

Archbishop Smith pledges to work toward restoring trust broken by sex abuse

Trust in the Catholic Church has been broken in the wake of horrific reports of clergy sex abuse, but that trust can be restored, Edmonton Archbishop Richard Smith.

“As a bishop, I share in the pain and shame of that betrayal. I feel that and I’m sure every bishop feels that,” Smith told reporters Oct. 10.

Smith said the Archdiocese will be reviewing its own practices and protocols in light of updated and expanded national abuse prevention guidelines set by the Conference of Catholic Bishops at their plenary meeting last week.

Canada’s bishops have pledged to implement the 69 recommendations in the abuse prevention guidelines, updating From Pain to Hope, which was unique when it was created in 1992.

The new national guidelines outline a strict system of accountability and transparency. Responding to complaints, for example, includes an immediate call to police if the abuse involves children, and any investigation involves lay people to prevent any hint of cover-up.

“This means that as a bishop, I am accountable to other bishops, to the people I serve, and to the public,” Archbishop Smith said. “If we receive a credible and substantiated allegation of abuse, I will act on it immediately.”

The new guidelines, made public Oct. 4, focus on healing for victims and repairing the damage done to both the Church and society. They also come on the heels of a Pennsylvania grand jury report that exposed decades of abuse and cover-up by Church leaders and forced the resignation of American Cardinal Theodore McCarrick.

“I think people want to see concrete protocols – policies, they want to see evidence of commitment, not just to prevention but also to the way that we’re going to respond sensitively, decisively, clearly to allegations,” said Smith. “How we walk with people to help them to heal.”

Smith announced new measures in the Edmonton Archdiocese to restore that trust.

Victims of sexual abuse who receive compensation or counselling will not be asked to sign confidentiality agreements or be held to any such agreements signed in the past.

And, pending a review that's underway right now, the names of any priests who have served in the Archdiocese who have been accused with credible and substantiated allegations of abuse, will be made public on the Archdiocese website.



Father Peter Hung Cong Tran

Archbishop Smith also announced that Father Peter Hung Cong Tran, a priest in Calgary who formerly served in Edmonton, is accused of sexual misconduct and has been removed from ministry.

Tran was pastor of Queen of Martyrs, Edmonton's Vietnamese parish, from 2007 to 2016. He was also associate pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Vancouver, where the alleged abuse took place, from 1998 to 2003.

The investigation is ongoing.

At least six priests who have served in the Edmonton Archdiocese have been charged and convicted of sexual misconduct or abuse in the past, with crimes dating back to the 1960s. The most recent one was in the 1980s.

The Archdiocese receives about three calls per month reporting abuse, not necessarily about clergy and not necessarily sexual, said Teresa Kellendonk, the director of pastoral care who is in charge of investigating abuse complaints.



Teresa Kellendonk

To prevent abuse, every employee or volunteer in the Archdiocese – up to and including Archbishop Smith himself – has been required to take training through Praesidium, an international abuse prevention consultancy. Since 2011, over 10,000 people including priests, deacons, seminarians, staff and volunteers have received that training.

Next week, priests and lay people in the Archdiocese will also be receiving more in-depth training on how to investigate cases of abuse.

“It rests on all of us to prevent abuse,” Kellendonk said. “So the protocols we have in place, the abuse prevention training that we have been participating in for the last seven years with all of our volunteers and our parishes, nobody gets a free ride. No bishop, no priest, no volunteer.”

“This commitment that we have in the Archdiocese to preventing abuse, working with victims, gaining as much knowledge as we can, that will always continue.”



Father Stephen Hero

That commitment also includes students studying to become priests at St. Joseph Seminary, which requires a criminal record check and psychological evaluation before they begin their studies and abuse prevention training in their first year.

“Human formation is making them good, healthy human beings,” said Father Stephen Hero, the rector of St. Joseph Seminary. “If there is a conviction on record of sexual abuse of anyone, they would absolutely not be admitted.”

Anyone who may be aware of instances of sexual misconduct or abuse is encouraged to bring the information forward to the police as well as the Archdiocese at 1-877-770-6777.