

SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE CHURCH: TRAGEDY AND CRISIS

Day after day the print and electronic media report new allegations against priests and bishops regarding child sexual abuse. When bad things happen to good people and good people are accused of doing bad things, we feel like our world has been turned upside down.

We feel a sense of shock and betrayal at the scope and magnitude of the crisis. A sense of helplessness can set in as we wonder when the allegations and investigations will ever end. We are not sure how we can influence the Church's response to all this. In addition, these events come at a time when most Americans feel an increased sense of insecurity about our personal safety and the safety of our nation.

Intense and painful feelings often are present in times of crisis and tragedy. It is important to realize that these feelings are normal and will pass in time. It is also important to understand that not everyone will have the same feelings at the same time. Typical reactions include:

SHOCK AND BETRAYAL...How can I trust those who work in the Church? I need people that I can trust and believe in.

SADNESS...Grief for the suffering of the victims and the suffering of the Church.

ANXIETY...A loss of a sense of safety and security. First 9/11 and now this, what can we count on?

ANGER...How could people dedicated to God betray the trust of children? How could those in charge fail to keep them from harming others later on?

EMBARRASSMENT...Having a sacred part of your life embroiled in a public scandal feels shameful and humiliating.

WORRIES...About the future of the Church, about the effects of all this on our parish, about whether things will get worse before they get better.

WHAT HELPS?

- Recognize and accept your feelings no matter what they are.
- Talk about your feelings with others who understand your concerns.
- Bring your thoughts and feelings to God in prayer.
- Rely on persons and activities that give you support and a sense of stability.
- Pay attention to your needs. Doing so can be helpful in maintaining your own mental and emotional well being. Take a break from thinking or dealing with this sad issue as a way of steadying yourself.
- Talk to your pastoral staff about what you believe will help you, the Church and your parish.
- 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, as in times past, 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 spiritual and psychological help that 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.