

This brochure is developed for people of the Anglican Church of the Diocese, May 1999, revised February 2005, by

Sexual Misconduct Response Team
("S.M.R.T.")

Of

THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF
HURON

190 Queens Avenue
LONDON, Ontario
N6A 6H7

1-800-919-1115 (Ontario)
1-519-434-6893 ex 224

The Rev'd Canon Janet Griffith Johnson
Director, Human Resources



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from material
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**The Centre for the Prevention of
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For All In the Church

Sexual Abuse and The Church:

What you need to Know



The Anglican Diocese of
Huron

Sexual Misconduct
Response Team

Q What should Christians believe about sex?

A Sex is a gift from God and is life-giving and good when used for God's good, loving and creative purposes. Trouble comes when sex is used for the wrong purposes, when someone uses sex for their own pleasure or gain while ignoring the well-being, needs or safety of another person.

The church is meant to be a loving and trusting community of people doing their best to live as Jesus Christ taught us. Jesus teaches that we are to love God with all that we are, and to love each other just as we want to be loved. This means that anybody who uses sex for their own purposes, ignoring the well-being of another, is not following Jesus' teaching. Sadly, this can and sometimes does happen in the Church community.

Jesus teaches that we have a special job to care for children and other vulnerable people. It is everyone's job to make sure that the church community is a safe place for all people. That job is especially the responsibility of people who are leaders in the Church. That includes not only clergy, organists, Sunday School teachers and Youth leaders, but all people who hold positions of leadership in the Church, including volunteers. All of these who work in Jesus' name in a ministry are working in a sacred trust. To do something wrong sexually is to violate that sacred trust.

The questions and answers that follow are meant to hold up the highest standard as we work together in Jesus' name. If you ever feel that one of these standards is not being followed, please come forward with your concerns. The Church has a clear set of guidelines to address such serious problems.

Q How do I know when sexual abuse occurs in a pastoral relationship?

A When someone, whether clergy or laity, who is in a position of responsibility makes sexual contact or talks or acts in a sexual way towards a person in their care, that is sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse by someone in a responsible role can include *physical contact*, such as:

- "accidental" touch of sexual areas of the body
- Tickling and/or playful aggression that seem uncomfortable
- A very long hug when a short one seems more normal
- Kissing on the lips when a kiss on the cheek would be appropriate
- Pressing against the body while hugging
- An inappropriate gift (lingerie, for example)
- Sexual touch
- Sexual intercourse

Sexual abuse by someone in a responsible role might not be physical: it can also be *verbal*. For example:

- Repeated unreasonable comments about physical appearance or dress
- Suggestive comments or sexual talk, perhaps talk that could mean two things at once
- Relating personal details of sexual experiences
- Questions about the intimate details of relationships
- Looking for sympathy about his or her partner's sexual inadequacies
- Invitations to "intimate" visits, such as a hot tub alone together, or a naked swim
- Invitations to sexual contact
- Inappropriate "jokes"
- Inappropriate comments about sexual orientation

Q *Is sexual contact between you and a person in a role of leadership ever okay?*

A It is the job of the person with responsibility or power to look out for the well-being of the person under their care or leadership. People in such roles are responsible to know that entering into a sexual relationship with someone under their care is not ethical, and will almost always mean God's gift of sex will be misused, bringing harm instead of good. In other words, even if it looks like two consenting adults, the rules are different for people in responsible roles!

For example, pastors who become interested in dating or romance with one of their own congregation (this is complicated and not advisable) must get out of the ministerial role in that person's life before ethically pursuing the relationship. Questions need to be asked to test this decision:

- Was the ministerial relationship minimal (no counseling or past pastoral relationship)?
- Is the minister willing to remove him/herself from the role of ministry in that person's life?
- Can the minister be open and honest about the relationship with the congregation?

In the case where the clergy wishes to pursue a relationship, they must contact their Bishop for permission to do so. The Bishop interviews the couple and a chaplain is assigned to the lay person for a period of two years in order to ensure that the interests of both persons are protected and sacred trust is being maintained.

Genuine consent to sex can happen in a healthy way only when the two people are in an equal relationship. If not, then it's too easy for the person with less power to say yes only because they are feeling scared or manipulated into sex. This can happen even without that person knowing it! They may think that sex is what they want or need, then find out later that it was the last thing in the world they should have done! That doesn't mean they can't make good decisions. It means that it's very difficult for someone with less power to make a healthy choice for themselves about sex with a more powerful person.

Q *How do you know when someone's gone too far?*

A These are the warning signs that a relationship has gone too far:

- You are feeling uncomfortable or confused with a relationship even if you thought it was nice at first.
- You are receiving unusual time and attention from that person.
- You are receiving personal gifts, or gifts of a personal nature.
- You meet the person for counseling, and end up hearing more about his or her problems than talking about yours.
- You are being invited out for intimate, social occasions.
- You are being touched in a way that you find confusing, uncomfortable or upsetting.
- You are given a "religious" reason for the conduct, like "God has brought us together".

Q *What should you do if you are sexually attracted to a leader in your church?*

A Feelings of sexual attraction are not "wrong". If you share your feelings with a leader in your church, it is his or her responsibility to honour your feelings and help you to understand that he or she cannot return your interest in an intimate relationship. This is especially true if the person is your ordained minister: when they reject that intimacy, they are keeping a sacred trust to protect the pastoral relationship with you. In other words, they are faithfully being your minister!

Q *What should you do if you believe you are a victim of sexual abuse by someone in the church in ministry?"*

A Pay attention to your feelings and trust yourself.

- Remember that you are not to blame, even if you agreed to the relationship in the beginning.
- Be careful to share your confusion, fear or anxiety only with a person you trust to look out for your best interests.
- Ask a warden, a clergy-person, your territorial Archdeacon or the Diocese of Huron Church House for a copy of the document entitled "*Code of Sexual Ethics and Professional Conduct: Our Sacred Trust*". Read this document with the person with whom you have shared your concerns. Look at the steps you will need to take to report a problem. The steps are set out to make sure there is a full and thorough response to your complaint, and that you are protected throughout that procedure.
- This document also lists resources to assist you in looking at some of the important issues you may be facing.
- If you feel confused about this document, you can also make your complaint directly to the Bishop of the Diocese of Huron. (A toll-free number and address can be found at the end of this pamphlet.) he or she will arrange to meet with you, help you to document your complaint, will take the matter seriously, and will provide you with assistance with the response procedures.
- Remember that you might not be the only person to whom this has happened and that your action can help both yourself and others.
- **If a child has been sexually abused by someone it MUST be reported to the Children's Aid Society and/or the police without exception: this is a legal obligation.**
- If you wish to make a complaint against a pastoral counselor, find out if he or she is a member of a professional organization. Come forward with your concerns and make the complaint there as well as at the person's church.

Q *Can your congregation be better prepared for the possibility of sexual abuse?*

A The Diocese of Huron has benefited from studying the issues of sexual abuse within relationships in ministry. A new document, the "Code of Sexual Ethics and Professional Conduct: Our Sacred Trust", has been endorsed by the Church.

You may wish to study these issues of sexual abuse as a way of helping your congregation deepen their awareness about this important issue. You may want to do some work in your congregation to develop a loving and faithful way to respond to this potential problem...or you may want to strengthen what is already there.

A representative from the Sexual Misconduct Response Team (SMRT) is available to assist your group or congregation to study and be better informed about the Diocesan Code and about issues around sexual abuse within relationships in the Church.

Something as simple as making this flyer available to the people of your church may turn out to make all the difference in the world to someone in trouble.

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