



Roman Catholic Diocese of Victoria

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MEMO

Date: December 15, 2022
To: Clergy, Religious, Parishes, Schools and Staff
From: Bishop Gary Gordon
Re: Recent news of sexual abuse lawsuit

The CBC published a story today¹ regarding a woman who recently settled a lawsuit over alleged childhood sexual abuse by Fr. Gerhard Hartmann, while he was a priest serving at St. Peter's Parish in Nanaimo in the 1970s. This news is undoubtedly distressing for victim-survivors of sexual abuse, whom we want to assure of our support.

This news also affects all members of the clergy, parishioners, and indeed the whole Diocese, causing reactions of pain, anger, and perhaps shame, as Catholic followers of Christ. We recognize that this information may be difficult for people to hear, but may also provide an opportunity for other victim-survivors to come forward so that, in the light of truth, there may be healing and justice.

Although we are not able to discuss the details of this case, several years ago the Diocese of Victoria began concrete steps to provide a victim-based approach when allegations come forward. The Diocese has instituted an independent reporting process² and a Responsible Ministry program³ to screen all members of the clergy, volunteers, and employees, and create protocols to ensure safe environments for children and the vulnerable.

The decision to come forward and report sexual abuse by clergy, religious, employees, or volunteers may be difficult and often requires considerable courage. To assist with this process, the Diocese of Victoria provides an Independent Reporting Agency service managed by a team of psychologists, counsellors, and social workers.

If a person decides to involve the Diocese in their healing plan, the Church will welcome and respond to the person with trust, charity, and compassion. The process for a pastoral encounter includes compassionate listening, acknowledgment of the person's courage in coming forward, affirmation and recognition of the hurt caused, reassurance that it is never the victim-survivor's fault, expression of deep remorse and sorrow on our part, and ultimately, empowerment. The Diocese will, at the victim-survivor's direction, provide pastoral support, and healing resources for that person and their family.

In the spring of this year, an independent agent was contracted to conduct a review of historical clergy files to identify known allegations of misconduct to better respond to victim-survivors and allegations.

The Advent season heralds the dawning of the light of Christ which dispels all darkness, and is always an invitation to draw ever closer to Christ for healing and peace. We pray that those who have suffered sexual abuse and their families will find some peace and healing from past wrongs, and that all of us may experience and participate in God's mercy this holy season.

1. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/b-c-woman-settles-lawsuit-over-alleged-childhood-sexual-abuse-by-catholic-priest-during-confession-1.6686647>

2. *Sexual abuse by a clergy member, religious brother or sister, or Church employee or volunteer, may be reported to the independent reporting service Boyd & Associates at 1-800-968-3146. Sexual abuse or cover-up by a Bishop may be reported to the independent professional ethics firm ClearView at 1-866-892-3737.*

3. <https://www.rcdvictoria.org/responsible-ministry>