



NEWS ARCHIVE:

Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

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Diocese gathers May 12, 2010, to pray for victims of sexual abuse, for healing and reconciliation

BY BLAKE SITTLER

A liturgy was held at St. Paul's Cathedral in downtown Saskatoon May 12 to pray for those who have been sexually abused by members of the church. The service also included prayers for reconciliation and eventual healing and forgiveness of the perpetrators of the crimes.

Similar liturgies were held in Davidson, Rosetown, Humboldt, Wadena, and Unity on the same night. The liturgy in Saskatoon was presided over by Saskatoon Bishop Don Bolen, with some 150 people attending.

The prayer service was a creative Liturgy of the Word, featuring a reading from the gospel of Mark about the woman with a haemorrhage who was healed by touching the cloak of Jesus. The reading was then presented by eight readers, one who read the gospel, followed by the others speaking the thought fragments of an abuse victim, a parent, a priest, an Aboriginal elder and other people affected by sexual abuse.

Those present were invited to process to the front of the church to pick up one of the stones piled on the floor and to place it at the foot of a large resurrection cross. Many of those who placed stones by the cross did so emotionally, and at times couples placed the stones by the cross together hand-in-hand.

"I was there and I found it to be quite moving," said a local priest. "I was particularly struck by the sense and spirit of contrition and humility in the service. I also appreciated the very frank talk about abuse, especially during the dramatic reading of the Gospel...it was refreshing to be talking about abuse so openly in church."

Bishop Donald Bolen began his homily with a story of a woman who gave birth in a grave in which she was hiding from the Nazis during the Shoah. A man hiding in the next grave later said that surely only the Messiah could be born in the heart of human suffering.



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“If there is a Messiah, if there is a God of love, then that Messiah must be born into the heart of human suffering... or the redemption gained will not reach us in our deepest darkness,” Bolen said.

The bishop made it clear that the prayers offered during the liturgy were for all those hurt by abuse as well as for health and forgiveness of the abusers themselves.

“We gather as a community to pray for all those touched by the reality of abuse... for those who were abused in secrecy, for those who did not deal promptly [with the allegations]... for those who perpetrated the abuse on the most vulnerable members of society... for ourselves as we struggle to see God’s presence in this broken body of the Church,” Bolen said.

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon responded to the issue of sexual abuse in 1991 when Bishop Mahoney formed a committee to develop diocesan procedures for dealing with allegations of sexual abuse by clergy and parish employees.

In October 2008 the diocese further developed the policy to include prevention, response and a victim's committee. This three-part document titled, " Working Together for a Safe and Respectful Church Environment," opens with a statement of hope that the church would be a place of safety for the vulnerable.

“This policy is our Church’s response to the need to protect those most vulnerable in our church and society. In our society and indeed in the church itself, sad experience has shown the need for vigilance and awareness to provide safe space and practices in order that all, especially the most vulnerable, may feel and be at peace in a safe environment,” states the text.

The 35 page document is aimed at protecting both the children as well as vulnerable adults. "Vulnerable adults" may include those mentally and physically challenged and those who may be in particular need because of their emotional, social or material circumstances. The policy applies to clergy, religious and laity involved in parish or diocesan ministry.

Bolen's first pastoral letter as bishop was a response to the issue of sexual abuse in the Church. It was read or distributed to all parishes in the diocese the weekend of May 10-11, the fifth Sunday of Easter.

Bolen concludes the letter, “The sexual abuse of minors in the Church is a complete contradiction of what the Church is and what it is summoned to be... our first concern must always be for those who have been abused...to assist in whatever way possible to help diminish their suffering and move towards healing... And let us not be reluctant to pray also for those who have been guilty of abusing others; their sin does not make them exempt from our prayers or from God’s mercy.”





