

Most Reverend John M. Sherlock
Bishop Emeritus, Diocese of London
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LONDON ON N6A 4H4



December 21, 2006

Ms. Hans Gartner and the producers,
CBC's the fifth estate
P.O. Box 500
Station A,
Toronto ON M5W 1E6

Dear Ms. Gartner:

Your request to interview me for your program, the fifth estate, has come to my attention.

I have retired as the Bishop of the Diocese of London. Bishop Ronald P. Fabbro is now in office, and it would be inappropriate for me to return to the public scene, so I must respectfully decline your request. I would like, however, to convey some things to you in writing.

In his statement of August 6, 2006 during the trial of Father Sylvestre for his many crimes, Bishop Fabbro made a comment that well describes my own mistaken thinking in the old days: For Catholics it was once unthinkable that priests would abuse children. This culture of disbelief affected all of the Church from parents on to school teachers, to priests and even to bishops. So in many cases the victims were victimized twice, first by the abuse itself, and then by refusal of others to believe them. Some were made to feel guilty for making an accusation and some believe, even today, years later, that they themselves are at fault for having been abused.

In the period between the late 1980s and the early 2000s, I underwent a profound personal transformation.

As early as 1989, I instituted a diocesan policy for responding to allegations of clergy sexual abuse. I was also involved in drafting the Canadian Bishops' 1992 document *From Pain to Hope* concerning the need for diocesan sexual abuse policies.

I was not, however, really prepared for the allegations of sexual impropriety by priests under my authority. My own deep love for the priesthood made it extremely difficult for me to believe that a priest would engage in such deplorable behaviour. I was slow to appreciate that pedophiles are expert liars, able to fool many people, including the bishop.

Some victims of Father Sylvestre came to me in 1989. Instead of believing these women, who told me what he had done to them, I believed Father Sylvestre's denials. In doing so, I

inadvertently victimized them a second time, and I deeply regret doing so.

I am aware that documents have been discovered in the files of the chancery office of the Diocese of London pertaining to police investigations conducted in 1962 following complaints from girls regarding abusive conduct by Father Sylvestre. I did not know of the existence of these documents, and if I had known about them, my reaction to the 1989 complaints would have been quite different.

I have learned through bitter experience that the cases of abuse the diocese faced were real. Nothing prepared me for the shock of sitting for many hours with victims of clergy sexual abuse and hearing about their painful experiences firsthand. I have asked priest-abusers to apologize to victims, and to the Church as a whole for the pain they have caused.

In March, 2002, I issued a letter publicly apologizing for the abuse inflicted by clergy, and directed that it be read from every pulpit during the Mass of Holy Thursday. This letter best expresses my deep personal feelings:

Faced with the shame and the shock of ongoing reports of clerical abuse of minors, you and our faithful people deserve a response from me. I share the shame and the shock that you are experiencing and it is a pain which is deep and personal since a member of my own family is among the victims.

As a leader in the Church, I have tried to provide help and healing for victims as far as humanly possible, although I know all too well that some of the spiritual and emotional damage is humanly irreparable. I cannot and will not return an abuser to an active ministry since our first concern must be for our children whose trust in us must not be betrayed.

In the name of the Church, I confess our sins, beg pardon of all who have suffered abuse and from their parents and families who cannot escape sharing in the suffering.

Even today I cannot add to that letter.

Bishop Fabro has courageously taken on the difficult task of confronting the problem of clergy sexual abuse, and is doing his utmost to eradicate it. I commended him.

Yours sincerely,



+J.M. Sherlock,
Bishop-emeritus of London

c: Most Reverend Ronald P. Fabro, Bishop of London