



Conference of Major Superiors of Men

Instruments of Hope and Healing:

Eleven Years of Work and Reflection by United States Male Religious on the Tragedy of Sexual Abuse within the Catholic Church

The Work So Far

In August 2002, the leaders of the men's religious institutes of the United States met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, attempting to respond to the strong outcry over the sudden public awareness of the abuse of minors by priests and religious. The Bishops had already met in June of that year to forge a common approach to this tragedy for the whole Catholic Church in the United States and all its ministries. The leaders of the men's religious institutes felt a need to articulate clear responses and commit their institutes to more transparent internal operations and policies in regard to the tragedy of sexual abuse of minors. These policies were understood to include the pastoral care of victims, increased screening of new candidates, formation of new educational programs for all members, development of effective methods of supervision for members who had abused minors, and authentic methods of transparency for a public whose trust had been lost by revelations of abuse in the course of that year. The institutes of Religious Brothers, though not covered by the policies and procedures of the Bishops' *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* because they are not clerics, joined with the religious clerics of the leadership conference to develop a common program – Instruments of Hope and Healing – and to be bound by it.

While any member of our institutes who had ever had a substantiated allegation of sexual abuse had been removed from ministry, religious institutes of men operate under different provisions of Canon Law. These provisions require that religious institutes not expel members who had abused, if the abuser showed repentance, empathy for those victimized, and a willingness to accept intense supervision in community and permanent removal from ministry. Religious institutes needed to find fraternal ways to professionally and intensely supervise abusers who fulfilled those criteria. They would keep offenders within their communities using structures which ensured the protection of children. For the leadership of these religious institutes this seemed to be a more responsible option than dismissing unsupervised members into society with the increased risk of the re-abuse of minors.

In order to hold ourselves accountable and transparent in our procedures and policies, we sought the assistance of Praesidium Religious Services, Inc., a highly respected resource and accrediting agency in the field of child-care accreditation. The process established between the

religious institutes and Praesidium brought our communities in compliance with national standards of child-care and for the prevention of sexual abuse. Praesidium assisted us in an intense evaluation of files, procedures, policies, community locations, and evaluation of supervision and safety plans for members who had abused. Outside objective accreditation processes, conducted at regular intervals, also evaluated, case by case, how well we were responding to victims and how individual institutes used their review boards. Praesidium also helped us to establish comprehensive programs for our leaders and members in the prevention of sexual abuse, responding pastorally and justly to victims, and implementing ongoing educational requirements in our institutes. Based on our experience, these standards of accreditation have been strengthened and clarified in two subsequent revisions since 2002.

We have learned a great deal over these years. We learned the dynamics of power over others that are inherent in our ministerial relationships with them. We learned the awesome responsibility that power and trust endows to those who receive it. We learned the tragic damage that the betrayal of power and trust causes to those we serve. We learned that we must remain critically observant of our members and ensure ever more diligently the safety of our ministries for young persons.

While acknowledging that a single case of sexual abuse of a minor is abhorrent, with the Bishops of the United States we leaders of religious institutes have harvested from the deep pain and dark grace of 2002 models of prevention and accountability that indicate few new cases of the abuse of present minors. While fewer allegations of sexual abuse from years prior to 2002 are evident, we maintain continuing scrutiny by our review boards and accreditation procedures. We have every indication that our responses are more pastorally responsible and indicate a deep sense of compassion for and understanding of the pain and loss of victims.

We, as leaders of religious institutes, have always perceived our response to this tragic reality to be a work in continuity with our mission to young people, rather than administrative procedures to solve a serious problem. Our Founders, usually deeply devoted to education and ministry with youth, would have found the current tragedy of sexual abuse abhorrent.

Eleven years later “we continue to share in the anguish” of so many in the Church over the tragedy of sexual abuse of minors, most especially the abuse perpetrated by our own priests and brothers. This tragedy continues to fill us with a painful sense of responsibility to continue to do our absolute best to prevent and compassionately recognize and care for the victims of such abuse.

Continuing Our Commitment

As the members of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men ([CMSM](#)) and in the spirit of Gospel values and our institutes' traditions, we remain committed to the protection of children and young people. After acknowledging, in 2002, that there was a sexual abuse crisis, CMSM members have worked diligently to protect minors and to improve our own accountability in this area. We note two significant achievements.

- ❖ CMSM members developed the *Instruments of Hope and Healing*, a comprehensive program providing standards for the protection of minors from sexual abuse, for comprehensive outreach to victims, for the development of independent lay review boards, and for supervision of members who have been credibly accused of sexually abusing minors. The *Instruments of Hope and Healing* program has twice seen the revision of the Standards for Accreditation, most recently in 2012, to include evolving best practices for protection of minors as well as higher standards of transparency and accountability.
- ❖ To insure compliance with the *Instruments of Hope and Healing* program, CMSM contracted with Praesidium Religious Services, a national leader in creating safe environments to protect minors from sexual abuse, to develop accreditation standards and an independent accreditation process for the distinctive way of life of vowed religious communities.

The *Instruments of Hope and Healing* program and our work with Praesidium have led to documented improvements in our protection of and care for young people:

- ❖ Rigorous screening of candidates, including background checks and psychological evaluation;
- ❖ Clear and accountable guidelines regarding outreach to victims and compliance with civil and church law;
- ❖ Intense supervision for members with established allegations of child sexual abuse, especially those determined to be at high risk for recidivism. All members with established allegations of child sexual abuse have been permanently removed from public church ministry.
- ❖ Educational programs focusing on heightened awareness of child sexual abuse and a proactive environment of care for all to whom we minister.

This work has been done in full cooperation with the guidelines, procedures and documents of the Catholic Church, including the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* adopted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in June 2002.

In 2013, as the leaders of our religious communities, many of which were specifically founded to work with children and young adults, we have a particular role to play in the protection of young people in the Church. We state once again that we abhor the sexual abuse of minors, and we realize and apologize for the distinctive pain caused when our members are its perpetrators. While we have not always responded perfectly, we remain committed to meeting the highest standards of prevention, outreach, evaluation and supervision. To this end, we re-assert the following commitments:

- ❖ We will maintain the integrity of the *Institutes of Hope and Healing* program and the Praesidium accreditation process through ongoing review and revision.
- ❖ We will continue to work with the Bishops of the United States in their efforts to bring accountability and transparency to this issue. While religious communities have different ways of proceeding than do our bishops and diocesan priests, we are committed to working with them and the National Review Board for the protection of all children and minors served by the Church.
- ❖ We will establish a National Advisory Council, composed of men and women of diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise, to examine and to make recommendations regarding our efforts of the past eleven years and our current policies and procedures to foster and to enforce environments that are safe for children, expressive of our particular charisms, collaborative with other Church leaders and consistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- ❖ We will investigate and implement other appropriate mechanisms of public responsibility for CMSM member communities, especially those building collaboration and cooperation among religious at the national level.

In our 2002 statement CMSM members declared that “as religious, we are committed to working with parents, church leaders, civil society and all people of good will to restore the trust that has been lost, and to find what we need to learn from this tragedy, what it calls us to as people of faith and as a nation.” We reaffirm that statement and recommit ourselves to its vision and implementation.

August 2013