



DIOCESE OF GRAND RAPIDS

OFFICE OF PASTORAL SERVICES | OFICINA DE SERVICIOS PASTORALES

PASTORAL RESOURCES IN RESPONSE TO SEXUAL ABUSE

The recent reports of past allegations of sexual abuse by clergy and the cover-up within the hierarchy of the Church place all of you, as ministers of the Church, in a graced position as parents and parishioners approach you for assistance. If they have not seen [Bishop Walkowiak's letter](#) addressing this scandal, please share it with them.

Here is a **quick compilation of resources** for you to consider using in addressing parent/parishioner concerns, for use on your parish website or social media, and for developing any meetings or times for prayer.

Parents

- [The Clerical Sex Abuse Scandal: What Parents Can Do & How to Talk to Your Kids](#) Jerry Windley-Daoust, Peanut Butter and Grace
- [Practical Advice for Parents on Preventing Child Sexual Abuse](#) (PDF) Virtus

Youth

- [A Listening Session for Teens on Sexual Abuse by Priests](#) Saint Mary's Press (This session allows young people in a school or parish to gather in a safe and trusting place to voice their feelings, thoughts, and concerns in light of the recent publicity of sexual abuse by priests.)
- [Addressing Clergy Sexual Abuse and Cover Up](#) article by Lily Hannan, Life Teen

Prayer

- [Prayer for Healing Victims of Abuse](#) United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- [Prayers and Intercessions from the Day of Prayer for Survivors and Victims of Sexual Abuse](#) Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference
- [A Novena of Saints for a Church in Crisis](#) Meg Hunter-Kilmer, PiercedHands.com
- [Liturgy and Prayer Resources](#) Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions

En Español

- [Caminen en la Luz - Una Respuesta Pastoral al Abuso Sexual de Menores](#) United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- [10 consejos para prevenir el abuso sexual en niños](#) Eres Mama
- [Consejos a los padres y madres para la prevención del abuso sexual en sus hijos/as](#) Fundación ANAR

Note, these links are provided solely for the specific resources related to responding to this situation. Providing this link does not necessarily endorse the website, its content, or sponsoring organizations. Please use the resources as you best see fit.

Expressing Empathy

As you respond to questions or concerns, please be especially aware of the pain of those who may have children or who themselves may have experienced abuse.

“Silenced. Hidden. Humiliation. Shamed. In the shadows. Guilty. Alone. Isolated. Scared. Fearful. These are just some of the words that victims have used to describe how they feel. Of course, there are many who are thriving among us - not afraid, using their voice and gifts freely. [But] most victims are mortified at the thought that someone will find out they were sexually abused.” (from Virtus.org)

Our desire to convey what we have done to create a safe environment in our parishes and schools may step over what parents and parishioners may be trying to communicate to us. Expressing empathy is done by putting any parent or parishioner in the center of your attention (not your program/ministry) and using words, phrases and terms that acknowledge the awful, lifetime effects of abuse.

Promise to Protect

When parents do inquire about the safety precautions to protect children and young people from abuse within the parish faith formation and youth ministry programs, compassionately assure them that your parish (and school) has created a *culture of awareness* throughout the entire Catholic community. Please share with them that since 2002 the following requirements have been implemented. All parish employees and volunteers, including clergy, who have contact with children and young people must:

- attend the Virtus – Protecting God’s Children Program
- agree to compliance with the Standards for Ministerial Behavior
- undergo criminal history background checks

These intentional efforts, along with monthly Virtus training bulletins for staff, provide your parish with the most comprehensive tools available to monitor programs for children and youth.

Healthy Ministry

Just as important as it is to care for those in our parishes and communities, it is also important to remember self-care. If you or someone you know who works for the Church needs information, support, or resources regarding stress and trauma, we invite you to visit “[Self-Care for Healthy Ministry](#)” resource pages from the Catholic Apostolate Center. There, you can find resources from SLIconnect, the education ministry of Saint Luke Institute.

Another aspect of self-care is to find another trusted adult with whom you can work through your own thoughts and feelings about the current situation in the Church. Depending on your own circumstances, the person who will be most helpful may be a colleague, a spiritual director or a therapist.

Prayer

Please pray for those who have been abused and their families and as you do, please be mindful that each of them has a name, spoken at baptism and called by God. While we may or may not know them personally, they are not a category to be prayed for, but rather a beloved, wounded child of God.

Pray for our Church and her leadership who may carry their own personal pain; again, not a category. There will continue to be difficult days, weeks and months ahead for all Catholics as we seek answers to our questions. Do not be discouraged. The Holy Spirit has been promised to the Church by Christ himself, and we know firsthand of his love and his sacrifice for each one of us and for his bride: the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church (Eph. 5:25b-27). Allegations will be investigated; answers will be forthcoming. We pray to the Lord, whose words are truth and life, that the truth will come to light and ultimately, through this process Christ will lead our Church to a better place.