



Ottawa – Beginning today, in Catholic dioceses/eparchies across Canada, Bishops will issue locally the updated and expanded national guidelines for the protection of minors in Canada. Entitled *Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse: A Call to the Catholic Faithful in Canada for Healing, Reconciliation, and Transformation*, this document of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB) was unanimously adopted by the Bishops of Canada on **September 27** during their 2018 annual Plenary Assembly. Since then, Bishops have taken time to familiarize themselves with its contents and to consider with their diocesan/eparchial staff how to ensure its implementation in their dioceses/eparchies as well as how best to inform and educate clergy, members of religious communities and lay personnel.

First and foremost, this document focuses on minors and vulnerable adults, whom Canada's Bishops wish to protect from sexual violence. In addition to a clear delineation of procedures in cases of sexual abuse, it puts forward 69 recommendations inspired by nine lessons which Bishops have learned through their collective experiences over the past quarter century. Chief among these is that victims must come first. The document seeks not only to provide guidance for diocesan/eparchial protocols and policies as well as those for religious communities, but to stimulate a cultural transformation in attitudes about sexual abuse. The new guidelines apply to all Catholic clergy (Bishops, priests and deacons), as well as members of religious communities and also lay personnel who are working in Catholic parishes or Church organizations.

With their responsibility for the safeguarding of pastoral environments at the forefront of their ministry, and to ensure accuracy, depth, authenticity, rigour, and relevance, the Bishops in preparing the document involved input from a broad spectrum of contributors, including survivors, lay women and lay men, as well as professional consultants with experience and expertise in psychology, social work, child protection, and Church and civil law. The majority of the experts consulted also have specific experience in protecting minors and vulnerable adults from sexual abuse.

With this document, Canada's Bishops reaffirm their commitment to continue improving practices in their dioceses/eparchies with an emphasis on long-term prevention and pre-emptive action. The document brings the CCCC's existing guidelines (From Pain to Hope, 1992; Orientations, 2007) up to date with the latest laws in Canada and the most recent norms of the Holy See. Bishops will study and use the document to update diocesan/eparchial policies and protocols. In adopting the document, the Bishops also agreed to establish a special committee to assist the CCCC in keeping its policies up-to-date and to make recommendations on emerging questions.

The Bishops acknowledge that the implementation of a document of this magnitude will take time, but the focused and transformative actions which will come of it will protect minors and promote the healing of survivors. All of Canada's Bishops hope that survivors of sexual abuse will read *Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse* and see in it a real effort to listen and learn from them.