

Healing The Wound of Child Sexual Abuse

A Church Response

*A report from a
Working Party to
The Bishops'
Conference of
England and Wales*

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PREFACE

In taking on the brief given to the working party by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales to investigate how the Church can best offer care and support in the matter of child sexual abuse, there were two preliminary questions that had to be faced before we could begin to draw up any guidelines. The first was to be clear why we were being asked by the Church to take on this work. The second question was the style of presentation to adopt.

Why had the Bishops' Conference asked us to make this study?

It had come as a recommendation in *Child Abuse: Pastoral and Procedural Guidelines 1994*¹ which had itself come about because of the recent scandals revealed in the public failure of several priests and official church workers who were guilty of child sexual abuse. These scandals put the question of child sexual abuse at the forefront of people's minds. In church circles the question was strongly focused on the failure of the shepherd. How could this come to happen? What was wrong? How do we stop it? Society in general was also rightly critical of these heinous failures, but in the reality of sexual abuse these public failures in the church were very few. The vast majority of known abuse comes from within the immediate family circle. Our problem was to avoid seeming to be responding solely to the 'Church scandal' and not trying to address the whole question of sexual abuse in families, many of which are in the Christian community and Catholic.

It was very difficult not to focus on a response brought about because the Church had been seen, in some of its ministers, to have failed publicly. The working party has striven not to do this. We have endeavoured to face the whole question of abuse and not restrict ourselves to cases where the abuse was committed by an official representative of the Church. Our report comes from a commitment that abuse is sinful and the Church must and will oppose sin wherever it comes to light. When it has come to light within the very heart of the Church it has not been easy to understand or respond in a pastoral and healing way. It is true that people in the Church have made errors of judgement and acted in a manner that has been more a reaction to the shame than to the hurt of victims. The working party see their work as part of the Church's response and growth in facing an evil which has deep rooted effects on those who suffer it and also affects all who are in any way part of the victim's life. While this is our stated intention, we did not find it easy, and it may read at times, as though our concern was triggered by the priest abuser. For many people in the Church community the fact of abuse by a priest sounds like the worst possible scenario, but in fact for the victim abuse by anyone is destructive, leaving profound pain and the need for compassionate and sensitive help. The Church cannot help in a pastoral role until we have ourselves come to understand this.

This was something the working party were made aware of right at the beginning of their work, and it took 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' before we were able to go forward.

The second question we needed to address at the beginning of our work was that of language and the shape of our report.

Where technical or professional terms are used we have explained them, either in the immediate text or in the Glossary, but our report is not a text book or manual. It was never intended to be such. A pastoral response must use pastoral language and in doing so may be open to criticism from both those who want accurate defining language, and those who reject the metaphors used. The metaphor we have used is the one of a wound. We have referred to the whole question of abuse as a wound²: in

¹ Report from a working party to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales 1994, 39 Eccleston Square, SW1V 1BX

² Having opted for this metaphor the Working Party were encouraged to find it later already in use in a book *Healing Hidden Memories*, Mary J Williams 1991

different ways and degrees all are hurt and in a sense wounded by child abuse. The victim's wound is unique but it was important to underline the effects that child sexual abuse has on those who have knowledge of it and are struggling to make some response. So we have put our response to this knowledge into two categories. The first we term **Preparing to Heal the Wound** – facing the reality. The second we term **Healing the Wound**.

This device enabled us to identify the process and stages of moving from victim through to survivor. Many survivors see themselves as moving on even further to being a thriver. It also enabled us to look at each category of our brief ('victims/survivors of abuse, together with families and other social groups affected, including colleagues of abusers') and identify their needs and progress. Part of any good pastoral practice is to be sensitive to the different rates of progress and also the different needs depending on just where and how one is 'wounded' by someone's sinful, abusing and criminal acts. This metaphor has grown and been pruned back in the course of our work. We recognise it for what it is, a device, a tool, a way of coming to grips with very complex issues: we acknowledge that there are other metaphors that could have been used, or other ways of approaching the whole question. For us, this was the one that enabled us to find our way.

This is the second working party to complete its work for the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales on the subject of child sexual abuse. The first report covered the response and good practice in the event of a case of sexual abuse coming to light. It dealt with the crime and Church responsibility.

This report deals with the victim/survivor and the Church's responsibility towards them as innocent and sinned against and needing pastoral support to grow.

The working party have not drawn up a list of recommendations; this was considered but rejected. The document is seen as more than a handy reference guide, and it was felt that the main purpose of being educative and helping to develop a deeper understanding of the pain involved, to hear the prophetic voice of the victims and promote dialogue, was better served by inviting the readers to draw their own conclusions and determine their response.

The abuser was not in our brief. It is right that there is an order of priorities and for the victim/survivor to be high in that order. In the course of our deliberations it became more and more clear that the question of the abuser must be addressed. Complete healing will include the concept of forgiveness. How do we heal completely if the abuser never genuinely asks for forgiveness? How can the abuser be healed if genuine forgiveness is never requested? How can the abuser be said to be healed at all?

This report is due to the Bishops of England and Wales: it came about from their desire to be true shepherds. They have publicly proclaimed this desire:

We need to become a Church more conscious of our own needs for repentance... Whatever our past failures, our lives can be recreated. We know all too well that this is a costly process; forgiveness is not easy or painless. Christ's risen body still carries the mark of his wounds. If we are willing to seek the risen, wounded Lord, we and our world can be transformed.³

This report, offering care and support, is a tangible sign of that desire. It is in this spirit that we present it.

+ *Terence Brain*

Terence Brain
Chairman of the Working Party

³ Extracts from a meditation that came from the Bishops of England and Wales at their meeting at Cricklade, September 1995.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Origin of our Brief

The sexual abuse of children is a reprehensible act directed at a most vulnerable member of our society.

These are the first words of the conclusion of a paper on *The Sexual Abuse of Children* accepted by the Catholic Bishops' Conference Department for Christian Responsibility and Citizenship in November 1992. Following the same report, the Bishops of England and Wales asked for more specific guidelines for dioceses on the procedures to be adopted in cases of alleged abuse by a priest or other persons whose work gave them a position of responsibility in the Church. This report *Child Abuse: Pastoral and Procedural Guidelines*, was adopted in April 1994. The report re-emphasised that the welfare of the child is paramount in any allegation and that the Church must work more closely with Child Protection Teams and other professionals when dealing with the sexual abuse of children.

In November 1993 the Bishops asked for further advice on how the Church could best offer care and support to victims/survivors of abuse, families and other groups and individuals affected by abuse. This working party began in February 1994 and has met on many occasions since then.

1.2 The Purpose of this Document

This present document goes beyond procedures, guidelines and the need for good practice in seeking to address the issue of the sexual abuse of children. It is relatively easy to state that the sexual abuse of children is both sinful and a crime. However, it is difficult to find words to express the extent of hurt and damage caused by *sexual abuse in the lives of children (both when they are children and in later life). This document is not solely concerned with abuse by clerics, although this can have very particular repercussions. The Bishops of England and Wales are conscious of this, and are making use of the *Pastoral and Procedural Guidelines* in dealing with allegations of abuse in their dioceses. Allegations should be able to be dealt with thoroughly, promptly and effectively.

This report is not a handbook for therapists. It is not a training manual. It is a resource which underlines the need for both therapy and training. Above all it is a call to everyone in the Church to:

- appreciate the depth of pain in the lives of those who suffer
- listen carefully to those who are victims and survivors and acknowledge their prophetic voice in the Church
- promote open dialogue about child sexual abuse in the Church
- activate pastoral resources

*When there is an asterix * in the text, then please refer to the Glossary at the back of the Report.*

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It is hoped that more Catholics will acknowledge the reality of child sexual abuse within the communities in which they live, and become more competent and confident in responding to the needs of victims and survivors. They will then be able to take the initiative in promoting a frank dialogue within the church about how parishes are to become healing communities. It is not envisaged that parishes will become *therapeutic communities but that the struggle and pain of people can be openly acknowledged by the parish.

One implication of this is that each one of us can become more aware of the needs of those abused and use our own individual and collective resources to respond to them. Abuse affects everyone in different ways. No two stories are the same and each person has to be accepted as a unique person.

It is unlikely that there is anyone in the Church who has not heard or read about the sexual abuse of children, and the way it has affected the lives of so many people. Yet there are still many people in the Church who are not fully aware of the profound and frightening effects of child sexual abuse. Some find it difficult if not impossible to appreciate the reality of abuse. Others suggest that individuals and communities should 'pull themselves together' and that those involved 'make too much of it all'. This reaction, itself a further 'abuse', is an indication of how difficult we find the subject of sexual abuse. The pain felt by the abused person is quite unique. Nevertheless the qualitatively different hurt, which affects others in the family and the community, is real.

The abuse of a single individual affects the whole Church, though the effects within the Church community present special difficulties when the abuser is a priest. Without in any way downplaying the uniquely terrible experience of victims and survivors, we have to say that the Church too is wounded at every level – some Church leaders feel traumatised, many priests are demoralised and feel deskilled, all parish communities are shocked, some parishioners have ceased to practise their faith, an increasing number of individuals are in great psychological and spiritual pain.

2 THE WOUND

2.1 Introduction

When we face the sexual abuse of children, we are close to the roots of the Gospel message to respect the uniqueness of every single person in the world. At the very heart of the Gospel is Jesus' command to love and so to cast out fear and anxiety. We are asked to take particular care of children:

Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. (Mk 10:14).

The failure to nurture children or the use of adult power to abuse them in any way, is to create destructive fear and anxiety which results in long lasting emotional, spiritual and sometimes physical damage.

It is likely that the disciples of Jesus were surprised when:

he took a little child and set it in front of them, and said: "Anyone who welcomes one of these little children in my name, welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me".

(Mk 9:36-37)

They were probably surprised because he was talking to them about power. They had been arguing among themselves about which of them was the greatest, and his dramatic setting down of the child in their midst was a way of getting to the root of the problem of their yearning for power. Jesus was challenging them to realise that it is the little ones, the innocent ones, who show us how to stand before God. The attitude of Jesus towards children is a fundamental statement about power and about respect for the vulnerable. It is the task of the Church to continue working and speaking on behalf of children, particularly those who are not able to speak for themselves.

This report is particularly conscious of the sexual abuse of children in a Church context, although that is not its only preoccupation. There are quite specific problems for victims when the abuse has additional complexities because it takes place in association with religious symbols, or when victims are trying to grow in their Christian faith. So much of the symbolism, music, ritual, worship and sacramental life is contaminated as a result of this previous experience of abuse. The reality of abuse can also raise questions for the Church about worship, reconciliation and community.

2.2 The Child

When I was a child, I used to talk like a child, and think like a child, and argue like a child... (1 Cor 13:11)

It belongs to the essence of childhood to be open, trusting, dependent, ready to learn and be formed as well as to need total nurturing which not only characterises the child, but also models the relationship of every Christian to a loving God.

Children will naturally trust adults who are close to them. Any sexual exploitation by an older person destroys that trust and places a huge obstacle in the way of the child's normal development. This is true whether the perpetrator is a relative by blood or marriage, family friend, member of the clergy, teacher, baby sitter or anyone else. The child's world becomes unsafe, confusing and frightening. **The child⁴ is never responsible for sexual abuse and is legally incapable of ever giving consent to being abused.**

It seems that in the vast majority of cases⁵ the abuser is well known to the victim. We are taught from earliest childhood that our closest relations and friends are to be trusted. It is also evident that abusers are extraordinarily skilled at ensuring that there is something 'very special' and secret about the abuse, and that only harm will come to the child if anyone else is informed. The child can be completely bound by the demand of secrecy from the abusing adult, which makes it impossible to contemplate breaking the secrecy and talking to another adult.

Power and control are critical factors for those who sexually abuse children. The abuser exercises unyielding control over the child. The child can be coerced and brought under control through simple requests and demands. The child can even feel a sense of safety and pleasure while the relationship is being established and may not perceive the subtle reality of *'grooming'*. The child may well enjoy the special attention in what appears to be 'affection'. Regardless of whether the child enjoys it or whether or not it is affectionate, – it is abusive. The child is caught in a confusing web of mixed messages and is unable to find any way out. The child lacks autonomy and independence and yields to the power of the adult. This experience can disable the growing young person from developing mature inter-relational skills.

The feelings of shame and personal disgust that accompany the events may be a large part of the eventual damage. Many victims find it extremely difficult, if not far beyond their ability, to describe the actions and events they have experienced.

There are many reasons why a child cannot tell of abuse, for example:

- The child is threatened:
 - 'You will be taken away'
 - 'You will never see your mother/father again'
 - 'The family will be broken up' etc
- The child is threatened with death
- The child is bribed
- The child is told that God will punish him/her
- The child is afraid that no one will believe the story
- The child has lost the capacity to trust anyone because of the abuse
- The abuser is in a parental role, and therefore very powerful
- The child is tricked by false reassurances
- The child is made to feel that this is 'special'
- The child has no language to describe what has happened
- The child may not even be sure that what has happened is 'wrong'
- The child thinks it is normal for this to happen
- The child is made to feel wicked
- The child feels responsible, guilty and ashamed
- The child is so traumatised that the seriousness of the events are not grasped
- The child is made to believe that s/he 'asked for', 'wanted' and 'liked' the abuse

4 The Children Act 1989 recognises that this pertains to young people up to the age of 18.

*5 75- 80% – according to Rev Stephen Rosetti in *Slayer of the Soul* p10.*

- The child feels guilty and deserving of punishment for what s/he is made to perceive as consensual.

This all leads to terrible confusion within the child. Many children who are abused grow up feeling that they are responsible for the abuse, and that it is their fault. Some feel they are being punished for something they do not understand. Others feel that they are simply bad children. It is terrifying for children to come to believe that they are being 'cared for' by a 'bad' person. Their experience of abuse totally undermines their security. It should not be too surprising, therefore, that children decide that it is they themselves who are 'bad' and not the adults. Children can even continue to love those who have hurt them.

The tragedy for these children is that the security and capacity for affection that everyone needs as a basis for learning to love are fundamentally damaged. If the child is abused by a stranger, then the family and the familiar can provide some consistency and comfort, encouragement and protection. If the abuse is perpetrated by a member of the family, then the potential support of the family as a unit is inevitably taken from the child.

The closer the relationship of the victim to the abuser, the more certain is the loss of trust. If children cannot trust those closest to them, then it is unlikely that they will be able to trust anyone at all. If they cannot relearn how to trust, then they may have real difficulty learning how to love. If they are frightened of someone, then they cannot respect them. This in turn can lead to difficulties in forming loving relationships with others, and for some people can lead to a wide variety of problems. These include fear of touch, fear of intimacy, sexual dysfunction, fear of mutual relationships, parenting problems and a profound sense of worthlessness. The shattering of human trust which is brought about by sexual abuse can then hinder the victim or survivor from experiencing the love of God revealed in human love. One survivor described the aftermath of sexual abuse as like living inside a glass bubble:

As a result of a complete breakdown of trust in the world ('if one adult is like that, perhaps they all are') I lived in a world of emotional isolation and alienation. I could see out of the bubble, and talk to people through it, but I could not 'touch' anything on the outside. My whole view of the world, myself, God and others was seen through a barrier of fear and suspicion (personal communication)

Another survivor writes:

The scars of such a wound never disappear and serve always as a reminder of the ugliness and horror of the sin of sexual abuse and as a testimony to the valiant and courageous efforts of survivors who are committed to finding meaning in the struggle and the pain of their lives (personal communication)

It is difficult to describe in words what it is like to be sexually abused as a child. The memories and experience of adult Christians who have been abused give us some clues as to how young children feel:

I felt that the evil of abuse had made me evil and that there was no place for me in the Church. Only children who were good and pure were loved by God.

I could never look at the altar especially around the ages of 11-13, I didn't feel like I was good enough to look up. Part of me thought the devil was inside of me because of the thoughts I would have sometimes.

When I was being abused I saw a crucifix on the bedroom wall... If I go into a Church and see a crucifix, I'm right back in my bedroom.

(Quotes from a publication from
the Christian Survivors of Sexual Abuse)

Victims who come from a Christian background or, more surprisingly, who are abused by someone with responsibility in the Church, may actually turn to the Church for help. In both these cases the Church has a particular ministry to those who are its members or those abused by its members.

Some people who work with children and adults who have been sexually abused would say that it can be counterproductive to talk about the love of God. For some victims and survivors the image of God can be that of a distant, judgemental, overwhelmingly dominant male figure, who can even appear as an abusive father. What is needed in order to help those who think and feel like this are people who can show (*actually incarnate* says one survivor) in human relational terms, what the love of God is. The victim needs alternative experiences which begin to heal the damage of abuse. For many victims, these relationships are a fundamental necessity for growth and the discovery of God as love. Simple assurances of God's love may be received by the victim as trite and unbelievable.

Sexual abuse has undoubtedly affected our ability to enter into an intimate relationship with God. Finding it difficult to trust and believe in another's promises it is likely that we find it difficult to develop a relationship with God in which these elements are essential.⁶

For many women survivors, frequent references to God as 'He' and the language in much of the liturgy, reinforces their experience of being devalued. Male counsellors or priests who try to help female victims may have to address the extra problem of gender difference.

2.3 The Adult Survivor

Children who are abused adopt strategies for coping with the abuse *(adaptive). These include denial, secrecy, avoidance and repression. It is not uncommon for victims to take refuge in disassociation (the process where the victim imagines that s/he is in a different place while the abuse is going on). These strategies later become unhelpful *(maladaptive) and make it difficult for the victims to seek help as children or adults. Some adults can suddenly recall the childhood abuse and begin to experience what has been called *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. This disorder occurs after a period of time where memories and unpleasant feelings associated with them interfere with life⁷. It is likely that victims will presume that no one will believe them, or that their story will be discounted. So, if anyone even begins to hint at some experience of abuse, it is absolutely essential that they are listened to attentively and with respect.

One survivor writes:

For me, the beginning of healing was feeling. When I was able to feel my emotions of anger, pain, sadness, rage, shame and guilt, I knew I had changed direction in my life. When I was fortunate enough to find someone who didn't try to fix 'it' or me, and who listened to and cried with me, I knew there might at last be the hope of some relief.

⁶ *Woman, Why do you Weep?* Sandra Flaherty, Paulist Press, New York 1992

⁷ *PTSD and Child Sexual Abuse: Commentary - Leonore E.A. Walker, Journal of Child Sexual Abuse Vol 2(4) 1993*

Healing from the effects of abuse in childhood is a long, slow and very painful process that usually takes many years. (personal communication)

As a consequence of the experience of betrayal and abandonment, many adults who have been sexually abused as children have difficulty in forming, developing and maintaining intimate relationships. We can only develop intimacy when we take the risk to disclose something of our innermost thoughts and feelings. This capacity to disclose what is deep within us is severely threatened when we have developed the strategy of denying what has happened from childhood.

For some people who were abused as children, the development of adult sexuality can become very difficult because of the guilt, anger, physical pain, disgust and shame attached to the early abuse. Some children attempt to stop feelings of sexual arousal by numbing themselves emotionally, physically and mentally. For many this behaviour leads to real problems as adults in enjoying sexual relationships.

Feelings of rage, depression, anxiety, guilt, fear and low self esteem are some of the most debilitating effects of child sexual abuse. However for some people these disturbances can lead to *psychosis and/or a variety of forms of self destructive behaviour, such as abusing alcohol or drugs, eating disorders (bulimia, anorexia nervosa and obesity), self harm and suicide. Some victims, when they are severely distressed, are pushed to the point of self mutilation such as cutting and self-burning, resulting in extensive scar tissue on their arms and other parts of the body. It may well be that many cases of psychological disturbance are, at their root, related to child sexual abuse⁸. However it is certainly not the case that everyone who is abused develops mental health problems, nor obviously, that people with mental health problems have all been abused.

The effects of this abuse of power in sexual abuse can lead to a wide variety of responses from victims and survivors. Many victims and survivors succeed in living full and successful lives. Some react by becoming dominant and over aggressive. Some children become oversexualized (having been conditioned to be pleasing to adults by being sexually provocative). This does not mean that they are to blame for any episodes of sexual abuse in their lives. Others are resistant to normal friendly approaches from other people; still others find it almost impossible to move on from the experience of being victimized and go on to live their lives passively and submissively.

These effects can make it difficult for the abused person to seek help either as a child or an adult. Everyone in the Church needs to become more conscious of the complexities in sexual abuse, so that appropriate responses can be offered to those in need, and inappropriate responses avoided.

2.4 The Families of Victims/Survivors

If the sexual abuse of the child is perpetrated by a member of the child's family, then there is a wide range of reactions and responses in the family too. It is indeed very difficult for members of a family to believe that another member is capable of abuse.

There will be shock, denial and disbelief. There may well be a refusal to believe the child's story, or real anger against the police or Child Protection Team who have instituted an inquiry. There may well be division in the family, some denouncing the abuser, others denying that anything could have happened, still others exonerating the abuser and members blaming one another for what happened. Sometimes the victim is blamed for the division which emerges within the family. Some members will be

⁸ For further study on this see: *Treatment Issues for Survivors of Physical and Sexual Abuse in the Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* October 1993 p389. In one study, 76% of clients reported physical or sexual abuse.

ashamed, others will want to 'hush it all up'. The family may be ostracised, ignored, stigmatized, labelled as 'all the same' by neighbours and others in the community.

Some victims of abuse feel their disclosure has led to the break-up of their family. This is an additional layer of psychological stress – that someone could feel or be made to feel that it might have been better to keep quiet or tolerate the abuse rather than risk the consequences of the destruction of their family.

There is no easy answer to this. If the Church is to make a contribution to the healing of the wounds within the family, then some people, especially the parish clergy and others working in pastoral teams, need to be aware that these reactions are sincere. The members of the family will need time, perhaps years, to move on through these feelings and reactions. Those listening to these understandable and normal reactions will need appropriate support and supervision. It will be important for members of the family to have the opportunity to tell the story many times, and those who listen need to learn about the progress made through the telling of the story and the sharing of feelings.

2.5 The Parish and Local Community

We only move towards healing within the family, parish and local community once we have recognised and named some of the forces at work when child sexual abuse has occurred. The following paragraphs are an attempt to describe the effects of abuse in the community.

In his research into the effects of child sexual abuse on an individual, Finkelhor⁹ has outlined four main 'traumagenic dynamics'.

These are listed as:

- Traumatic sexualisation
- Powerlessness
- Betrayal
- Stigmatisation

These effects have been described in the investigation and therapy of individual adult survivors; they are also accurate in describing the effects of child sexual abuse on a family, a parish or a local community. Clearly the effects of sexual abuse on an individual are quite unique and destructive. However, the above headings provide a framework for understanding the effects of abuse on communities which, in turn, have a great deal to learn from the courage and resourcefulness of individuals who are survivors. The effects are inevitable in any community, though they are likely to be more widespread and deeply rooted if the abuser is a local leader in the community, as in the case of the local priest. The experience of a community mirrors the more direct and personal effects on an individual.

i Traumatic sexualisation

Any group of people affected by sexual abuse will feel a sense of insecurity about all relationships. Ordinary friendships become worrying; people lose their nerve in relationship building; some couples experience inhibition or disinclination about the physical side of their relationship. Some people feel that their imagination is contaminated by intrusive images provoked by the accusations and evidence of abuse.

⁹ *A Sourcebook on Child Sexual Abuse*. Beverley Hills, Sage 1986

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There is a need for reassurance that these disturbing effects are to be expected. They can diminish and disappear –but it all takes time and care. If the abuser is a priest, it may be that some people are challenged for the first time to see priests as sexual beings. Others may become afraid in case all priests are abusers.

ii Powerlessness

People are suddenly gifted with hindsight and wonder why they could not discern abuse earlier. Families feel a sense of failure in not having protected their children. Parents and others lose confidence in themselves, and this in turn may express itself in anger. Teachers wonder why they could not tell. Parishioners may feel they no longer want to play their part in reading at Mass, visiting the sick, preparing prayers for Services or leading groups. They too have lost confidence.

In these circumstances people can feel they have lost whatever skills they had. They feel incompetent and inadequate. There is a need for people to feel encouraged to stay in the midst of the chaos and remain focused on their task to be committed parents and parishioners, even though everything feels out of control. Parishioners need to feel that they can still make an essential contribution to the working of the parish.

iii Betrayal

A parish in which a priest was the abuser, can begin to show signs of collective depression. Some members will cease to attend any services, others may move away. Some will continue to attend Sunday mass, but will withdraw from everything else. Parents may not want their youngsters to act as altar servers. It becomes more difficult to come to collective decisions because of the tendency of the group to split into factions. There is suspicion and hypersensitivity to people saying the ‘wrong thing’. Some people will have little reason to know who are those directly affected and who can therefore be easily hurt by an unthinking or ignorant remark. The need for confidentiality and anonymity means that there will be some people who are ‘in the know’ and some who are not. The fragmentation of such a community makes mutual support and sensitivity particularly difficult. As a result the community is not only ‘betrayed’ by the abuser, but, unwittingly ‘betrayed’ by one another at the very moment when they need one another most.

It is essential in the midst of all of the above, that the wider Church is known to be supportive and accepting, a task which will demand imagination, energy, and perseverance. The fact that people in a Church community feel free to weep with one another, for example, is a powerful statement of support and an acknowledgement of trust, which helps to address the deep feelings of having been betrayed.

iv Stigmatisation

Abuse gives a family or community a sense of being an abnormal group. They feel that they are being identified and singled-out by the media. The community loses its confidence and pride in itself. There may be talk of the need to ‘rededicate’ the church building. Some people will doubt the validity of sacraments celebrated by an abusive priest.

Some people will reject the allegations made against the priest, and may even promote his innocence after conviction. They see those affected, in whatever way, as trouble makers. On the other hand there may be people who have been indirectly affected by

the abuse and who invest all of their sympathy and support in the victims. It is possible that there is a third group who view the whole situation as sordid and unmentionable and who consequently project that judgement onto the parish as a whole - leaving it labelled the 'sick parish'. There may be a few who walk away and want nothing further to do with it.

The above headings allow us to explore the effects on communities as a whole. There can be similar effects within families. One adult survivor expressed it this way:

People who know the victim and the family and friends of the victim are put in the position of having to hear the unimaginable and believe the unbelievable about things which, for so long, have been unspeakable. (personal communication)

People who know the abuser experience something similar:

Those who know both the victim and abuser are often asked to choose who and what they believe and to respond in a concerned and Christian manner to both, despite feelings which might dispose them to do otherwise.
(personal communication)

Within the wider community, there will be extremes such as anger and a wish to punish abusers as well as the desire to help the victims and others who suffer. There is also a sense of powerlessness, because victims seem to be inconsolable and abusers appear unreachable - especially if they have been removed from the scene for their safety, treatment or custodial sentence.

If I, as a victim, am inconsolable, you console me just by staying with me and letting me be inconsolable. (personal communication)

It does seem that many who have been victims of abuse experience renewed suffering whenever they hear of the abuse of others. New incidents of abuse can also trigger the memory of abuse in others who have never shared their story with anyone else. They are not 'jumping on the band wagon', they are simply allowing the suffering of another person to affect them in a way which may encourage them to face their own pain.

The whole community can be shocked and demoralized, and we must be aware of the danger of doing nothing during this immediate time of shock. In any community a broad range of people will experience psychological and spiritual crisis. Different groups in a parish will express different reactions, and it is impossible for any one person or one group of people to respond adequately to all the needs.

The presence of local church leaders is important to reaffirm the significance and value of the local community. This would be part of building up a positive image of the community. It is impossible to prescribe in detail how, and at what stage, anyone should act, but there will undoubtedly be a need for spontaneous and appropriate gestures and symbols.

2.6 Colleagues of Abusers

The effects on colleagues of abusers varies enormously. Some (who seem to be a minority) deny that the accused has done anything wrong, or insist that the abuser is misunderstood. The majority are shocked and horrified by what has happened. Some will lose their nerve and feel insecure in their work. Colleagues of abusers will find themselves asking all kinds of questions about forgiveness and support, confidence and trust.

The effects of abuse are such that the colleagues of someone who has abused children are affected and not just personally. Their whole professional and collective reputation can be affected. So, for example, when a teacher is accused of sexually abusing children, this impacts on the other teachers in the school. They may begin to doubt their own judgement about colleagues and wonder why they had not discerned what was happening months or years earlier. Some wonder about what is wrong with their relationships with children that the youngsters could not reveal the story of abuse to them in some way. They may begin to worry about appropriate touching, comforting children, discipline, how to cope with their own feelings about their colleague, or about colleagues who support the one convicted. There can be a highly complex range of feelings and reactions.

This also applies to volunteers and others in the Church who work with young people.

It can also be difficult for other leaders – catechists, youth workers and pastoral workers, who all feel touched by the stories of abuse by colleagues and are all scrutinized in a new way by those with whom they work. A whole profession can be stigmatized as a result of the misdeeds of one of its members.

The priest is a key person in the local Catholic community. In those cases when the abuser is a priest, there are further significant complications. This is inevitable when we consider the hundreds of people who have acknowledged the liturgical and symbolic leadership roles of the priest. All who have been visited, baptised, married or instructed by the priest or who have friends whose lives have been influenced by him will be affected. Abuse by a priest will affect all the parishioners in any parish in which he has ministered.

There is a need for care to be taken in the placement of a priest to a parish where his predecessor has been convicted of child sexual abuse. The new priest will be looked upon with suspicion by many people. He may feel isolated and uncertain where to begin. He will be expected to be sensitive to the needs of specific groups of people who may not appear to have been directly affected by the abuse – older people, disabled people and those who are housebound. There will be special concern for teenagers directly affected and their friends. There will be a need for 'spiritual' reflection for all who require it, and a clearly arranged support system for the priest to help him cope. He may well benefit from supervision as well as qualified and competent professional support.

2.7 The Effects of the Legal System

If there are legal proceedings, this may be a new and traumatic experience for any family. In this case they will need a good deal of practical information and advice as well as warm and empathic listening. Ideally, Statutory Authorities keep families informed of the procedures involved in the legal process – such as the timing of case conferences. A failure to do so places an extra burden on the family.

Once an official inquiry begins, families do not know how many more people are involved. As one group of parents said:

The more we heard, the worse it all got. The more people who were involved, the more frightening it all became.

When the children of more than one family are involved, *the whole thing got beyond anybody's control, and you're scared that no one can manage it.* This experience can

paralyse local communities.

One effect of sexual abuse and the subsequent inquiries is that young people are urged to talk to strangers (police and social workers) about experiences, feelings, activities which they have never talked about to anyone. As one mother put it:

It was terrible to have your 11 year old son have to say the things he said, and to talk about the things he had to talk about. It has damaged his childhood. He has had to grow up too quickly.

Church personnel are to be aware of other agencies or statutory authorities already working with those in need, and not presume that care can be provided better by a Church agency. However, it may be that the Church's 'voluntary' service may be able to provide more long term support than the other agencies.

If a member of a family is imprisoned, there is need for support for those who have to live without the one convicted. There is further care needed to help the family prepare for the release.

It is possible that there will be no prison sentence and that a time on probation is the decision of the court or the magistrate. This can be difficult for everyone. Each member of the family needs a different kind of support. One cannot help anyone against their will, but there may be a role for the local Church through the priest, pastoral assistant or member of a local care group, to continue to be in touch with the family.

The length of time it takes for the whole legal procedure to be followed through can cause great stress for those involved. It is only right that justice should be done and to be seen to be done. However, those with responsibility for the care of the victims and their families will need to be consistent and patient throughout the whole process.

There is an inevitable tension between the 'caring' and the 'legal' process. It is particularly problematic when the caring professionals are not able to begin any counselling or therapy work in order to accommodate the court and criminal investigation. This can mean that children and parents have to wait a considerable period of time before the care they need is made available. It seems to parents and families that the welfare of the child is not actually seen as paramount and that there is a need for those involved in "Working Together" – the police, child protection teams, local authorities and others – to think again about the priorities involved and the order in which the priorities are to be taken.

2.8 General Conclusion

The effects of child sexual abuse are traumatic in the lives of so many people. As members of the Body of Christ, we all suffer, in some sense, from the abuse of any child anywhere. Any abuse infringes the God given dignity of a vulnerable person, and everyone is lessened as a result of that. We can never forget that for some people, abuse is an unwarranted theft of childhood, and all our responses must reflect a conviction that the needs and potential of the victim/survivor are our prime concern.

3 PREPARING TO HEAL THE WOUND

3.1 Introduction

We use the word 'healing' in a metaphorical sense. Healing, unlike medicine, can neither be prescribed nor delivered, but it can be facilitated. We hope to point to ways in which an environment will be created in which healing is fostered and encouraged.

Jesus said: *Come to me all you who are overburdened, and I will give you rest.* (Mtt 11:28) He did not force people to turn to him, and neither can the Church. The Church wants to help and to be available to people in need. However the Church has not always responded effectively and has often been perceived as insensitive. To be available includes welcoming, and never judging people in need. To welcome means to develop a willingness to learn from victims and to stand with them and not to pretend to have all the answers. There are three criteria required.

First, for the Church to offer help to others requires a **deep level of empathy and perseverance, with careful and accurate listening.** This is illustrated by being honest and open about allegations of sexual abuse, and by not denying or dismissing them. People in the Church have to acknowledge their own failures in the past. In the earlier report *Child Abuse: Pastoral and Procedural Guidelines*, Bishop Budd said in the preface:

I wish to apologise sincerely to the survivors of abuse and their families and communities, particularly when there has been abuse by people exercising responsibility in the Church. They have been hurt by the abusers but also by mistaken attitudes within the Church community and at all levels. I acknowledge that far too often there has been insensitivity and inadequate response to their hurt.

The mistaken attitudes of the past (such as secrecy and a refusal to listen) must not prevail.

Second, the Church realises that it **cannot act alone.** The Church undertakes to cooperate with the statutory agencies and legal procedures whenever there is an allegation of child sexual abuse by a priest or church worker. This is not to say that these procedures are perfect or that the Church is simply cooperating because it is obliged to do so by law. It is more that by cultivating mutual trust with the statutory agencies, better services for children and others affected will be provided.

Third, in order to heal, the Church has to try to **remove anything that prevents the healing of the wound.** This includes the assumptions, lack of good practice, wrong attitudes that have been present in Church *and* society about sexual abuse. We see the Church's contribution as being effective at local and national level. The challenge to the Church, therefore, is how to do its best to foster the development of an environment in which the prophetic call for justice is heard and healing can take place.

3.2 Facing Reality

The fact that children are sexually abused in society and that the Church is part of society means that Catholics (and indeed all people) have to face a range of issues if they are to help those who have been affected to be healed. The Gospel insists that people face the truth about themselves and their world, or else they will never be truly free.

If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples, you will learn the truth and the truth will make you free. (Jn 8:32)

The earlier report *Child Abuse: Pastoral and Procedural Guidelines* stated quite explicitly:

There is a responsibility resting on all people to be vigilant. Misguided loyalty or fear of public disclosure can create a conspiracy of silence which, in turn, can breed

more evil. Fear of scandal is no reason for silence. There is never any excuse for children to remain at risk. (emphasis in the original)

This is a clear call for openness, honesty and a commitment to apply the policies and directives produced by each diocese.

It is also a call for the Church to work alongside other professionals in responding to the sexual abuse of children. This cooperation will enable the children concerned to have the best possible response to their need.

There is no doubt too that a great deal has been learned about human behaviour in recent years. Bishops, priests and lay people will have to remain open to future developments in knowledge so that they can be of service to those abused, their families and communities. Everyone must grow in understanding about how to give genuine service to abusers as well. This means avoiding the temptation to take the easier, superficial and apparently 'kinder' solution (which was simply 'giving people another chance'). We now acknowledge that any rationalization by the abuser of abusive behaviour is not only very suspect, but in fact, usually indicates how serious the problem is. It seems to be impossible for an abuser to control compulsive behaviour. The effectiveness of therapy in dealing with various classifications of abuse and the various individual cases remains to be tested in the long term. The Church needs to keep abreast of current developments in thinking in this area. This again underlines the need for close working relationships with other professionals. Certainly it can no longer be presumed that an abuser will not 'do it again' simply because those words are spoken with apparent, or even real, conviction.

3.3 A Culture of Disbelief

Every individual and community has a system of values which helps them to decide who to listen to and whose evidence or witness they are likely to accept. So in Western society people are disposed to listen carefully to and accept the advice of appropriate authorities, professional working groups and alleged experts. Even in the community of the Church, people are less disposed to listen to those who are habitually dispossessed or ignored such as children, the imprisoned, the marginalized and those whose presence is discounted. The present challenge is to re-examine the values which prompted those reactions in the past. The way that Jesus spoke to the disadvantaged and the marginalised (lepers, prostitutes, Samaritans, tax collectors etc) implies that his followers must constantly re-examine their behaviour and attitude towards individuals and groups who feel excluded.

In order to heal the wound there is a need to remove anything that prevents healing. Many, in fact, do not accept the extent of sexual abuse, nor the harm it does to people. T. S. Eliot said that *humankind cannot bear very much reality*¹⁰ and faced with the awful reality of sexual abuse, people will turn away. It is often easier to ignore the fact that children are abused by adults than to face it, and to face that it happens in my neighbourhood, parish or family. Everyone has a tendency to deny, minimise or distort unpleasant truths. For the Church to go along with this is to deny the Church's call to be the faithful witness to Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. It is impossible to ensure that all members of the Church will always be open about child sexual abuse, but this is the ideal and intention which this document seeks to encourage.

3.4 Various Forms of Power

It is clear that adults have power over children and that power is abused daily by many

*10 Burnt Norton 1:
one of the Four
Quartets - T. S. Eliot*

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people in many places. Adults may find it unsettling to face up to the dilemmas inherent in proper responsibility for children; their legitimate authority; and the limits to their exercise of power over children. Some will find it deeply disturbing to cope with the contradictions of how they too were the victims of misused power when they were young by 'good' parents or teachers or priests. Every person in the Church needs to examine his or her conscience about power so as to develop a greater sensitivity to the needs of children, and become more alert to the abuse of power in general.

Bishops, priests, deacons, religious sisters and brothers as well as lay people, act as moral and spiritual guides in the Church, and are by that very responsibility and authority, people with power. They are called to serve and minister, but the sinfulness of humanity can take over and 'service' can become a disguise for a misuse of power. People with power need to become more aware of the dynamic of power in their own lives and conscious of the 'boundaries' that are necessary to respect others.

3.5 Power and Boundaries

Boundaries and intimacy are both necessary if people are to grow up as mature and sensitive. Sexual abuse is a violation of boundaries between people. There are, in fact, limits which are necessary to guide and protect people in making relationships. They are vitally important to everyone since they guarantee the uniqueness and sense of worth of each individual. The effects of this violation are physical, emotional, psychological, sexual and spiritual and they can endure throughout life.

In recent years, the helping professions have begun to think very carefully about power and boundaries. They do not see the word boundary as implying a wall or barrier between people, it is more the 'space' between the power of the professional and the neediness of the recipient.

Clergy may not perceive themselves as very powerful people, but they are perceived as such by others. Unlike psychologists, therapists, social workers and others in the helping professions, however, the clergy have not been discouraged from social contacts with their parishioners. Indeed, many clergy would feel that most of their pastoral work is done through the social relationships they have developed with parishioners.

It is usual to approach a professional person because something is needed, eg, a doctor when we are sick, a lawyer for legal advice. The client's needs put the professional in a powerful position. S/he can respond or not, keep the client waiting or not, give more or less time, treat a client honestly or not, give of their best or not. These are ways in which the professional can control the quality of service to the recipient. Recipients may not even be in a position to know whether they have received good service or not. Being in need means having to trust. This trust is the vital element in the relationship between the recipient and the professional and must be respected. If a priest abuses his privileged relationship with a child in order to abuse that child, then he has completely destroyed the trust which is essential for the child's security.

If the abuser takes advantage of his or her professional role to gain access to children, then this is a fundamental abuse of power, and the public is quite likely to have less confidence in the abuser's co-professionals.

Most of the helping professions have developed a system of supervision to enable individuals and groups to examine the nature of the relationships they are developing

with those who come to them for help. It may well become the case that anyone from within the Church community who is involved in responding to abuse will benefit from supervision to ensure that the boundaries are protected and power is not abused. Moving on from a culture of disbelief to a culture of honesty, means facing and beginning to resolve these problems.

3.6 Celibacy and Holiness

In considering people with power in the Church, there is sometimes an assumption that because someone is celibate he or she is a holy person. The priest or religious may have been considered more holy and integrated, rather than the same as everyone else. Traditional ways of speaking in the Church may have implied this and some may have believed it. There is absolutely no reason why a celibate person cannot become an integrated person like anyone else, but nor is there any doubt that when a publicly professed minister of the Church is involved in scandalous activity, the shock is more profound.

3.7 Confidentiality and the Sacrament of Reconciliation

In the mid seventies there was a great deal of reflection on the Rite of Reconciliation within the Catholic Church. More and more people began to take advantage of the opportunity to celebrate the sacrament 'face to face' with the priest. There have been many occasions when a conversation with a priest has moved into a 'confessional' discussion without any direct acknowledgement that this is what has happened. This is a situation in which boundaries need to be clear. Those involved need to be quite clear and explicit when a conversation has become a celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation. There is no question about the absolute nature of the sacred seal of the sacrament. Knowledge gained in the *'internal forum' (ie. during the celebration of the sacrament) can never be referred to in the 'external forum' (ie. outside this particular celebration of the sacrament). Total secrecy is guaranteed in sacramental confession.

Some people presume that every conversation they have with a priest is covered by the same level of confidentiality as that guaranteed in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It may well be that if someone says to a priest 'Can I tell you something in absolute confidence?' the answer has to be 'No' or, 'It depends on what it is'. There is a need for much more reflection on the nature of 'confidentiality' and how priests respond to requests for help.

3.8 The Role of the Priest

The Church has not usually looked at the role of the clergy as a 'professional' role. The 'professionalism' of the priest is the extent to which he is 'duly qualified' to ensure that the eucharistic community can celebrate and serve. His task is, in some sense, to hold together the household of God in the parish, to be a focus of unity in the parish as the bishop is in the diocese. The Parish is:

not principally a structure, a territory, or a building, but rather 'the family of God, a fellowship afire with a unifying spirit', 'a familial and welcoming home', the 'community of the faithful'. Plainly and simply, the parish is founded on a theological reality, because it is a Eucharistic community. This means that the parish is a community properly suited for celebrating the Eucharist, (which is) the living source for its upbuilding and the sacramental bond of its being in full communion with the whole Church. ¹¹

¹¹ *Christifideles
Laici, para 26*

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The Church sees itself as a family, held together in the unity of the Holy Spirit. The pain which is inflicted on one is felt by all, though not in the same way.

In the relationship between the bishop and the priest, the lines of accountability, appraisal, and expectation, are some of the issues which need to be addressed in the future as a result of incidents of the sexual abuse of children.

Until the early 60s, there seemed to be a presumption among many people in the Church that the priest was the person in the local community who knew the answers to almost every question about faith or morals. But today, new models of collaborative ministry are emerging. This provides us with the chance to re-think roles, power, authority, responsibility, leadership, and ministry. As St Paul said when talking about the way we are all baptised into the one body of Christ:

If one part is hurt, all parts are hurt with it. If one part is given special honour, all parts enjoy it.

(1 Cor 12:26)

4 HEALING THE WOUND

4.1 Introduction

The sexual abuse of children has been put on many agenda – parish, deanery and diocesan pastoral councils, councils of priests and the Bishops' Conference. There have been in-service initiatives in many dioceses for priests and lay people. But there is still room for further study, reflection and action. This new found awareness must not lead to complacency. Knowledge is not the same as healing. It will take more time to discover how this knowledge can indeed be used as an effective help in building up a community of healing and trust.

In writing this report, the authors chose the analogy of treating and healing a wound to show that healing can occur in the life of a person who has been sexually abused. Healing is a natural process: it cannot be forced, though with the appropriate care it can proceed more quickly. Some well-meaning sympathizers who have not been abused, imagine that healing can take place quickly. To say so to victims/survivors is insensitive to the needs and situation of those individuals. Healing only begins when victims begin to take the risk and tell their own story. In this section we look at how the needs of victims and others who are vulnerable can be met, and what lessons can be learned from their experience.

4.2 Trust

Survivors have told us that the fundamental loss resulting from abuse, is the loss of trust. They were abused by a person they trusted. Now their trust has to be earned. It is necessary to rebuild trust as carefully and as lovingly as possible.

Survivors say that they are terrified of being let down and rejected. They are intuitively aware of a 'helper' who cannot cope with the story of their pain. They need to trust the person they are talking to and it is to be expected that they will test the listener to make sure they are being believed and understood. Some would say that they 'test the relationship to destruction', to ensure that they are being fully accepted.

Support can also be given indirectly to survivors by raising the public awareness of the evil and sin that is child sexual abuse and the damage that it causes. Support can be given by raising Christian awareness of sexual abuse within the community and publicly asking forgiveness and praying for healing. There are different levels of support to be offered to those who have been abused. Everyone should recognise their competence.

Support can be given more directly to victims and survivors through listening and counselling. These are two distinct activities and they should not be confused. Some people are good listeners, empathetic and caring, but that does not mean they are counsellors. Counsellors are trained listeners with the professional skills and backups required¹². Counselling sex abuse victims is itself a specialized form of counselling. Again, it is imperative to recognise one's own level of competence. For any 'helper' to attempt to play the counsellor without the appropriate training, support and supervision, is an unacceptable risk and will, at the very least, hinder the healing process rather than aid it.

We quote the advice of a survivor to potential helpers:

One telling is never enough, and soon the escalation of anxiety, fear, shame, confusion and many other feelings leaves them (the survivors) feeling hopeless and alone, hurt and angry. Those feelings may then be shared with a supportive person, who, having heard the pain of the victim, goes away feeling dumped on, victimized,

¹² Each Diocese may find it helpful to consider, as part of its policy, the level of accreditation of those whom they recommend as counsellors.

abused, misunderstood, angry and confused. It may help to remember that a caring response from a caring, supportive and understanding person, may not evoke a caring, understanding and supportive response from the victim or co-victim. Instead, something completely different can happen. Victims and co-victims perceive the strength of caring professionals and ministers as an indication of their ability and willingness to hear and hold their pain, anger and hurt.
(personal communication)

Without seeking to provide a comprehensive guide for 'would be' helpers, it is important to appreciate some of the dynamics at work once a victim begins to talk of abuse. An abuser binds his victims through secrecy. That bond has to be broken for healing to begin. It can only be broken when the victim begins to trust.

All this is a challenge to clergy and lay people in the Church. They cannot assume that they are seen as trustworthy by victims and survivors, especially if the abuse originally came from within the 'family' of the Church. They must prepare themselves to receive trust and then openness and integrity.

In the careful rebuilding of trust it will be necessary, when asked, to be prepared to walk the second mile (Mtt 5:41).

4.3 The Special Contribution of the Church to Healing

The Catholic community cannot mediate the healing of Christ unless it acknowledges its need for healing from its own sinfulness. The Church is called to be a saintly community but it is not without blemish: its members are sinful. So the Church will always be struggling to renew itself in Christ, to find the appropriate responses and answers to the needs of people. This is very true in responding to child sexual abuse. The appropriate answers must be there, but incomplete knowledge, human frailty and lack of faith have hindered their discovery – or their discovery has not been followed up by adequate response. Some members of the Church find that they cannot cope with the sexual abuse of children and everything that stems from it. There is a temptation to just ignore it. If the Church is to be part of the healing ministry of Christ, then her people must deepen their commitment to the needs of those who have been abused. The physician must heal himself/herself, otherwise the victims and survivors will not even expect to find the healing which is within the Church.

Healing is possible when the whole Church is a sacrament of Christ the Healer committed to those who are sick or excluded. The Gospels abound with instances of Jesus' healing people who are sick, troubled, paralysed, possessed or feel excluded from social and cultural life in any way. Jesus identified himself with those who needed healing – 'I was sick and you visited me' (Mtt 25:36). It is as though Jesus has a preferential love for those who need healing, and they in their turn believed in him – they were able to trust – their faith made them whole. The healing grew from within – it was never imposed from outside. This is also true of the Church's sacramental reality.

Healing – making whole – is also about removing stigma. Well-being is not achieved if social stigma remains. Jesus always brought those he healed fully into the community. Often being wounded puts the victim outside the community - making them excluded, shunned, and alien. Healing must remove this stigma. The woman who touched Christ in the crowd (Lk 8:40-56) was not only healed and freed from her shame, but Christ also ensured her inclusion into her local community as well.

The healing is complete when the individual experiences the fullness of life. If the Church uses this model of healing it must both free the survivor from destructive relationships and make possible full social integration into the Body of Christ.

In this report we wish to emphasise the commitment of Jesus to those who suffer and need healing. We encourage reflection on the examples of healing in the gospels. It is not our brief to provide those reflections, but we are convinced that the process of healing, within the Church, is to be found in the Gospel of Christ.

We are convinced that the healing process for victims and survivors in the Church will stem from the whole Church reflecting on Christ, on the cross, absorbing the violence and destruction which others impose on him. He absorbs it, he does not transmit it to anyone else. In this action Jesus 'draws all people to himself'. (Jn 12:32)

Healing is a process. It is a natural progression. One must not demand miracles. There will be scars when the healing of deep wounds has taken place. This is natural too; scars do not mean that healing is incomplete. Scars are a sign of what has been healed. This fact is sometimes forgotten or misunderstood. Scars are uncomfortable. But again Jesus is a sign: the risen Lord still bore his wounds. In his glory he was still known as the saving victim.

This saving victim is available in the world to heal, to make whole, to bring to new life. The Sacraments of the Church are a vitally important way of meeting the need for healing. Sacraments in their matter and form include signs and symbols, gestures and words that proclaim the goodness of things and persons in God. In the power of God human creatures are recreated as good; 'sacrament' recreates in God's image and likeness. This is a great support to those who celebrate the sacraments in affirming them in the Community of the Body of Christ, in ending isolation, and helping them all play their full part in the prophetic, pastoral, and liturgical dimension of the Church.

There is a need to look carefully at public prayer. It is important to ensure that if, for example, the parish wants to pray for the abuser, that the needs of the victim and others are included – and vice versa. The Christian ideal to 'love the sinner and hate the sin' is not complete without including those who are 'sinned against'.

When there is specific concern for victims and survivors of abuse, those who celebrate the sacraments need to look carefully at the language and symbols and signs used. Many of these symbols which express the reality of relationship with God, the reality of love, the true beauty of the human person, have been disfigured, particularly when the abuse was within the Church community, and so have lost their original significance. The Church community must be very sensitive to this fact. It needs to listen carefully to those who have been abused to discover together how to make all the sacraments a celebration of healing and reconciliation.

In the Sacrament of Reconciliation penitents acknowledge their own sinfulness and the need for the forgiveness of God. It is essential to remember that the victim/survivor of child sexual abuse has not sinned; **abuse is never the child's fault, no matter what the circumstances.** Some survivors have had great difficulty with the Sacrament of Reconciliation, being told that they should confess their sins of impurity when in fact they were victims. The victim/survivor may feel guilty because of what has happened, but a feeling of guilt is not the same as sin. Any victim or survivor coming to the sacrament should find immense care and gentleness. Every confessor must ensure that victims or survivors who mention abuse are not left feeling that they

need forgiveness for the abuse.

There is a need for the Church community to find ways of involving those who suffer, in a sacramental encounter which is directed towards freeing them, not from the effects of their own sins, but from the effects of sin committed against them – the effects of someone else's sin.

Healing includes such characteristics as a sense of belonging, of being included and not being rejected because of difference. In the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist), the Church affirms anew a true relationship of love, belonging to God and yet being free to be oneself, no coercion, no dominance. These sacraments help the faithful to enter into a fuller life with Christ.

Some victims and survivors find the Sacrament of the Sick a comforting way of engaging in the sacramental life of the Church, healing them, sustaining their trust in God and strengthening them against the effects of evil. The important thing is to listen to victims and survivors to find out how best to devise appropriate liturgical events which respond to their needs.

In any healing there will be memories to be faced. For victims and survivors of child abuse the very fact of remembering can be a most painful experience, and is also the first step towards healing. In the life of the Church, remembering is also the first step to the healing by Christ. *Do this in memory of me* (Lk 22:19). In the Sacrament of the Eucharist God is thanked for memory of Christ the Victim. The Church needs to find ways to enable the victims of abuse to bring their memories, often suppressed over a long time, to the table of the Lord. All bring their own stories and experiences, hopes and desires, fears and anxieties to these celebrations. It must be here, in the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of the Lord, that they are most poignantly expressed. Again, this must be done 'in communio'

The sacraments of Marriage or Ordination are, among other things, statements about the place of people in Church and in society; they are rites of passage in their lives. They open up new opportunities for relationship, love, acceptance, service, and ministry. They can grow in self-knowledge and service through the sacrament, and so become instruments of healing among those with whom they live and work. There are victims and survivors of abuse who are married or ordained – all of whom need to be listened to and empowered. The sacraments which mark their vocations can enable them to reflect more carefully on the sustaining and healing love of God for them.

The healing power of Christ is therefore available to us all, but Church communities must ponder anew how this healing can be promoted and celebrated, for and with victims and survivors of child abuse. Healing from the effects of abuse is partly a process of giving back power to the powerless. Survivors are empowered when people listen to their contribution particularly when they are asked what symbols and signs have been of help to them personally in their own journeys. The Church can affirm the intrinsic value of these symbols and signs of childhood, transition, change and growth.¹³ As Jesus said: *Listen, anyone who has ears to hear!* (Mk 4:9). There is a real need for eyes that see and ears that hear. Everyone has ways of coping or feeling brave when in fact they are feeling fragile. If Christ is going to heal, – *He must increase* – then the followers of Christ must go beyond their own strategies for coping, – *I must decrease* – (Jn 3:32). As this happens the Church will truly be the place where those who are vulnerable, fragile, abused, exploited or excluded, are central and have a voice.

13 Survivors of abuse often use objects such as candles, soft toys, flowers as well as the beauty of nature to help them feel strong and confident. By these means they are able to create 'transitional objects' to internalize the healing presence. That healing presence is Christ.

HEALING
THE WOUND
OF
CHILD SEXUAL
ABUSE

4.4 Pastoral Response

How do we reflect this healing of Christ in our pastoral response to child sexual abuse?

i Children

It is actually impossible to provide a stage by stage blueprint for every child in every circumstance. Regrettably, it may not always be possible to provide necessary help at the desirable time because of the legal processes. However, every child will benefit from an appropriate and consistent pastoral response. In this section we outline some of the necessary elements and dimensions for any pastoral response.

It is vitally important for anyone who is engaged in the task of listening and helping at every level to maintain wholesome, mature, authentic relationships with children. Without such relationships children will feel anxious.

Children require unconditional acceptance and nurturing. This has to be specific to each child in his or her unique situation, but the basic principles of listening, not judging, empathising and supporting which one would normally offer a child, are even more necessary for a child who is a victim.

Who can offer this care? It is vital that at an early stage, the child's preferences are discussed. In many cases this will mean the parents or those in 'loco parentis'. They will themselves need help in coming to terms with their child having been sexually abused. Diocesan delegates could provide names of suitably qualified and competent therapists, counsellors or spiritual directors. The delegate may also know of other agencies which have trained personnel who could help the parents so that they are aware of what the issue raises for them as well as for the child. If the parents are not able to provide this kind of help (e.g. if the parents have been the abusers) then the task is more complex. If the child does not indicate any clear preference, then the best person might emerge from discussion with other agencies, social workers, teachers, educational welfare officers and others. There is no knowing who a child might want to seek out for the nurture and security necessary, so it is important that the Church as a whole becomes much more aware of the effects of sexual abuse. The essential safety, affirmation and love that each child needs and deserves is more likely to be available when more people appreciate the needs of the child.

Children can be encouraged to have access to helplines, such as Childline, Rape Crisis Centres etc. by telephone numbers being made freely available in churches, parish newsletters, halls, youth clubs and schools. Public recognition of the incidence of sexual abuse in homilies, bidding prayers, courses, topics for parish discussion groups etc. can create the environment for the child to disclose and/or seek advice and help.

These words are only a partial response to healing the wound. Children may carry deep and lasting scars and the care needed will be different at various stages as children become adults.

ii Adult Survivors

Much of what has been said of children is true for adult survivors. Survivors have said that they need to be accepted and loved for who they are, their pain to be acknowledged and not in any way dismissed, and the Church to contribute to their healing. Above all, no one should 're-abuse' victims and survivors by telling them how to feel or what to do. Healing is at the victim's pace, not the pace of the carer. Great sensitivity will be required. It is easy to avoid the survivor's pain and need for justice

by the diversion of exhorting forgiveness. This is a lesson the Church is learning from survivors.

The Church has pastoral experience and the professional world has developed guidelines in helping people in need, and both can come together for those called to minister to the sexually abused person. The authors of this report are conscious that victims and survivors have found the response of the Church in the past to be inadequate. Pastoral care can be offered in a whole variety of ways, including information about the availability of therapy and spiritual direction, strong and accepting parish communities, sensitive liturgy and an openness about sexual abuse. It is clear that it is only by working with victims and survivors, by listening to them and learning from them, that better care and healing will be available in the future. Where victims and survivors feel able to make requests of the Church for help, this has to be taken seriously.

iii Families, Parishes and Communities of Victims/Survivors

There will be a wide variety of situations, but the following elements will be common to all of them.

In the event of a family or parish being affected by the trauma of sexual abuse, people involved need to feel that there are others who are prepared to be close to them in the midst of their pain.

There will be an added difficulty for families who have a child abused by a priest. They will need support and yet may well harbour hostility towards any overture from the Church. Those who do offer support will find themselves challenged in the task of responding to a wounded community. The Bishop, the diocesan delegate and the diocesan team as well as the local deanery must all be seen to play their part.

Anyone who is expected to be, or emerges as a leader from within the community will be placed under severe scrutiny and will need support and encouragement. Those who wish to help will have to:

- acknowledge the depth and complexity of feelings of those who have been abused;
- find the time to allow people to talk about their feelings for as long as is necessary;
- appreciate the boundaries so that the person is indeed respected and the necessary trust can develop.
- helpers will need to appreciate and manage, in an authentic way, the depths of their own feelings in such a complex and painful matter.

The repercussions of sexual abuse in a parish or local community will, in part, depend on how well known the abuser or victim happens to be. There is a responsibility on the priest and others in the parish to be sensitive to the needs of the victim and others, directly and indirectly affected, including those associated with the abuser and indeed, the abuser personally.

In brief, a response to the needs of families, parishes and communities would include some of the following suggestions:

- reviewing Diocesan policy to facilitate counselling and therapeutic interventions by accredited and competent practitioners;
- ensuring greater liaison between dioceses to seek to learn from others;¹⁴

¹⁴ Does the experience of one diocese inform the understanding of another?

- keeping up-to-date information of what is available to help those in need;
- ensuring that all parties have opportunities to receive help;¹⁵
- ensuring that the normal network of pastoral care continues – for the sick, housebound, older people etc.

Some of the following suggestions may be helpful in enabling the family, parish or community to begin the healing process. These are not stated as progressive elements, more pointers to what could be necessary:

- an expression of compassion and acknowledgement of immediate pain;
- manifest solidarity with victims/survivors by putting them first;
- an emphasis on the blamelessness of the victims – the Church needs to try and ensure that no child or young person is left with any residual guilt;
- communications must not fail to acknowledge and affirm the criminal nature of child abuse;
- some determination to counter the informal (gossip) network which may promote the notions of the ‘poor abuser’ (especially if it is a priest) and the ‘evil child or family’ even after prosecution;
- a show of understanding of the pain of a wide group of people which goes beyond the immediate victims;
- people are very hurt by the time, attention and concern expended on the perpetrator rather than to the victim. It shows no lack of compassion for the criminal to put the needs of the perpetrator after those of the victims;
- allowing an expression of anger - when his father’s house was desecrated Jesus was angry and threw the traders from the Temple. Public expressions of anger, shame and sorrow are a help to start the healing process.
- apology – an unambiguous statement of contrition. A direct and prompt contact with the victim and the victim’s family and the parish concerned by someone in a senior position in the Church is essential.

There may also be a need for some or all of the following:

- liturgical services which focus on the need for healing in the family, parish and diocese;
- re-affirmation of core values A re-affirmation of Christian love, family life, wholeness and God-createdness of childhood, of priesthood, and sacrament can emerge through preaching, teaching and sharing among parish groups;
- community rebuilding, in the way that everyone has the opportunity to accept ownership of the problem and solution, involving discussion about appropriate behaviour, risk avoidance, and good child care practice;
- training the community to understand and therefore support the victims whose problems do not stop as the abuse stops, but who have to live through the process of revelation, investigation, prosecution or non-prosecution, conviction, discharge... and the rest of their lives.

iv Colleagues of Abusers

Most professions have their own guidelines and systems for managing the needs of

¹⁵ *The establishment of a helpline (possibly through a diocesan social work agency) can be a safe way for some victims/survivors to make their first disclosure.*

their members which emerge when a colleague has been abusing children. This is not yet the case with priests and other people with pastoral responsibility in the Church.

It is vital that the families affected and the whole local Church feel the care, concern and support of the Church. The local bishop will put in place interim arrangements for any priest who is placed on administrative leave or is arrested. The bishop will consult with the diocesan delegate and other priests in the deanery. This procedure ensures that the local clergy are aware of what is happening. There is no doubt that in the past, some families have felt abandoned by the Church.

... we did not know if the Bishop knew, or how he was making sense of it. The local clergy did not seem to know what to do. They were at a loss, just like the rest of us.
(personal communication)

The Church was silent. (personal communication)

There is a need for reassurance 'by the Church', that the ordinary services provided by the Church are still credible. This reassurance can only be given by the Bishop.

If the abuser is a priest, there may be a particular impact on other priests in the diocese. In recent years, priests have found themselves on the defensive, and their morale has been affected by the incidents of child sexual abuse by a priest. The confidence of some priests has been so severely dented that many are now more cautious about their contact with children and teenagers. Like all other adults, priests should distinguish between the public and private situation when communicating with children.

There needs to be care to assist any priest appointed to fill the vacancy left by a priest who has been convicted. The new priest will become the focus of a great deal of confused emotional expression. It is as though the whole parish is grieving and that each person family and group is at a different stage of grief. He will have to withstand emotional pressure because different people feel very different things about his predecessor. He has the right to pastoral support from his bishop. He could also benefit from a 'professional' advisor and support group if he is to be sustained in his ministry.

As the number of priests decreases, there are more presbyteries housing only one priest. This raises two issues: the increased need for personal support for priests on their own, and the risk of a lack of accountability by the fact of living on one's own. The first has begun to be addressed through programmes such as the Ministry to Priests and Emmaus. Future continuing formation programmes for clergy should take into account the changing social conditions of parochial clergy. Accountability for one's behaviour may require the surrendering of certain freedoms we have become used to, or take for granted. The 'presumed respect' which priests experienced in the past, has, by and large, gone and there is now a greater emphasis on the need for healthy personal relationships. It is vitally important that anyone engaged in pastoral ministry maintains wholesome and mature relationships with all those they serve. Regrettably this has not always been the case (as the need for this Report shows) and we must accept this fact.

The delegate and team can work with those involved in continuing formation of clergy to arrange special study days for the priests of the diocese on a whole range of subjects raised by the sexual abuse of children – eg sexuality, power, confidentiality, stress, the danger of meeting one's own needs in the needs of others, boundary setting etc.

The fundamental purpose behind all help and support is empowerment of the

people affected rather than decisions made by concerned people from outside.

The authors of this report are aware that the majority of its readers are unlikely to be victims of abuse. Those who are victims or survivors may recognise much of its contents. Others may find certain statements unrecognisable, inaccurate, or even offensive. All victims and survivors experience a wound which is their own and only their own, and they can be deeply affected by the pain of others who have had similar experiences. People who have been abused can speak about their own pain, and may have real difficulty when others express it on their behalf. The authors recognise that they cannot claim to speak on behalf of victims and survivors, but they have tried to listen to the witness of people who have been abused, and to report that witness with sensitivity and accuracy. The authors apologise to those who may feel that they have not succeeded.

This report has tried to find ways that allow for the hurt and damage of child sexual abuse to be faced: not to be afraid of seeing the pain in those who have suffered. To look at the wound.

Having seen the pain, there is a need to begin to prepare to heal the wound: to be willing to reach out, not to walk by on the other side. To begin by listening, by promoting open dialogue and by not allowing the sin of abuse to be hidden in the dark night of secrecy.

And finally, to share in the process of healing. This demands a commitment to enabling people. To see trust begin to grow again: to walk with survivors as they begin again to listen to the voice of the Father's beloved Son: *Come to me all you who are weary and overburdened and I will give you rest* (Matt 11:28)

The survivor is not solely a witness of Christ's suffering and passion, but also a witness to his resurrection.

5 GLOSSARY

Adaptive: Behaviour which is successfully designed to achieve a purpose – eg someone believing everything they hear from other people in order to win their approval or avoid disfavour

Boundary: the space between the power of the professional and the vulnerability of the client

Child Sexual Abuse: There are many forms of sexual abuse ranging from looking, exposing, touching and fondling, to full genital penetration. Sexual abuse of a child includes revealing indecent material such as pornography to the child or using the child as a subject of indecent productions. Sexual abuse includes obscene language or terminology, or the misguiding of a child by suggestion and indecent provocation of any kind.*

Diocesan Delegate: The person appointed by the Bishop of the Diocese to be responsible for the Dioceses' response to accusations of sexual abuse being brought to the attention of the Diocese

Dissociation: a coping strategy often used by someone who is suffering trauma, whereby they imagine themselves to be elsewhere or to be somebody else in order to escape from the extreme pain of their experience. This form of distancing can become habitual so that a person has a sense of unreality which interferes with their everyday living.

Grooming: A process whereby abusers are known to plan and organise their access to the target child for months or years in advance, usually by befriending the protecting family and gaining their confidence.

Forum: *Internal* – the absolute secrecy attached to those things said during the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

External – the different levels of confidentiality pertaining to other conversations.

Maladaptive: Unsuccessful behaviour that has outlived its usefulness – eg someone who spends the whole of life doing what other people tell them in every circumstance, blaming themselves when things go wrong.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder: Following a traumatic event it is thought that the following experiences can be defined as a response needing professional help:

- a the client must have witnessed or experienced a serious threat to their life or physical well-being;
- b the client must re-experience the event in some way;
- c the client must persistently avoid stimuli associated with the trauma or experience a numbing of general responsiveness;
- d the client must experience persistent symptoms of increased arousal (eg, anxiety, agitation, hypervigilance, sleep disturbance, outbursts of anger, problems of concentration etc);
- e symptoms must have lasted at least a month.**

Psychosis: Parting company with reality. Where unconscious fantasy material overwhelms the ability to test reality.

Survivor: An adult who was sexually abused as a child.

Therapeutic Communities: A live-in community of patients, structured by a particular psychotherapeutic model of treatment.

* (cf *Child Abuse: Pastoral and Procedural Guidelines - A report from a Working Party to the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales p. 10*)

** (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual. APA 1987)

6 APPENDIX

The Selection and Formation of Diocesan deacons and priests

As the Budd Report indicates:

Seminaries and their Selection Boards are already acutely aware of the reality of abuse, and of the need for psychological screening. Yet further individual guidance must be given to assist those training for the ministry to come to terms, in a mature manner, with their sexuality, providing a growth in self-understanding, expression and control, conducive to sexual integration.

Seminaries and their Boards are also aware that such screening is insufficiently sophisticated to identify potential sex abusers. It is, therefore, important to look for behavioral signs that might indicate that a particular candidate is attempting, consciously or not, to avoid appraisal by the seminary authorities.

Candidates for the priesthood must be assessed on the basis of a positive discernment rather than on the lack of any apparent negative qualities. 'How suitable is this man for ordination?' rather than 'What had he done wrong?'. Seminary staff should be aware of those students who cause disquiet to the authorities and their fellow students without it being clearly established that they have done anything that might disqualify them or even call for special attention. Hindsight often shows that for those priests who sexually abuse there was an issue that was never quite dealt with during their time in seminary about how they related to other people or to the system as a whole.

Staff must also endeavour to recognise both those who appear to slide through the seminary without forming any attachment either to other people or to work and those who seem unable to recognise the vital importance of boundaries in relationships – the capacity to trust and be trusted while remaining maturely independent.

It is highly probable that in any seminary, at any one time, there will be a number of candidates who come from an abused background. It is important, therefore, that efforts are made to foster a culture in which trust and respect are nurtured and in which students can confront their vulnerability and weakness. The seminary, though not the appropriate context for intensive therapy, should be prepared to offer suitable accompaniment for those students who are facing some painful aspects of their earlier lives. Nor can we avoid acknowledging the very real limitations that the all male environment creates for the development of sexual maturity.

Students in formation for priesthood are becoming increasingly familiar with the processes of personal reflection and supervision. Such skills enable them to reflect carefully on their lives and work and help them to integrate their personal lives and ministerial role. It is essential that this continues to operate after ordination using people who are themselves skilled in such processes. External monitoring of this kind is common in many professions and is proving to be of great benefit to both the professional and their constituency.

In his letter *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, on the formation of priests, Pope John Paul II reflects on what he calls the 'social and cultural atmosphere' which:

largely reduces human sexuality to the level of something commonplace, since it interprets and lives it in a reductive and impoverished way by linking it solely with the body and selfish pleasure... In such a context, education for sexuality becomes more difficult but also more urgent. (para 44).

Sexuality is essentially the energy for relationships which compels us to seek connections with others. Awareness of this is crucial for men training for the priesthood. They are being called to relational ministry: a ministry which is warm, vulnerable and vibrant. Such ministry can liberate others in their search for God and assist them in making sense of their lives. Ministers who avoid relationships and who are unable to own their vulnerability may well hinder others in their journey towards God.

Those who work and live in the seminaries are aware of the need to offer a diverse range of opportunities and contexts for all candidates for the priesthood to look to the development of their own sexual integration. This development is a life-long process; its tasks vary according to age and circumstance and it requires information as well as formation. Students need factual information, a forum in which they can explore and accept their own identity and a capacity to reflect on their development in relation to their calling, their understanding of the Gospel and their relationship with others.

In order that such development, including all the tension and struggle involved, might be clearly modelled, it is important that seminary staff themselves should be engaged in their own continuing processes of discernment and formation.

It is this which will provide the emotional and psychological security which will enable a real growth towards a priesthood that seeks to empower others rather than accrue the kind of power which can isolate people, bolster insecurity and maintain abusive and oppressive relationships. This is especially the case when considering the nature of the sexual abuse of children, since as we have already noted, such abuse is a misuse of power.

The Working Party saw many of the issues raised above as useful for those involved in novitiates and the formation of those preparing for the permanent diaconate.

Terms of Reference

The Working Party was instructed by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales in November 1993 to:

... investigate how the Church can best offer care and support to victims / survivors of abuse, together with families and other social groups affected, including colleagues of abusers.

The Working party began its work in February 1994 and has met on 16 occasions.

Working Party

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Bernard Wilson	Diocesan Delegate, Salford
Richard Zipfel	Secretary of The Committee for Community Relations of the Bishops' Conference

and many other individuals who would prefer to remain anonymous

A PRAYER

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord
Lord hear my voice!
O Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my pleading.

*out of the woundedness of the abused
out of re-abusing intrusive memories
out of the splits of a fractured community
out of the tears of the people of God
... I cry to the Lord*

If you, O Lord, should mark our guilt
Lord, who would survive?
But with you is found forgiveness
For this we revere you.

*out of the dark side of our sexuality
out of the denial and guilt of the abuser
out of the demoralisation of the confused
out of the crushing injustice of abusive power
... I cry to the Lord*

My soul is waiting for the Lord
I count on his word.
My soul is longing for the Lord
more than watchmen for daybreak.
Let the watchmen count on daybreak
and Israel on the Lord.

*out of the neediness of priest and people
out of the hope for a Church which is hostile to abuse
out of the desire to listen to the powerless
out of the longing for the holiness of the kingdom
... I cry to the Lord*

Because with the Lord there is mercy
and fullness of redemption,
Israel indeed he will redeem
from all its iniquity.

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