

**Message from Bishop Harris to be read at all week-end Masses September 21-22, 2019**

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

As we begin a new pastoral year in our parish communities, it is appropriate for us to revisit and reaffirm our Diocesan Protocol for Responsible Ministry - Caring for the Faith Community - A Protocol for Responsible Ministry which became diocesan law in 2009.

The Protocol's roots go back to the 1990's. Like other organizations that work with children and vulnerable adults, the Diocese of Saint John, along with other dioceses across Canada, developed policies to ensure the protection of minors and the vulnerable. Initially promulgated and implemented in 2009, 2010 and revised in 2012, our protocol is diocesan law in the Diocese of Saint John. The effect is twofold - the protection of minors and the vulnerable as well as the protection of those who provide the ministry.

Hearing of sexual abuse is always painful. When an abuser is a member of a parish or diocese - whether clergy or lay - it is particularly devastating to the victim, the family and our Catholic faith community. We are all affected no matter how close or far we are from the actual situation. Because of this, there are many who have questioned their faith in God and in the Church. Pope Francis has said, "Do not fear transparency. The Church does not need darkness to carry out her work."

During the Fall of 2018, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops published, "Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse - A Call to the Catholic Faithful in Canada for Healing, Reconciliation, and Transformation". The title itself demands much from each of us. In this document, the Canadian bishops share compassionate insight into the hard lessons learned along the road to justice and healing for victims of sexual abuse. Contributions from the helping professions were valued and acknowledged. As we move forward as a faith community, we will need to continue to be a praying and a learning Church in this regard.

Early in 2019 the Diocesan Responsible Ministry Committee convened to review and update the Diocesan Protocol in light of the CCCB document and its recommendations.

In May regional workshops were held in Saint John, Fredericton, and Miramichi for parish priests, Responsible Ministry Coordinators and Parish Council Chairs. Discussion and feedback which occurred were valuable and already some useful changes to our Protocol have been made. Participants were informed that a review of parish record keeping practices in regards to the Protocol, the Protocol's implementation and the training of ministers will take place this Fall by members of the Diocesan Responsible Ministry Committee. The outcome of that process will be shared.

As a diocesan church, we are totally dedicated to making the church a safe place for children, youth and vulnerable adults. Thank you to those in the parish who are ensuring that the work of the Parish Responsible Ministry Committee is carried out each year.

We each have a moral and legal responsibility to see that minors and the vulnerable are safe in our Church.

Abuse of a minor must be reported to the New Brunswick Department of Social Development or to local police. A complaint to the Diocese may be made to the Bishop's Delegate. Contact numbers can be found in the Responsible Ministry binders in the worship site (s) of each parish.

Thank you for your attention. I am grateful to all of you for your support. May the Lord bless each and all of you.

In the words of Pope Francis, we are missionary disciples, sent to evangelize the world. May you consider it a privilege as you radiate Christ among yourselves and to others.

Blessings on you and yours!

✠ Robert Harris  
Bishop of Saint John