

Are These Our Neighbours?

People Involved in Abusive Situations

“If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these...it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.”

Matthew 18:6

What kinds of abuse are there?

- Physical** - infliction of unmerited/excessive punishment.
- bullying—casual or planned physical attacks.
- neglect
- Psychological** - emotional manipulation, bullying (verbal, threats), domination.

Abuse is:

The misuse of power or influence by the stronger over the weaker for the benefit or personal gratification of the powerful.

- Sexual** - gratification at the expense of anyone unable to say “no”, e.g. seduction or rape of anyone but especially children, youth of either sex.

In many cases acts of abuse are also a betrayal of the trust which individuals and society place in those with positions of authority and leadership.

The abused are:

Children – months to 13 years Youth – 14 to 19 years Elders/sick - any age
Women – any age Minorities – aboriginal peoples/new immigrant groups.

The abusers are:

Anyone—man, woman or youth—who uses physical, social or spiritual power to gratify themselves, in any way, at the expense of others who cannot see a way to say “no”.

Background

Some possible reasons for abuse:

Cultural differences

1. People in authoritarian societies are often more tolerant of what we regard as abusive behaviour.
2. Vigorous corporal punishment was widespread and acceptable in white society at the time of the residential schools, but is now unacceptable.

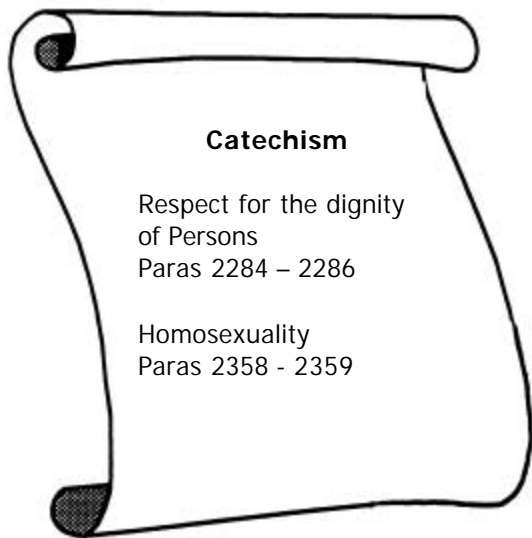
Lifestyles

The current relaxation in sexual attitudes, dress codes, respect for others, which is very much a part of modern life, reduces inhibitions and makes it easier for abusers to justify their actions to themselves.

Upbringing

Abusers have themselves often suffered at the hands of others, even in their own families.

Loneliness – physical, emotional, spiritual



“The most efficient way of changing a person is to change the social context of the person”
Cloé Madanes

“Pastoral care must aim to heal the wound caused by the abuse...”
From Pain to Hope pg. 27

“Underneath the din of screaming headlines, we can hear the cries for help.”
Stephen Rossetti

Reference Sources

Vanier Institute of the Family www.vifamily.ca

Vis-à-Vis national newsletter on family violence, Canadian Council on Social Development

From Pain to Hope, CCCB, 1992

Winter Commission, 1989

“When Your Child has been Molested” and “He told Me Not to Tell”: two of the many publications held by Catholic Family Services, Saskatoon
Origins, Journal of the American Bishops
Public Media

Speaker Resource

Catholic Family Services (includes programs)

Mennonite “Person to Person” program

Agencies in your community

Discussion:

1. What role do we as relatives, neighbours, Christians have in addressing this problem?
2. What should be the role of the judicial system?
3. What special role has the church in offering support to all those in its care?
4. What support can we offer to both abusers and victims?
5. We are our brothers keepers, but perhaps we should hesitate to rush in where angels or at least professions step very carefully?
6. What is the difference between vigilance and vigilantism?

Action Suggestions:

1. Abuse of any kind is a major scandal which the media usually exploits. Try and find the true facts behind a story, always with the final aim to walk in charity.
2. When appropriate, tackle the media not in reaction, but to correct factual errors and emphasize any actions being taken to make amends and prevent re-occurrence.
3. Locate and publish in your area any help contacts for victims.
4. To visit the lonely is a call of ministry. There is a need to understand how much we all need companionship. Some by their profession, their work and their calling have to spend much time alone and in isolated places.
5. Pray for all concerned as this is a very difficult and troubling aspect of life for all people of good will.
6. Learn the signs to look for, LISTEN when someone risks confiding in you and report only to the proper authorities (social workers, police, church).