

June 18, 2007 - Leaving a legacy

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Editorial

Bishops before him can easily be accused of creating a culture of secrecy in terms of sweeping the misconduct of London diocese priests - notably Father Charles Sylvestre - under the rug. But Bishop Ronald Fabbro appears committed to leaving a legacy as the man who took great strides to help Sylvestre's 47 victims heal, to admit to the Church's wrongdoing, and now to work to prevent such deeds from recurring.

Fabbro took a strong stance against Sylvestre's actions immediately following the 47 guilty pleas in August 2006. He publicly apologized for Sylvestre's actions - as well as the inaction of the Catholic Church - and moved to have Sylvestre defrocked.

The release of the Code of Conduct for the Roman Catholic Diocese of London last week only further illustrates how strongly Fabbro is committed to eradicating the possibility of future sexual abuse at the hands of an area priest.

The goal of the code, according to the diocese's website, is "the prevention of sexual abuse, the protection of the vulnerable, the pastoral care of those wounded by misconduct, along with the protection of the rights of the accused and the appropriate action toward those who have committed sexual misconduct."

Towards these ends, the diocese will adopt several key changes in operation. For instance, children giving confessions will do so in an open space so the child and priest are in full view of others; one-on-one instruction is to be avoided in preparations for such events as first communion; and two adults must be present for recreational programs and should be present in all other dealings with children.

Best thing the diocese can do for the victims is to ensure their suffering wasn't for naught. With the Code of Conduct, it is doing just that.

Perhaps the suffering of these 47 victims could have more far-reaching impact. Given the fact priests have abused their position of trust elsewhere in Canada and around the world, one hopes the Code of Conduct is enacted at other dioceses, or at least used as a blueprint for a similar code.

No profession, no matter how spiritual in nature, turns everyone into a saint. Priests are human, and humanity is far from perfect. It's past time for the Catholic Church to stop enabling and ignoring.