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Archdiocese of Los Angeles - Our Lady of the Angels Region

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### Protecting God's Children for Facilitators



## The Challenge of Complacency

By [Paul Ashton, Psy.D., D.Min.](#)

*“The church is aware of this damage, it is personal, moral damage carried out by men of the church, and we will not take one step*



*backward with regards to how we will deal with this problem, and the sanctions that must be imposed, on the contrary, we have to be even stronger. Because you cannot interfere with children.”*

– Pope Francis 11 April 2014

Complacency can be defined as “self-satisfaction especially when accompanied by unawareness of actual dangers or deficiencies” (Merriam-Webster). It has been 23 years since 2002 and the exposure of the sexual abuse crisis within the Catholic Church. The sadness, mistrust, disbelief, pain, anger and a myriad of other negative feelings remain vivid, however. It doesn't take much to trigger individuals to a place of upset and anxiety when the crisis is mentioned. Victims, survivors and thrivers alike may suffer the life-long ill effects of sexual abuse. Those whose faith-filled service and participation in the life of the Church remain a stalwart beacon for all of us to a place of Hope and healing.

Many people suffered, and continue to suffer, from the varied complications of abuse that infiltrated every corner

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### Paul Ashton, Psy.D., D.Min.

Dr. Ashton presents workshops, courses, retreats, and training seminars in Catholic dioceses across the country. His professional ministry enfolds adult education and praxis, and has included several teaching, counseling, and administrative positions in schools and parishes for several dioceses/eparchies. He also serves as a consultant to diocesan priests and religious communities as a presenter and facilitator. His work in the area of child sexual abuse prevention and healing includes training

of the Church. It is no small wonder that all of us want it to disappear. The unpleasantness of it all, to say the least, is something that all of us want to move far away from. The sheer volume of energy, effort and focus that has been placed on trying to solve the crisis is overwhelming. Thousands of ministers and volunteers in the Church worldwide have devoted thousands of hours to eradicating the risk that we face. People are exhausted. The efforts have been monumental and thus, we have the additional problems of secondary trauma.

Secondary trauma, also known as vicarious trauma or secondary traumatic stress, is the emotional distress that can result from hearing about, witnessing, or being indirectly exposed to someone else's trauma. It is a form of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that can affect individuals who work with trauma survivors or those who are close to people who have experienced traumatic events. It is no wonder then why people want to move away from the difficult aspects and rely more on the positive outcomes of a very successful campaign to educate people, eradicate abuse, and promote safe environments.

The big problem, however, is the absolute need for constant vigilance to make certain that those who would seek to hurt children are stopped, thwarted and dissuaded because of the awareness that fills our churches, schools and institutions. While people are tired of all of it, while we have much already accomplished, while there has been great success in reducing abuse and neglect of children and vulnerable persons—there is always much yet to do.

In every good program, there is a clear beginning, middle and end. The daunting task of any large undertaking needs these parameters so discouragement does not prevail. Children and adults alike need to be led through educational programs that have certain marks and levels of achievement. This makes good and clear sense—the unfortunate downfall of preventing crimes and protecting the vulnerable, however, does not have the end goal that many yearn for. It seems that history has shown there will always be those who seek to hurt others. Fences, locked doors and walls deter the honest, but continual vigilance is the only deterrent for those who operate from minimization, rationalization and justification. If we rest on our laurels (in being so satisfied with what we have already achieved that we make no further effort) as we so rightly deserve, we will cause a void in our united work efforts from which recovery will be very difficult.

To avoid complacency, we must know the signs of burnout, which can lead to complacency. These include:

- they show tiredness;

facilitators, developing and implementing curricula and retreat programs, counseling, and support group facilitation development. Paul is the founder of OPEN HEARTS HIV/AIDS Ministry and has supervised support and bereavement groups for over 20 years. Dr. Ashton holds a B.A. degree in religious studies, an M.A. in clinical pastoral counseling, a D.Min. in counseling and marriage and family therapy and a doctorate in psychology (Psy.D.).

- they show lack of enthusiasm;
- they show disinterest;
- they question their efforts;
- they express that they don't feel they make a difference;
- they are negative about new information, approaches or materials;
- they show passive aggression by not completing articles, not showing up for meetings or answering calls or emails.

They also show a lack of motivation, initiative, and a resistance to change, accompanied by a sense of satisfaction with the status quo and a reluctance to challenge oneself or take risks. They also exhibit a decline in quality of work effort, and a tendency to take shortcuts. Parts of programs are skipped or glossed over; programs are shortened; training days are compressed. Time and saving it seems to be the call of order. Creativity is suppressed in favor of keeping programs shorter, less-expensive and costly due to schedules and commitments.

Overall, on a larger scale, directors become coordinators or facilitators—with smaller budgets geared toward maintenance and compliance rather than spending the time, effort and monies to effect more creative and newer approaches encompassing the latest in technologies and educational developments.

**So, the antidote to all of this complacency is to remind ourselves and others of the following:**

- We are making a positive difference in the lives of children and vulnerable people.
- We can rest, we can step back, we can recuperate, we can take time.
- We need to encourage younger people to get involved in this safe environment ministry.
- We need to affirm others and ourselves of the fact we have done well and we must continue to do well if we want our legacy to impact children and vulnerable persons favorably.
- We cannot be deterred by negativity.
- We cannot think for one moment that perpetrators have taken a step back—they lurk in places where there is little or no monitoring of programs.
- We cannot be discouraged by success measured in the eyes of the world; we must recommit ourselves to the Gospel values as laid out successfully by Jesus himself.
- We must firmly believe and be inspired by Isaiah 40:31: “They that hope in the Lord will renew their strength, they will soar on eagles’ wings; they will run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint.”

We affirm every moment that you have sacrificed to be Facilitators these many years for the *Protecting God's Children*® Programs. We lift up all of your efforts and the ways in which you bring healing, the ways you have saved children and vulnerable persons, the ways in which you have empowered so many people in these united efforts to prevent and properly respond to sexual abuse.

There are so many things you have done that are likely hidden and unknown: so many kindnesses you have extended, so many tears you have wiped away, and moreover, so many tears you have avoided be shed by would-be victims. Thanks, and ever thanks for all of this and for running without getting weary. We see you. We acknowledge you. We thank God for you.

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**1) What can we do to countereffect complacency?**

- A)  Remind ourselves that we make a difference in the lives of children and vulnerable people.
- B)  We can rest, step back, take a break and recuperate.
- C)  We cannot be deterred from negativity.
- D)  We must recommit ourselves to the values in the Gospels.
- E)  All of the above.

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