rcav.org/abuse-crisis/abuse-report/2020>

June 2021 Implementation Working Group Update

<https://rcav.org/abuse-crisis/abuse-report/2021-june>

You can find the full text of the original recommendations at rcav.org/abuse-crisis/abuse-report/2019#recommendations

Progress Made Since the June 2021 Update

Recommendation #1: Establishing a complaint Intake Office

The Office of Victims/Survivors Support began operating on July 20, 2020, and is operating in the Archdiocese and in three other dioceses around British Columbia. The process is regularly reviewed to ensure that it is victims/survivors centred.

Recommendation #2: Establishing an Archdiocesan Review Board

The new Review Board, composed of a majority of lay people (which includes members who have experienced abuse by a priest), has added new members. The Board now includes the following individuals:

- Suzanne Nixon, Chair
- Sarah Ruggier-Ching
- Lawrence Ho
- Cathy Lins
- Deacon Bruce Fraser
- Gwendolyn Allison
- Father Gary Franken
- Mary Margaret MacKinnon and Krystal Low (rotating legal representatives)

Recommendation #3: Training Archdiocesan speakers

Several people have now been trained to communicate appropriately on these matters.

Recommendations #8 and #9: Public celebration of offenders

The IWG continues to monitor this recommendation and welcomes reports about any awards, recognition or publication of clerical sexual abuse offenders.

Objectives Still Outstanding

Recommendation #4: Appointing independent resource person

At this time, archdiocesan staff are still filling the role of accompanying individuals who report abuse, based on victims/survivors preferences. A Victims/survivors Care Plan should be implemented before the next update in June 2022.

Recommendation #6: Central storage of sexual abuse files

The Archdiocese does not yet have access to files of all priests from religious communities who have served here, but more have been acquired since the last Update. We have asked the communities for all such files.

Recommendation #12: Revision of policies and procedures

Progress has been made on the development of a user-friendly summary of the reporting process. This information should be posted on-line in early 2022 and will be included in the next Update.

Recommendation #14: Safe Environment training

As the pandemic has allowed, the Safe Environment Coordinator has restarted training for staff, volunteers and parishioners at the parish level. More frequent training and education sessions at the parish and deanery levels are being planned for 2022.

Recommendation #15: Conducting clerical performance reviews

A working group composed of people experienced in pastoral work, business and human resources is being formed to implement an annual performance review system for priests in the Archdiocese. The initial Pastors will go through the process in 2022.

Recommendation #17: Clerical training

All priests are receiving regular training. The most recent was a workshop led by Dr. Deborah Rodriguez.

Recommendation #18: Training trauma-informed clerics

Fr. Bryan Duggan is now working in the Archdiocese as a psychologist. His Doctorate in Clinical Psychology will allow him to form a team of trauma-informed clerics.

Recommendation #20: Training clerics and seminarians

Several training sessions and related resources have been provided to seminarians and clerics in recent months. Ongoing human formation has been prioritized for 2022.

Recommendation #10: Conducting file reviews

A third-party review of archdiocesan files of all clerics, including priests from religious orders who served in the Archdiocese, had begun but was paused due to the pandemic.

Recommendation #23: Hosting listening sessions

Based on the model developed by the Diocese of Victoria, the Archdiocese of Vancouver is preparing for listening circles and educational sessions to begin once parishes are fully open after the pandemic.

Recommendation #24: Offering Liturgies of Healing and Reconciliation

The Archdiocese honoured All Survivors Day this year by supporting Victims/survivors led efforts locally. Additionally, a day in the Spring of 2022 is being selected for a focus on education and engagement at the Parish level.



Updates Section

Paul Blancard Update

Paul Blancard, formerly a priest in the Archdiocese of Vancouver, was profiled in the 2019 report and again in June of 2021. Recently, an additional person reporting abuse has joined the lawsuit brought forward in March of 2021; the case is currently before the courts.



clerk sexual abuse during a time horizon which is yet to be determined. While a priest was named, the Archdiocese has not received any additional complaints regarding this priest and people participating in this legal action will be able to name other clergy members. We will provide updates as the class is defined and the suit progresses.

Class Action Lawsuit Regarding Abuse at Vancouver College and St. Thomas More Collegiate

In 2021, the Archdiocese was served with a Notice of a Class Action lawsuit on behalf of any victims of sexual abuse by Christian Brothers who worked at

their two local high schools between the years of 1963 to present. Bro. Edward English was named as an accused and other brothers may be added. The action is currently before the courts, and we will provide updates as the suit progresses.

Additional Cases

Additional cases are in settlement discussions and/or have legal processes that are ongoing. We will not disclose the alleged offenders at this time out of respect for the victims/survivors' process. We hope to address these cases in the June 2022 report.

Class Action Lawsuit Regarding Clerical Sexual Abuse

In 2020, the Archdiocese was served with a Notice of a Class Action lawsuit on behalf of any victims of

Conclusion

We recognize that many situations experienced decades ago would be handled very differently if a report of sexual abuse were received today. Thanks to the work of the Case Review Committee and other groups engaged in this critical issue, the Archdiocese has been able to improve care for victims/survivors and implement better systems to create safer environments for everyone in our communities. As the pandemic winds down, we are also committed to more opportunities for educational sessions, including some with opportunities for victims/survivors to share their stories.

As an ongoing part of the work against clergy sexual abuse, the Archdiocese continues to encourage victims of abuse to come forward and report their experiences to the Office of Victims/Survivors Support which can be reached at (604) 363-7338 or at 1-800-968-3146. We thank the survivors who have spoken out. We recognize how much courage it takes and we appreciate their strength in shedding light on this history.

If you would like to share ideas regarding how we can better care for victims/survivors, please feel free to write us at CareForVS@rcav.org.

Helping priests listen to survivors

By Nicholas Elbers

At the centre of Dr. Deborah Rodríguez's ministry is a thankful appreciation for God's grace, a survivor's empathy, and the belief that both laity and priests need to develop the skills necessary to help them care for survivors of clerical sexual abuse who might come to the Church searching for healing.

Many people struggle to approach the topic of clerical abuse because of the painful feelings that it brings up. Part of the team at Hopeful Hearts Ministry near Seattle, Dr. Rodríguez works with laity and clergy to help them understand trauma so they can get past those feelings. In her ministry she works to give both clergy and laity a framework for approaching survivors of sexual abuse that is grounded in sound trauma science.

Rodríguez, who contributed to the book: *Abuse of Trust: Healing from Clerical Sexual Abuse*, gave a talk for priests in the Archdiocese of Vancouver in October to help them learn best practices for receiving survivors' stories of trauma.

Because of the stigma around trauma it can take time for priests to be comfortable discussing clerical abuse, she said. Their vocation can make it difficult for them to approach the topic



Adobe

Priests and other parish workers often don't have the skills or experience necessary to deal with survivors of clerical sexual abuse, says Dr. Deborah Rodríguez. "Survivors don't feel safe in a lot of church settings."

talk about it, especially when confronted with a victim, like she is.

"Once that a priest knows I am a survivor of clerical abuse, they go into protection mode," she told *The B.C. Catholic*. "There is always an emotional response - [they are] fearful perhaps." Because she is so familiar with priests' responses, she knows she has to "wait and acknowledge" that emotion from them.

Her approach to helping priests engage with and move past their discomfort is rooted in the same principles that guide her work with trauma survivors. She says everyone has experienced some kind of trauma in their past, and when she works with priests she is able to present herself as someone who has experienced pain and suffering, just like them. "Once this sameness becomes the foundation of

the conversation there is safety and we can move forward," she said.

When survivors of clerical sexual abuse come to a church looking for healing they often report being retraumatized by the experience. There are a variety of causes, but often it boils down to the fact that priests and other parish workers don't have the skills or experience necessary to deal with a traumatized individual.

"Survivors don't feel safe in a lot of church settings," Rodríguez said. When they disclose their story, "they often are retraumatized because priests and other religious are unfamiliar with how to help a survivor reveal a story."

Rodríguez has advice for those who want to learn to minister to trauma survivors and more fully manifest Christ in their lives. "All you do is receive the story first.

No one has to fix anything, no one has to be a counselor. You just receive it and sit with it for a while. You sit there with it, then [simply say] 'thank you for sharing that,' then 'what can I do, how can I help?'"

To make the first contact a "safe" experience that leads to healing she recommends using a simple mnemonic device called V.E.E.E.L. Validate, Empathize, Empower, Explain, and Leave the door open.

Some simple phrases and questions illustrate each step of the process: Validate: "I have heard you, thank you for sharing your story with me." Empathize: "I want to understand how you are feeling / I have to be honest, this makes me feel sad/angry/frustrated." Empower: "I admire your courage. How can I help you?" Explain: "This is what I know/what I can do/what I cannot do." Leave the door open: "I will be here for you / I will keep you in my prayers."

The goal is to create an environment of safety, which is the most important thing Rodríguez wants people to understand about dealing with people who have suffered trauma. Accepting their stories without judgment or critique goes a long way to helping them feel comfortable, which in turn puts them on the road to healing. □

When trauma has damaged your sense of God

By Nicholas Elbers

The latest addition to the Archdiocese of Vancouver's Review Board on clerical sexual abuse cases brings not just her background as a survivor of clerical abuse, but her professional experience working on mental health and homelessness.

Cathy Lins' two areas of expertise, which include collaboration with U.S. federal agencies, will be of special value to the board, given that survivors of abuse from Canada's residential school system often find them-



Cathy Lins

selves homeless in places like Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Lins is founder of Gather My

Sheep, a Wisconsin-based Catholic ministry helping abuse victims find a path back to the Church. In a 2020 interview with *The National Catholic Register*, Lins said "research shows that when people are in distress, church is the first place they turn ... Unfortunately, many parishes aren't equipped to support those dealing with psychological trauma. I've heard many horror stories of the hurtful treatment people have received at their local parish."

As a result, they turn to yoga, nature, "anything but Jesus

Christ and his Church."

It's because of those traumatic incidents that Lins felt inspired to help churches become places of healing. Speaking with *The B.C. Catholic*, Lins recounted a prayer she offered after a speaking engagement where she encountered an overwhelming number of such negative stories. "Lord, there is a reason why you wanted me to see this. You wanted me to see the suffering of your people ... How do we make sure that [your] Church actually works as a healing place?"

Helping Catholics and priests

become truly welcoming isn't a problem of will or desire. Many churches train missionaries to go out and welcome people into relationship with Christ. But a common theme emerges when they encounter people with mental illness: "They come back and say, 'we don't know what to do.'"

Lins believes the simplest and best way for Christians to get better at ministering to those with mental health problems is to get "mental health first aid training." The intention is not to save people, but to stabilize them, Continued on Page 13

Canon law revisions on sexual abuse 'a major improvement'

By B.C. Catholic Staff

Canon law experts in the Archdiocese of Vancouver are welcoming changes to Church legislation that respond with a more victim-centred approach to sexual abuse of children by members of the Church.

The revisions to Book VI of the Code of Canon Law take effect Dec. 8, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and were announced May 31 through Pope Francis' apostolic constitution *Pascite gregem Dei* ("Tend the Flock of God"). The changes were first commissioned by Pope Benedict XVI to improve the effectiveness of the code's penalties for sexual abuse.

The new law says crimes of sexual abuse against minors and vulnerable persons are "offences against human life, dignity, and liberty" rather than breaches of priestly celibacy, as the previous legislation stated.

The revisions, which also provide for canonical penalties for abuse committed by consecrated religious and lay persons in Church leadership positions, are "a major improvement," said canon lawyer Msgr. Gregory Smith.

Canonists from across Canada and around the world agree "the changes to the law are welcome and will help the Church re-



Lynda Robitaille

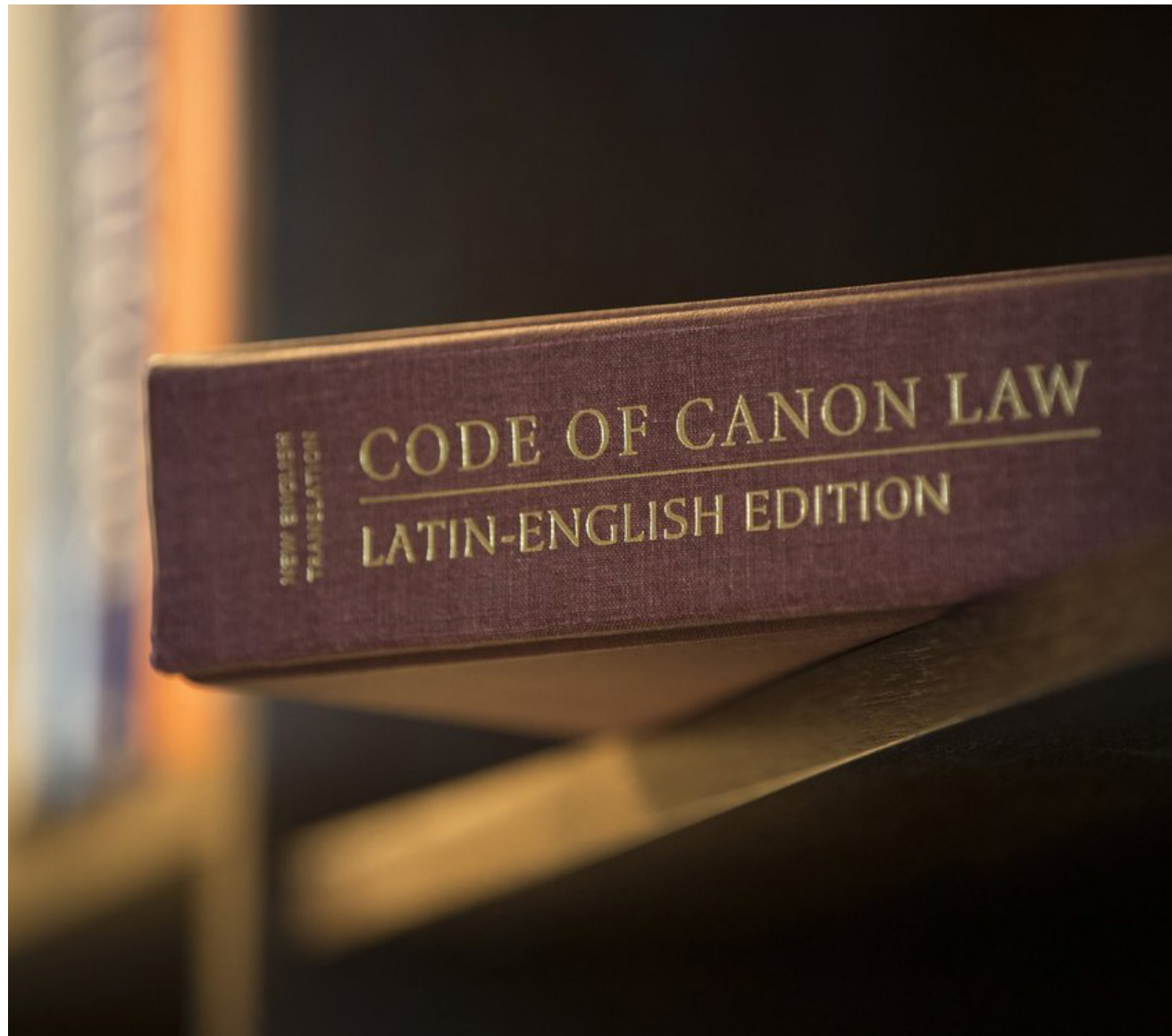


Msgr. Gregory Smith

spond effectively" to abuse in the Church, said Msgr. Smith.

"The innovations reflect not only recent experience with abuse cases but also the new roles of the laity in Church leadership and administration."

Dr. Lynda Robitaille, Dean of Theology at St. Mark's College and the new president of the Canon Law Society of America, said establishing that sexual



GNS photo/Nancy Phelan Wiechec

Changes to the Church's Code of Canon Law provide penalties for sexual abuse not only by priests but religious and lay people in Church leadership.

abuse crimes are not only committed by priests and against minors is "an important focus" of the new law.

The revised law pro-

vides canonical sanctions for abuse crimes not only with a minor but also "with a person who habitually has an imperfect use of reason or with one to whom the law recognizes equal protection."

The revised law provides penalties not only for clergy who commit sexual abuse but also "a member of an institute of consecrated life or of a society of apostolic life, or any one of the faithful who enjoys a dignity or performs an office or function in the Church."

In a recent presentation to U.S. bishops, Archbishop Charles Scicluna, who also serves as Adjunct Secretary for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, indicated local diocesan bishops will be responsible for treating allegations of clerical sexual misconduct

with a vulnerable adult as a canonical crime and prosecuting them as strictly as sexual abuse of minors.

Offences could include coercive sexual harassment of seminarians by priests or formators as well as sexual contact between a priest and someone employed by them or under their pastoral care. "Such cases of clerical sexual misconduct with adults have previously been treated as moral failure, but not canonical crimes," Robitaille said.

The Canon Law Society of America expressed gratitude for the revisions, saying the changes were needed.

"This reinvigoration of canon law is a welcome necessity to our member canonists' work on behalf of the Church and will be, as the Holy Father says, an instrument for the good of

souls," said Msgr. C. Michael Padazinski, former president of the canon law society.

The revised Book VI was announced on Monday, May 31, through Pope Francis' apostolic constitution *Pascite gregem Dei* ("Tend the Flock of God"). The revisions were first commissioned by Pope Benedict XVI to improve the efficacy of the code's penal sanctions.

Father Joseph Le, the Judicial Vicar for the Archdiocese, Father Mark Gazin of the Marriage Tribunal, Deacon Bruce Fraser of the Archdiocesan Review Board, and Msgr. Smith have been taking part in webinars on the revised penal law presented by St. Paul University's canon law faculty.

With Catholic News Agency files. □

Continued from Page 12

mentally, so they can get the professional help they might need.

The training focuses on a few core ideas that might be familiar to people with CPR training, including doing a harm assessment by asking, "Is this person a danger to themselves or others?"

In mental health, watching your own mental state, or co-regulating, is important because people react to others' emotions. "If [you are] angry and upset the other person will respond in kind," she

said. "You need to bring your emotions down, [bring] your voice and volume down."

Beyond mental health, there are spiritual problems to be tackled as well, Lins said. These issues can be especially acute among survivors of clerical abuse. "Because of their trauma, their sense of God has been damaged."

The sacraments can be especially difficult. Lins recounted how it took time for her to be comfortable with the sacrament of reconciliation, sometimes feeling as though she was

being locked in a small room with one of her past tormentors.

In a more positive recollection, Lins described working with a priest who would remove his clerical collar so she would feel more comfortable.

When people are taught to understand the symptoms and realities of mental illness, it helps to destigmatize their problems, Lins said, and by understanding what is happening when someone is in emotional distress, there is less getting in the way of loving them. □