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*Message of Most Reverend Archbishop Albert LeGatt
Holy Family Parish, Winnipeg, Manitoba
Sunday, January 11, 2015*

Dear parishioners and friends of Holy Family Parish,

As you can well imagine, this morning, I would like to speak to you about the situation that has arisen, the charges of sexual abuse being brought forward against your pastor of many years, Fr. Ron Léger.

First of all, I would like to say that I share in my own way in the immense sadness, turmoil and anguish that you have in your heart. I see and hear the anguish in Jean-Jacques, your Parish Life Director, in Fr. Peter and in the words and especially in the eyes of so many of you.

Over the years you have been close to Fr. Ron, many of you becoming his friends. The news announced this week of those charges being laid by the Winnipeg Police Service against Fr. Ron has certainly brought forward a flood of questions and emotions: shock, sorrow, anger, confusion, righteous indignation. Where is the truth?

Fr. Ron has done much good in this parish; he has done much good for many young people through the Drop-In Centre. That is true. But what is the truth about these charges. What really happened here? That's what everybody is asking. I must tell you that I, myself, do not know the truth. And neither do any of you here this morning. We are in that very, very, painful time where we wait that the truth be established. That is the work of the police and of our justice system in which we must put our confidence at this time. Fr. Ron, as anyone, is to be considered innocent until proven guilty. However, as difficult as it is to carry all this, we do not yet know the truth behind these allegations.

Some people have asked me what I believe about these charges. I can only repeat that despite any of my own thoughts and opinions, I do not know, and so like all of you, I must wait for the light of truth to become clearer, before saying anything beyond what has already been announced this week.

However, this being said, I do know some things to be true, things which the Church has come to certainly know, even if haltingly at times. We have come to know that when sexual abuse does happen, the person abused, the victim, is wounded in so many aspects of their life and personhood, very, very, deeply, and for a long, long, time. And when sexual abuse does happen at the hands of a minister of the Church, the wound is compounded by this betrayal of trust by someone who was to be an example of God's love to them.

When allegations of sexual abuse are disclosed, our very first concern as Church, as society, must be for the alleged victims and for all those who are vulnerable. The truth must be openly, transparently made clear. All measures of protection of the vulnerable must be taken. Support must be given to all where support is needed in terms of counselling and emotional healing. You, who are parents, if sexual abuse were to happen to your child, you would not want it otherwise.

That is why, upon being informed by the Winnipeg Police Service on February 5, 2014 of an investigation being launched into allegations of sexual abuse by Fr. Ron, the Archdiocese implemented the measures of our Diocesan Protocol for the Protection of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults.

I consulted with the Chair of the Diocesan Advisory Committee responsible for the implementation of the Protocol and other senior leadership of the archdiocese. I informed the Provincial Superior of the Viatorians, the Clerics of Saint Viator, in Canada, who is Fr. Ron's direct superior. Then, I immediately suspended Fr. Ron from all exercise of priestly ministry in our diocese as well as forbidding him to have contact with all under-age minors and also with the parishioners of Holy Family.

Fr. Ron was in the Dominican Republic at that moment. His superior ordered Fr. Ron to come to Montreal immediately and to reside at the provincial house of the Clerics of Saint Viator, pending the result of the investigations. He remained there until the time when the police requested that Fr. Ron return for questioning whereupon he was arrested and charged with three counts of sexual assault and one count of sexual interference. He was then released on his own recognizance with conditions. The court proceedings will begin on January 26, 2015.

At the time the Winnipeg Police Service contacted us, they asked that we not disclose any details so as to not impede their investigation. We have cooperated fully with the police in this, not coming forward with any statement until this week when the situation became public. We also provided all the information they requested.

In a situation like this, regardless of what we believe is the truth or not, we must take these steps necessary to allow the truth to come out. We must allow the possible victims to have their voice heard and even more to receive the assurance of the Church's concern and

readiness to listen and to offer support as needed. If, and I repeat, if, abuse happened, the Church, you and I, cannot deny that abuse or the wounds that abuse brings. Jesus said: *“Let the little ones come to me”*. If, and I repeat again, if, abuse happened, we cannot do otherwise.

However, in this very, very, painful time of waiting to know if Fr. Ron is found innocent or guilty, what are we to do?

As disciples of Jesus Christ together, disciples of this Jesus Christ who knew himself to be the beloved, the one completely loved by God the Father, and who then put all things in the Father’s hands, praying that the Father’s will be done in all things, I believe what we must do before anything is pray.

We must pray. We must pray for the truth to be known. We must pray for the possible victims. We must pray for one another. We must pray for Fr. Ron. We must pray that the Holy Spirit which came down upon Jesus and led him to love fully, to live all that love would demand of him, that this same Spirit might come down upon all those impacted by this situation, upon all of us, and show us step by step what is God’s will of love in all this.

In this vein, in the vein of love that is humble and patient and long-suffering, I ask all of you not to judge one way or another until the truth is made as clear as it can be. All of us have opinions and ideas about this, many different opinions and ideas. Let those differences not cause us to judge persons or to judge one another. Do not let divisions and hardness of heart come between one another in this parish or in the diocese, nor against other people involved. Let us pray and act in such a way that truth, compassion, mercy and healing, will come to all, to absolutely all who are touched by this situation. As Church, we cannot do otherwise.

And as a diocesan Church, this compassion, mercy and healing, is something we want to try to bring to all. Along with our Diocesan Advisory Committee for the implementation of our Protocol for the Protection of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults, we have also established several years ago a Victim’s Care Committee. This group of people with knowledge and experience in the field of counselling and healing are ready to offer help or find help for all wounded by this situation. Their primary goal is to offer the help they can to the presumed victims from this moment on and as requested by these people. If abuse did happen, and again I repeat if, it is the suffering of those people that must firstly fill our hearts. But all of us and especially you the parishioners of this parish are also suffering deeply because of this situation. Again, the members of this Victim’s Care Committee will do what they can to help or find help for any of you who would need and request this help.

For anyone seeking help, I ask you to call the Archdiocesan office at 204-237-9851. Indicate to the receptionist that you wish to be in contact with the Victim’s Care Committee; they will

ask for your name and telephone number only. This information will be conveyed to the Victim's Care Committee chairperson and then a member of this committee will contact you and offer you the help they can. All will be absolutely confidential and free of charge.

In closing, I wish to once again express that the sorrow brought about to so many by this situation, has deeply touched me also. And sometimes all we can do is carry that sorrow together and carry that sorrow to God, praying that from within that sorrow we find the ways to continue loving, being both just and merciful, people of truth, people of light, people of healing.

I pray with you and for you all; please pray with me and for me. Pray that God's will be discerned and that what we come to see is in fact right and loving, may indeed be done. Let us pray for God's wisdom, strength and love to come to all of us through Jesus Christ who came to share everything with us. Let us pray that together we share fully in His love, the possible victims, Fr. Ron, all of you parishioners of Holy Family, the faithful and the clergy of our diocese and all people affected in any way by these events. Yes, let us pray! That is our greatest hope and greatest duty. Let us pray, together and for all.



+Albert LeGatt

Archbishop of Saint Boniface