

MINISTRY IN THE MIDST OF THE SEXUAL ABUSE ALLEGATIONS

We who are called to the service of God and the work of the Church never expected to face the tragedy of sexual abuse by clergy or the reports of flawed handling of these cases over many years. Clergy, deacons, catechists, pastoral ministers, secretaries, teachers and others all find themselves facing national attention on this problem of increasing magnitude as it touches our daily lives.

Everyone who works in the Church is affected by these tragedies. In addition to your own feelings, you are confronted with the reactions of family members, neighbors, and parishioners, as well as the daily media coverage. You may wonder how what you read and hear can have happened in the Church you serve. You may also wonder where and how all this will end and how the Church will be changed by it. Feelings such as shock, betrayal, embarrassment, shame, anxiety, fear, sadness and frustration can be overwhelming. At a time like this, these are normal reactions. It is important to recognize them, express them and to understand that each person will have a different sequence of feelings at any given time. Painful feelings include:

Anxiety... about when and how all this will be resolved, fears of being accused yourself, worries about the financial implications for the church and its charitable works, concern for the priesthood and effective ministry.

Anger... at being questioned by others simply because you work in the Church, about the media coverage, about the course of the investigations, about people losing sight of the vast good that is done because of their focus on the actions of some of the clergy.

Sadness... about the suffering of victims, about the failure of some leaders to prevent or limit the harm done, about the tarnishing of the Church and priesthood, about the loss of trust and faith for some parishioners.

Fear and Frustration... about the scope and magnitude of the problems and a sense of helplessness about what can happen next.

Confusion... about what the truth of this situation is, about how to minister at a time like this, about how to influence the Church's response.

WHAT HELPS

- Recognize and accept your feelings no matter what they are.
- Talk about your feelings with others who understand your concerns.
- Pray for the strength and wisdom to minister to all those affected by this crisis.
- Invite your parishioners to tell you how you can help them at this time.

- Rely on persons and activities that give you support and a sense of stability.
- Pay attention to when hearing more about this issue is helpful to you and when you need to take a break from thinking about it.
- Identify ways you can convey to Church leaders your thoughts and feelings about how the Church can renew itself as a result of this crisis.
- Reflect on the sources of hope for our faith and the Church.

CHRISTIAN HOPE

- The Church we serve cannot be destroyed by this crisis. In this difficult time, the Church has been given an opportunity for renewal and redemption.
- As painful as this process is, many victims who have suffered alone with their burden are now able to come forward to get the support and help they need.
- Christ promised to remain with us always—through the most difficult of times. Throughout history, despite struggles with heresy, corruption, and violence, the Church has faced painful truths and renewed itself. God has never abandoned the Church over the past two thousand years in spite of flawed, fallible human leaders. With God's help, we can face the challenges this situation calls for and renew our Church.