

Child Protection Task Force: A History

St. Joseph's Catholic Community

April 2002

Responding to the clergy abuse scandal in the Catholic Church, Father Tom Radaich called together a group of people to form the task force, with the purpose of creating a safe environment for children. Members were experienced in child protection issues, including social services, therapy, court advocacy, and education. Parishioners and non-parishioners were involved. The task force reports to the pastoral council. The mission statement was established: *“To work for protection and healing from childhood sexual abuse, within our parish, community and Diocese.”*

June 2002

Prior to the meeting of the United States Catholic Bishops in Dallas, letters were written to Bishop Schnurr informing him of the formation and purpose of the task force. The initial letter also listed suggestions for his consideration at the conference of bishops and a request to meet with him for discussion.

August 2002

Members of the task force, including Fr. Radaich, went to Duluth for a meeting with Bishop Schnurr. One of the important topics of conversation was the lack of a clear reporting policy in the Diocese.

At St. Joseph's, a parish meeting was held to provide information and awareness. The speaker was a parishioner who is a survivor of incest. It was well received. An offer to present the same program to a diocesan meeting of professionals was not accepted.

The goals of the task force were determined and published to the parish.

2003

A resource guide was published and distributed in the Grand Rapids area. It listed the contact numbers for the Itasca Alliance Against Sexual Assault and area therapists experienced in providing information, support, and education concerning sexual abuse and assault. Also listed were the names and phone numbers of three lay people who had been identified as Diocesan “Victim Assistance Coordinators”.

Work began on the development of a “Safe Policy for Children”. With resources gathered from other Catholic and Protestant churches, the public schools, and other organizations, the task force members drafted a policy that would complement that of the Diocese of Duluth and be unique to this parish.

Established the tradition of partnering with the Itasca Alliance Against Sexual Assault for their annual dinner and fund-raising event at St. Joseph's, and to provide on-going support.

2004

Using the format of a healing service for survivors of sexual abuse first presented in Cleveland, Ohio, in 2002, the Ritual of Lament was initiated at St. Joseph's during Lent. Open to the public, the invitation to attend was directed to “abuse survivors, their families and friends; all who have been hurt by the betrayal of abuse; all of us who seek forgiveness and healing; and for all who love the broken Body of Christ”. It has been repeated each year.

“*St. Joseph's Policy for the Protection of Children and Young People*” was completed and approved by the school board and the pastoral council.

Probation officers working with both adults and juveniles were invited to attend a task force meeting and were asked to identify community needs. The discussion resulted in a project to provide information and resources for the families and friends of sexual offenders.

2005

In April, the Task Force and “Cherish Our Children” co-sponsored a presentation for parents and professionals done by the director of “Stop It Now, MN” for recognition of “Child Abuse Prevention Month”.

Work was done to design brochures and business cards that would be available to law enforcement, social workers, schools, and the community at large, for the “family and friends of sexual offenders” project.

Contact was made with Fr. Ray Chase, director of Spiritual Development for Children at Catholic Charities in Baltimore. Arrangements were made to have him present “Illuminations” to the Grand Rapids community – the first time that the nationally known program was to be done outside of a major city. It centered on the artwork of a young man who was a victim of sexual abuse.

2006

Partnering with The Institute of Psychological and Sexual Health in Duluth, arrangements were made to provide a cell phone with a local number that was carried by a therapist at all times. The consultation provided was anonymous and free. This resource was one included on the “Help for Families and Friends of Sexual Offenders” brochure. Others were the Itasca Alliance Against Sexual Assault and Stop It Now, MN. The brochures included self-help information provided by CURE-SORT of Okemos, MI. Funding for publication was donated by the Catholic Church Women of St. Joseph's.

“Illuminations” – dedicated to eliminating child sexual abuse – was presented to professionals and again to the general community in April, “Child Abuse Prevention Month”. The response was overwhelmingly positive and plans began immediately to return the program to Grand Rapids and to seek a larger audience of professionals.

2007

Fr. Ray Chase returned with “Illuminations” in February and presented it three times over a two day period, to educators, law enforcement, social workers, therapists, foster parents and members of the general community. The Blandin Foundation provided the use of the auditorium and staff was very supportive.

Building on the response from “Illuminations”, a meeting was held at St. Joseph's to gather area professionals dealing with education and counseling. It was conducted by Christos Petsoulis and other therapists from The Institute in Duluth. Plans were made to offer a workshop for professionals.

Preliminary plans were made to invite John Crudele to speak to young people in Grand Rapids.

“An Introduction to Understanding the Dynamics of Sexual Violence” was presented by therapists from The Institute in November, again at the Blandin auditorium.

2008

Based on concerns of educators, other professionals, parents and youth in the community about moral decline in the belief system of young people, the Task Force and IAASA co-sponsored the presentations of John Crudele in March. He spoke first to students at the Grand Rapids High School and then to youth, parents and other adults at St. Joseph's. He addressed the difficult choices faced by young people today in regard to sexuality and the importance of chastity.

The Safe Policy for Children was reviewed; Fr. Jerry Weiss asked for more information and revisions.

The Community Resource Guide was revised and distributed.

2009

In January, John Crudele returned to speak to students at the Grand Rapids middle school, and again to youth, parents and parishioners at St. Joseph's.

The Task Force repeatedly discussed the issues of bullying, “sexting”, and Internet concerns as they relate to children. IAASA staff members, working with law enforcement and other area professionals, have begun an educational program in the schools called the “SMART Team” project. CPTF members offered to be trained when volunteers are needed for this program.

When the “Family and Friends of Sexual Offenders” project was begun in 2005, there was no available resource in the area for them if professional counseling wasn't affordable. Since then, the Alliance Against Sexual Assault has expanded their support services to these loved ones of offenders. Therefore, the cell phone carried by therapists at The Institute was no longer necessary, and that was discontinued in April. A new brochure was designed by the Alliance staff and funded by the task force, with another donation from St. Joseph's CCW. A separate document uses the “self-help” information from the original brochure, and it is available at the Alliance office.

In response to requests that the annual Liturgy of Lament be re-named to encourage the attendance of those unfamiliar with the language, it became “Healing the Broken Heart”. A female protestant pastor was asked to participate along with the pastor of St. Joseph's. The format remained the same, with prayers, readings, music, a reflection (by clergy or a lay person), signing of the senses, and laying on of hands. A simple reception was added at the end of the service and information on a follow-up gathering was available. For the first time, the speaker was a survivor of childhood sexual abuse.

Responding to numerous concerns by parishioners about a member of the clergy, information was collected and given to the pastor and the Chancery office was notified.

2010

It was decided that the names and contact numbers for the victims' advocates in the Duluth Diocese should be published in the St. Joseph's bulletin once a month. A new “social justice” space was made available for information and announcements in the church Gathering Space.

The Safe Policy for Children and Young People was brought up to date, with a provision for discouraging social networking between adults and youth. Father Jerry Weiss wrote an introduction stressing that it and the policy of the Duluth Diocese be viewed as supportive of each other. The policy was reviewed by the school board and approved by the Pastoral Council.

The diocese “Youth Protection Training” program, knowledge and use of the two policies, and a background check are required for all personnel and volunteers working with youth at St. Joseph's school and parish.

2011

Father Ray Chase, with the Archdiocese of Baltimore and founder of Illuminations, a national training program on child victimization, returned to Grand Rapids in April to lead four days of workshops and prayer services. The timing was intentional – Lent, Child Abuse Prevention Month, and Sexual Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month. He was the speaker at the annual ritual of healing, and presented a day-long workshop entitled “In the Eyes and Soul of a Child (The Impact of Child Maltreatment on Spirituality)” for an audience of clergy, parish staff and professionals. The following day’s workshop at the Blandin Foundation auditorium, “In the Words of the Offender”, was filled with members of law enforcement and professionals in the field of child sexual abuse. Costs for all the events were covered by grants and donations.

Because members of the Child Protection Task Force need to be aware of the responsibility that they share in regard to confidentiality, work began on a policy for orientation of new members.

The partnership between the Child Protection Task Force and Support Within Reach (formerly Itasca Alliance Against Sexual Assault) continues to be important to both.

2012

Members of the Child Protection Task Force need to be aware of the responsibility that they share in regard to confidentiality. Meetings can, on occasion, contain delicate, sensitive and confidential information that must be kept private for the protection and respect of those involved. With that in mind, the following actions are necessary to become a member:

- 1. Application must be made in writing.*
- 2. Read the documented history of the Task Force since 2002*
- 3. Read the Diocese of Duluth Sexual Misconduct Policy and Code of Pastoral Conduct booklet; sign the authorization for a background check; read and sign the St. Joseph's Safe Policy for Children and Young People.*
- 4. Participate in an interview with 2 or 3 task force members. Part of the interview could include the power point presentation on the Safe Policy.*
- 5. At the conclusion of the interview, read and sign the confidentiality agreement.*

(All forms and documents are available at the church office or from the task force chairperson.)

An effort will be made to have members of the task force represent a broad section of the child protection community – such as educators, social workers, mental and medical health professionals, members of law enforcement, advocates and parents.

The CPTF page on the St. Joseph's web site has templates for our Healing Service, our Parish Safe Policy and the Community Resource Guide for those looking to develop these items for their own Parish. Also, the video presentation of the "Panel Discussion and Mediation on the Spirit of Christ Crucifix" is available to view.

The annual Healing Service and the Mexican Fiesta were again cosponsored by Support Within Reach and the task force.

2013

A video was purchased for the parish library – "What Do I Say Now?" It provides parents with the skills needed to address difficult topics of sexuality with their children. Copies are also available at St. Joseph's school and at the Support Within Reach office.

Presentations by Pam Stenzel were coordinated by CPTF and funded by grants. She focused on personal responsibility, self-discipline, character and abstinence. She did two presentations at Grand Rapids high school and another for high school age students and their parents at St. Joseph's.

Evaluation of the Healing the Broken Heart service resulted in ongoing discussion of possible changes. Comments included the unease of some who are not Catholic and "didn't know what to do".

2014

Plans began to revamp the Healing Service originally based on the liturgy available from FutureChurch, “Lament for the Broken Body of Christ”. It was determined that the service has evolved beyond its Catholic roots, and welcomes “all afflicted by sexual violence”. Goals included an ecumenical approach and a smaller space that would be more comfortable for the small numbers of people attending. Contact was made with Community Presbyterian Church but there were scheduling conflicts.

A thorough review of the Safe Policy was done; records of the required background checks, etc. are kept by the parish business manager. The policy formulated in 2003 is available on St. Joseph’s web site for use by other parishes.

Contact with Fr. Ray Chase provided information about the Illuminations program. The project is now part of the School of Criminal Justice at the University of Baltimore.

2015

“Healing the Broken Heart: A Community Gathering for Those Affected by Sexual Violence” was held at Christ Episcopal Church during Lent. The program remains the same -- with music, scripture, prayers, and a personal reflection. Liturgical dance was used for the signing of the senses, and was a moving addition. The response was very positive.

The 14th annual Mexican Fiesta fundraiser was held at St. Joseph’s in April. Support Within Reach presented an award to the parish -- recognizing collaboration, dedication and commitment.

Task Force members began to explore ways to assist Support Within Reach in its efforts to combat human trafficking and sexual exploitation in northern Minnesota. Contact was made with St. Mary’s of the Lake in White Bear Lake. Members of their Human Trafficking Working Group are actively involved with other churches, law enforcement, and community organizations towards its goal of eradicating sex trafficking in Minnesota.

CPTF and SWR called together a similar group locally, with invitations to judges, law enforcement, educators, counselors, social workers, clergy, first responders, etc. Community Against Sexual Exploitation (CASE) was formed with the purpose of protecting youth. Proposed projects included raising public awareness, providing training and education, creating personal care packages for victims, and fund raising. Work began on planning a public forum. A CPTF application for a “project based” grant of \$2500 from the Bracken Fund was approved by the Diocese of Duluth.

2016

The CASE public forum at Itasca Community College in January was well publicized by local media and the attendance was large. It was taped by ICTV and played on local cable channels. It is also available for viewing at <http://www.supportwithinreach.org/community-forum-on-sexual-exploitaion/>. The website has extensive information about the topic, the speakers and the panelists.

Personal care packages for victims were displayed at the community forum and information was sent to area churches and civic organizations. More than one hundred packages were assembled by Charity and Justice Committee members at St. Joseph's. Many more were donated by other groups. When the drive ended months later, SWR staff members distributed some to their other offices in northern Minnesota.

Tim George, an EMT and CASE member, presented programs on sexual exploitation between Masses at St. Joseph's in March, and also to groups of clergy and physicians in the area. Presentations were also made to school superintendents and for the Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation. More presentations are planned for Law Enforcement students at Hibbing Community College and for area school principals and counselors.

"Healing the Broken Heart Gathering" was held once again at Christ Episcopal Church; Methodist and Episcopal pastors participated.