



VIA Survivors Guide

September 2021



#ACNAtoo

Advocacy Team

acnattoo.org

info@acnattoo.org

Dear Survivors and Concerned VIA Apostolica participants,

This resource has been created in collaboration with survivors and grassroots organizers from VIA Apostolica, a missionary diocese domiciled within the ACNA Diocese of the Upper Midwest. 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 VIA Apostolica and Bp. Todd Atkinson. We hope you find it clear and helpful in discerning your next steps if applicable.

Guide Overview

| | |
|--|-------|
| Section 1 Background & Context | pg. 3 |
| Section 2 What This Means | pg. 4 |
| Section 3 Categories of Survivor Testimonies | pg. 5 |
| Section 4 How do you know if what you experienced is Spiritual Abuse and worth reporting? | pg. 6 |
| Section 5 What assurances do survivors have from the PRT? | pg. 7 |



Section 1 | Background & Context

Jan 10th 2019

Bishop Todd Atkinson is welcomed into the ACNA College of Bishops

June 24th 2020

VIA Apostolica is designated a Provincial Missionary District in the ACNA directly responsible to Archbishop Foley Beach with diocesan domicile within the Diocese of the Upper Midwest (UMD) under Bishop Stewart Ruch III rather than the Anglican Network in Canada.

July 8th 2021

Bishop Stewart Ruch III, Bishop of the Diocese of the Upper Midwest requests a leave of absence and the Bishop's Council of the UMD asks that the Province (ACNA) take up oversight of the investigation into the mishandling of abuse charges and a review of their diocesan leadership structures.

July 26th 2021

Archbishop Beach appoints Bishop John Miller to serve the UMD as Acting Bishop and Bishop Todd Atkinson to assist Bishop Miller.

August 24th 2021

The Executive Committee of the ACNA appoints members of the Provincial Response Team (PRT) tasked with overseeing an investigation into the Diocese of the Upper Midwest's handling of allegations of misconduct and coordinating the care of survivors.

August 29th 2021

After receiving additional allegations regarding abuse of power within the UMD the Executive Committee approves expanding the scope of the Provincial Response Team's investigation to include abuse of power (spiritual abuse).

September 3 2021

The expanded scope of the Provincial review results in Bishop Todd Atkinson taking a leave of absence from VIA Apostolica and as acting assistant bishop of the UMD amidst allegations of misconduct.



Section 2 | What This Means

The governing authority over Bishop Todd Atkinson and VIA Apostolica have received enough evidence of past and present abuses that they have opened up an official Provincial investigation and are providing confidential avenues for survivors to come forward with their stories of abuse in order that survivors might receive care (if that is desired), and bring Bishop Atkinson and VIA Apostolica needed accountability and possible discipline from the ACNA.

In order for the PRT's investigation to have the clearest possible picture of Bp Atkinson's and VIA Apostolica's leadership culture the PRT require stories from (but not limited to) board members, clergy, staff, ordinands, and congregants who have had harmful experiences while involved in River of Life Church, VIA Church Lethbridge, VIA Apostolica Comox, VIA Apostolica Regina, VIA Apostolica Calgary, and VIA Apostolica Langley.



Section 3 | Categories of Survivor Testimonies

Board Members

There are many stories of board 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 Bishop Todd.

VIA Clergy

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

VIA Staff

For current or former VIA staff this could include experiences of wrongful dismissal, harmful work environment, spiritual fathering, abusive mediations and conflict resolution processes, insufficient job descriptions, and the mistreatment of women.

VIA 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 VIA are related to the discernment process of ordinands, potential church planters, and those involved in VIA's leadership development process.

VIA Congregants

For those who did not enter into any formal leadership training or spiritual fathering/mentoring relationship spiritual abuse most often expressed itself in the response they received when communicating their concerns or complaints to the leadership team of VIA Apostolica, in the handling of disagreements, and in the ostracizing of community upon leaving VIA. Please see [“What is Spiritual Abuse?” by John Perrine](#)

Observers Outside of VIA

Maybe you have not found yourself as an active member of VIA Apostolica 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 VIA caused in a friend or family member.



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

The team at #ACNAtoo has 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 if what they experienced was spiritual abuse.

They define spiritual abuse in this way;

*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. In *Escaping the Maze of Spiritual Abuse*, Lisa Oakley and Justin Humphreys distill years of academic research into the following characteristics of spiritual abuse:*

- *manipulation and exploitation*
- *enforced accountability*
- *ensorship 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*

You can see the rest of this resource and more in the [PDF document](#) hosted on ACNAtoo.org.



Section 5 | What assurances do survivors have from 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:

<https://anglicanchurch.net/provincial-response-team/#faq>

Rachael Thebeau, a representative of the Provincial Response Team, offers the following assurances to survivors of VIA who share their stories and choose to participate in the investigation:

“I want to assure you that your email is confidential and only a few people commissioned by the Archbishop specifically for this work have access to this inbox. Nothing sent to this email address is being shared with the Diocese of the Upper Midwest, Bishop Miller, Bishop Atkinson, etc.”

The email for the submission of Survivor Stories is:

ProvResponseTeam@anglicanchurch.net

You can confidentially share your story with the ACNAtoo team. They are an advocacy group that exists to center survivors, not the province, and will work to connect you to resources, other survivors, and publish your story if you would like to go public.

The email for ACNAtoo is:

info@acnatoo.org

The re-telling of one’s story can be challenging. It is vital to stay tuned to the impact of those experiences, stay tuned to your needs and seek local, professional help if needed.

