



Diocese of the Upper Midwest Survivors Guide

September 2021



#ACNAtoo

Advocacy Team

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Dear Survivors and Concerned UMD participants,

This resource has been created in collaboration with survivors and grassroots organizers from the Upper Midwest Diocese and broader ACNA. The goal of this guide is to provide education around and highlight clear pathways to participate in the current investigation the ACNA has launched regarding ‘Canonical Abuse of Power’ or spiritual abuse in the UMD. We hope you find it clear and helpful in discerning your next steps if applicable.

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Section 1 | Background & Context

May 4

Bp. Stewart [first alerts](#) Upper Midwest members about the Mark Rivera sexual abuse allegations.

June 29

Bp. Stewart provides an [update](#) on Grand River Solutions and responds to Joanna Rudenborg's twitter threads.

July 8

Bp. Stewart announces his [leave of absence](#).

July 10

The Bishop's Council [announces](#) their leadership role.
Abp. Foley [comments](#) on the situation in the UMD.

July 15

Bishop's Council [announces changes](#) after members step down.

July 27

ACNA Executive Committee approves the formation of a [Provincial Response Team](#).

July 28

[Acting Bishop John Miller and Assisting Bishop Todd Atkinson](#) are announced.

August 4

New [Bishop's Council](#) members are announced.

August 7

A new UMD [sexual abuse](#) case is announced.

August 28

The [Provincial Response Team](#) members are announced.

August 29

The PRT [scope of inquiry is expanded](#) to include "abuse of power," a canonical term for spiritual abuse.

September 3

Bp Todd Atkinson is [placed on leave](#) due to allegations of misconduct.



Section 2 | What This Means

The Province has agreed to facilitate investigations into allegations of misconduct in the Diocese of the Upper Midwest. Multiple leaders in the UMD, including Bp Stewart, Bp Todd, Chancellor Philbrick, and Dcn Val McIntyre, have been placed on leave. Many members of the Bishop's Council have been replaced.

The Province has received enough stories of spiritual abuse to expand the scope of the PRT.

In moments of crisis and transition, there is an opportunity for new voices to be heard. This guide will help you determine if you would like your story to be part of those new voices.



Section 3 | Categories of Survivor Testimonies

Vestry Members

There are many stories of vestry members who witnessed or experienced the mishandling of concerns, complaints, accountability, or due process, as well as an overbearing, manipulative, or controlling use of power by UMD leadership.

UMD Clergy

Current and former ordained clergy who witnessed or experienced spiritual abuse by way of control, coercion, inappropriate relationships with spouses, abuse of vows, or abuse of parishioners or local parish councils.

UMD Staff

For current or former UMD staff this could include experiences of wrongful dismissal, harmful work environment, inappropriate spiritual mentoring, abusive mediations and conflict resolution processes, insufficient job descriptions, pressure to lower work-life boundaries, and the mistreatment of women, including sexual harassment.

UMD Ordinands

(Those who entered an official or unofficial discernment process for ordination or submitted to a process of ministerial training)

Many of the stories of spiritual abuse coming out of UMD are related to Gregory House, the discernment process of ordinands, potential church planters, and those involved in UMD's leadership development process.

UMD Congregants

For those who did not enter into any formal leadership training or mentoring relationship, spiritual abuse most often expressed itself in the response they received when communicating their concerns or complaints to the leadership team of UMD, in the handling of disagreements, and in the ostracizing from the UMD community upon leaving the diocese/church.

Observers Outside of UMD

Maybe you have not been an active member of UMD but have had interactions with the leadership and culture of abuse. Your story and reasons for deciding not to be involved could be helpful in identifying abusive attributes or the harm which UMD caused in a friend or family member.



Section 4 | How do you know if what you experienced was spiritual abuse and worth reporting?

To start, please see John Perrine's article on ["What is Spiritual Abuse?"](#)

We have put together a [syllabus](#) seeking to equip survivors of spiritual abuse with the resources needed to make sense of their experiences and better aid them in determining whether what they experienced was spiritual abuse.

Definition

Spiritual abuse is a form of emotional and psychological abuse that is characterized by a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour in a religious context.

Characteristics of spiritual abuse usually include:

- manipulation and exploitation
- enforced accountability
- censorship of decision making
- requirements for secrecy and silence
- coercion to conform [inability to ask questions]
- control through the use of sacred texts or teaching
- requirement of obedience to the abuser
- the suggestion that the abuser has a 'divine' position
- isolation as a means of punishment
- superiority and elitism



Section 5 | Options for sharing your story of spiritual abuse

1. You can submit your story to the Provincial Response Team.

Collectively, the members of the team have extensive experience in working with survivors and handling the multifaceted and sensitive matters pertaining to allegations of misconduct.

All the resources you would need to know concerning who the PRT is, how the team was chosen, what their role is, the scope of their investigation, and where to submit questions, concerns, or stories are all located [here](#).

We have not yet spoken with anyone who has submitted their story to the PRT to see how the PRT responded or what their process exactly entails, so we can't offer any insight on how well the PRT is handling stories.

2. You can confidentially share your story with us at ACNAtoo.

ACNAtoo is an advocacy group that exists to center survivors, not the province, and we will work to connect you to resources, and to other survivors who can understand, process, and support your experience. Our team is composed of current and former ACNA members, concerned friends outside of our denomination, and survivors of abuse perpetrated by ACNA leaders.

3. You can submit your story to ACNAtoo to be platformed publicly

If, in speaking with our team, you decide to go public with your story for the purposes of advocacy, accountability and education, we could platform and publish your story.

None of these options are mutually exclusive. You may choose to share your story in all three venues or none at all. The re-telling of one's story can be challenging. It is vital to stay attuned to the impact of those experiences, attend to your needs and seek local, professional help if needed.

For more information, see our [guide on telling your story](#).

