

(1) Introduction: What are these resource materials about?

These resource materials are being provided to the people of the parishes of the Diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, to assist you in identifying and implementing reasonable, prudent, and effective measures to protect vulnerable people from abuse, as part of the ongoing work of making people, programs, and your parishes safer. Note that while perhaps more explicit attention is paid to sexual abuse here, **the goal of the materials and the goal of the parish plan is to take active measures to respond to and prevent all forms of abuse.**

This is the first of a number of packages of material that will be coming to you over the next few months. They are based on the resources used in a series of workshops attended by the clergy of the diocese in the fall of 2012. This first document is a summarized overview of fundamental matters related to identifying the risks of abuse in your parish and to designing appropriate and effective prevention and response measures to address those risks.

The final section of this document outlines two steps that your parish can take to begin the process of developing an abuse prevention and response plan.

The second package of resource materials will follow at the end of May: It will include a detailed outline of the process of creating an abuse prevention and response plan shaped and tailored to fit the realities of your parish. It will also include a number of tools that will help you create the plan, along with samples and examples that will help you get started.

(2) The reality of abuse

There is no one, single, common—let alone universal—definition of abuse. In general, abuse means “to use wrongly or improperly, to misuse.” It may take one, or more, of many forms, including neglect, harassment, and bullying, as well as other forms of physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuse.

- Parishes must face the stark reality that abuse is real. Furthermore, it is not only an historical reality. Abuse continues to this day.

- Abuse crosses every line we can think of—social, geographic, economic, racial, religious—and every other. It happens in large cities, in suburbs, in towns, villages, and in rural communities. It happens in communities of the wealthy, the middle class, and the poor. **Abuse happens “somewhere else,” and it happens in our neighbourhoods too.**
- Abuse is perpetrated in every type and kind and form of organization that involves or serves children, youth, or vulnerable adults, including organizations and institutions of every Christian denomination and of other religions.
- It is literally impossible to know how widespread the problem of abuse really is, in churches or anywhere else. In part, this is because there is no one single common definition of abuse or standard by which it is gauged. More important, the tragic reality is that many—some suggest 90 percent—of those who are abused never come forward, never admit it or disclose it to others. This is particularly true of people who have been sexually abused, and it is especially true of boys and men who have been victims of sexual abuse.
- Abuse is usually perpetrated by people well known to, trusted by, often loved by, their victims. Experts estimate that, in over 85 percent of documented cases of abuse of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult, the abuser is in no way a stranger, but is rather someone close to, and often in a position of trust over, the victim.
- The victims of abuse are male and female, children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
- Perpetrators of abuse are likewise male and female, children, youth, and adults. Contrary to what many people believe, many abusers are female, and many are children or youth.
- Lay people and clergy have been the perpetrators of abuse, and they have been the victims of abuse.

- The very good news is that there are not huge numbers of paedophiles and other sexual predators operating in a community at any given time.

The very bad news is that studies consistently show the average number of victims of a paedophile to be somewhere between 100 and 150 before he or she is stopped. That is not a misprint: In one Ontario case, an individual admitted having abused more than 200 boys, in four different rural communities, over a period of 30 years, before being stopped—before being arrested, charged, and tried for these atrocious crimes.

Note the language used in the paragraph above. It is intentional. It does not say that predators often abuse large numbers of children or youth before they are discovered. It says that predators often harm many victims before they are stopped. The evidence, from Canada and around the world, from cases involving children and youth in churches, residential schools, sports organizations, public and private schools, etc., is clear and unequivocal: **Many, if not most, sexual predators who prey on vulnerable people in organizations such as churches are found out or suspected—some are even reported to authorities—long before they are stopped.**

The goal of parish abuse prevention and response plans is to change that reality by identifying and implementing reasonable, prudent, and effective measures that will help the people of a parish prevent abuse—and will help them identify and respond quickly to stop abuse if it does happen.

(3) Why do abusers target churches?

Those who would prey on vulnerable people often target churches as a hunting ground for victims. It is not difficult to understand why:

- Many vulnerable people—children, youth, and adults who are unable, or not well able, to care for themselves—find support and solace in churches. For some people, the church is their primary family and community. Churches are thus often fertile ground for those who would prey on the vulnerable.

- Churches are communities that place a high value on trust. Indeed, creating and fostering a community of trust is, as it should be, an implicit, if not explicit, intention of churches. Abusers take advantage of and exploit this fundamental and precious reality.
- Increasing needs for the supports offered by churches and church programs, services, and activities, combined with diminishing financial and human resources can create situations in which safety is unintentionally compromised. If a church is “desperate for help,” it may (as many other organizations do) ignore or discard the measures it uses to reduce risk, thus unintentionally providing greater opportunities for people to harm others.

(4) Parishes are obligated to act to prevent and respond to the risk of abuse.

Every organization that involves or serves children, youth, and vulnerable adults has moral and legal obligations to respond to the risk of abuse. It does not matter whether the organization is large or small, incorporated or unincorporated, a not-for-profit organization, public institution, business, or registered charity.

- **Churches are no exception to this rule. If a parish involves or serves children, youth, and vulnerable adults, then it *must* take active abuse prevention and response measures—period. It is not optional.**
- It may not seem, or even be, fair, but the reality, born from a dark history, is this: In the media, in the public, and even to a certain degree in the courts, churches now face more intense scrutiny and higher expectations in relation to the issue of abuse than do many other organizations.

The reason is simple: Religious institutions have not always acted to protect the vulnerable from predators; in fact, they have all too often protected abusers and, in effect, created opportunities for them to continue their crimes. It is that simple and that complex.

The all-too-familiar tragedy of passive toleration of, or active complicity in, the abuse of children and youth by religious institutions in this country and around the world has significant consequences for parishes today. The default position of many people in society is that churches cannot be trusted. We can only earn trust by taking active measures to protect the vulnerable in our communities of faith.

- As an incorporated legal body, an Anglican parish is considered a “person” under the law. However, the abstract entity of the “parish” is not responsible for taking action to prevent and respond to abuse—the people who lead the parish are.
- The legal issues surrounding the issue of abuse are complex. **The fundamental legal principle, however, is simple: Parishes are legally responsible for taking active, prudent, reasonable, and effective measures to protect people—especially vulnerable people—who are involved in the church from harm that might come to them**
 - **On church *premises*** (this includes not only the church building, but any location where church-related activities take place, (e.g., a camp, etc.));
 - **In church *programs, services, and activities*** (this includes not only those for which the church is solely and directly responsible, but others less directly controlled by the parish in which children, youth, and vulnerable people of a parish participate);
 - **By *people* who are on the premises of the church and/or are involved in church programs, services, and activities** (this includes not only the people who are directly involved in church activities—e.g., Sunday school teachers, parish council members, youth group leaders, etc.—but also others who may come on to the church premises, e.g., people making deliveries, etc.).

(5) What steps can you take to begin creating an abuse prevention and response plan?

The second set of resource materials (set for distribution at the end of May) will outline the process your parish can use to create an abuse prevention and response plan. In the interim, here's what you could do to prepare:

1. Gather information:

Create a Parish Abuse Prevention and Response Plan file. Into it, put copies of the following:

- a) Documents that describe or govern all programs, services, and activities that involve or serve children, youth, or vulnerable adults (e.g., policies, procedures, guidelines, etc.);
- b) Terms of reference of committees or work groups responsible for or involved in these programs, services, or activities;
- c) Job or position descriptions for all those who are involved in these programs, services, or activities;
- d) Information about measures your parish is currently taking to respond to or prevent abuse (e.g., descriptions of screening processes, protocols about reporting allegations or suspicions, etc.); and
- e) Any other information that you think will be helpful to the process of creating a Parish Abuse Prevention and Response Plan.

2. Consider who might be able and willing to serve on a working group to create your parish's Plan:

It might be helpful to start thinking about people you might ask to participate on a working group that could spearhead creating your parish's Plan. The group should not be too large, and it should include members of the clergy and lay people, and people who have experience with programs, services, and activities that involve or serve children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Most important, its members must be people keenly interested in, and committed to, making your parish **safer**—for everyone.