

Listening to Victims

Notes Summary

Bishop Manuel de Jesús Rodríguez

The Bishop gave us a summary outline of his book, *Sexual Abuse Victims*. He covered some historical data points for background but mostly about the changes needed to take place in the continuous refinement of the implementation of Canon Law across the entire Church.

Some key points he made:

Major

1. Change needed for the universal recognition and protection of the juridical good for victims.
2. Change needed for the urgency to adapt universal change for the wider juridical good of the faith.

Interpretive meaning for Juridical Good for Victims

In canon law victims are treated primarily as witnesses which is below the standard of even the secular civil recognition of victim rights. He extensively documented multiple national laws, United Nations statements and policies, solutions in different jurisdictions, and various Church documents on the same topic.

Changes are needed to include aspects such as (where present, improve, where absent, included):

1. Procedural justice on par with civil and criminal law in the most advanced Nation States.
2. Minimal right to provide (such as) Victim Impact Statements during the penalty phases of the juridical process.
3. Making ecclesiastical authorities (especially bishops) subject to reporting, review and specific independent reporting of abuse by a bishop himself, if it occurs.
4. Eliminate (or reduce) inherent conflict of interest between a bishop and his accused priests, tension between fraternal friendship and juridical purpose.
5. Reasserting the motivation to support the victim.
6. Establishment of National Penal Adjudication (the French model) to disengage the bishop from the juridical process, placing fact finding, support, transparency, justice for the accused and the victim.
7. Fixing procedural gaps between jurisdictions.

Interpretive meaning for Juridical Good for the Faith

1. Faith, as faith, cannot survive without a meaningful support for victims. It cannot be that victims and crimes are forgotten, marginalized or disregarded in the name of preserving the faith. That is a non-sequitur and irrational.
2. This is a Call to Action.

3. The hard (and failure to cure in a timely basis) causes immense damage and certainly does not promote nor advance the Kingdom of God.
4. The Bishop noted the difficult and painful path Pope Benedict XVI (and before that as Cardinal) had to walk to right these wrongs. He quoted Pope Benedict many times.
5. The Code of Canon Law Book VI needs reform.
6. There is a need to strengthen or create major roles (such as Promotion of Justice) with the charter and authority to insist upon justice for victims - worldwide.

Rev. Kevin M. McQuone

Some key points he made:

Bear one another's burdens, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ (Gal 6:2).

He mentioned other trusted resources that ***Trauma is the Mission Field of the 21st Century.***

Citing data such as:

1. Pervasive Issue - 45% of women and 16% of men are victims of abuse. This means you should expect to encounter people in your ministry who have been (or currently are) victims.
2. Trauma Informed - The necessity of being aware and possess the appropriate skills. Chief among them is the question: "Paint me a picture" or "Tell me your story" so revelation is as clear as the victim can provide in the moment.
3. Institutional Accountability.
 - 3a. Say NO to protecting the system over the victim.
 - 3b Empathy
 - 3c The Golden Rule
 - 3d Mandated Reporter
 - 3e Trust in God that he will work toward the good.
4. A blinded system in very difficult to move forward.

There is a natural conflict between victim and accused. However, acknowledgement is key first critical step.

Criteria:

1. Vulnerability is a power dynamic. By power, By Age, By Experience, By language.
2. Trauma steals agency.
3. There are persistently vulnerable people and there are situationally/Transitional vulnerable people (grief, divorce, health).
4. A person must be free to say NO. A person must be free to speak without the accused present.

5. Evidence and testimony are hidden in plain sight.

5a concealing truth

5b rationalization

5c grooming persons and communities

We harm by ignorance and lack of patience to hear the story - often hidden in ordinary stories. Every story is unique - there is no boilerplate.

There are 12 competencies for Trauma support although we did not go into all of them.

- Accompany
- Support
- Safeguarding truth
- Advocacy is primary once it is shared with you
- Those with the least power need the greatest consideration.

Trauma informed training and ministry is needed.

And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me (MT 25:40).

Resource list (see photo).

Elizabeth Harris

Some key points she made:

Abusers are often first abused as a matter of fact that should not be lost.

Trauma Response includes:

1. Making them comfortable in place, time, speed of discussion - there is no timeline or deadline.
2. Communicate safety
3. Let them tell their story.
4. Gratitude for their coming forward.
5. Remain calm and peaceful.
6. Leave silence, little talking, purposeful listening - but careful on feedback
7. No translating of their story.
8. Avoid "I know how you feel"
9. No promises (satisfaction beyond the telling).
10. No false promises (rewards).
11. Advocate.

12. Allow breaks, refreshment, silence, "meet them where they are".
13. Follow up is critical.
14. Contact Info data sharing (including when and how to contact one another)
15. Give Agency to the victim.
16. Trust the story.
17. "Someone trusts you - you are now an advocate".
18. Support even if NO FINDINGS. NO FINDING does not = STOP SUPPORTING (nor the truth of the story, lies are rare).

Gina-Marie Loree

Some key points she made:

1. Adding Virtus for Children as a program. Includes skill building in:
 - a. Having a voice
 - b. Saying No
 - c. No Freeze response but trained positive response.
 - d. Ability to advocate for themselves.
 - e. Personal space/Boundaries
 - f. Healthy boundaries
2. Disclosure is subtle, incremental and you need to question to gain understanding.

New Reporting Info

Abuse Hotline FL 800-962-2873

Diocese 833-770-0909

Practices:

1. Silence and Shame enable abuse
2. Acknowledge the discomfort
3. Be a Safe Person
4. Lean on the experts.

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