



Memorandum of Listening Sessions Conducted at St. Margaret Parish

November 30, 2018

Introduction

The Lord hears the cry of the poor, blessed be the Lord.

Context

Over the summer months of 2018 the Catholic Church in the United States was rocked by two events: The first was the report of allegations that then-Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, retired Archbishop of Washington DC, had sexually abused minors and adult seminarians over the course of decades, while rising to power and prominence in the US Church, apparently unhindered. The report has resulted in his subsequent resignation, removal from the College of Cardinals, and ordering to a life of prayer and penance by the Vatican. The second was the issuance of the Pennsylvania grand jury report that detailed the sexual abuse of minors and the systemic cover-up by the hierarchy in six Pennsylvania dioceses spanning seven decades. The people of God have been left reeling trying to understand how such atrocities could have occurred and continue to occur, apparently unhindered, in the Church. A myriad of emotions, reactions, and responses have ensued. The people of God cry out to him seeking justice, understanding, wisdom, and consolation.

To help us (the Church, the Body of Christ) discern, heal, and move forward, listening sessions have been offered throughout the Archdiocese of Baltimore (AoB), some were regional, organized and offered by the AoB and the bishops in Baltimore. And, some listening sessions were organized, led, and held at the parish level. St. Margaret offered two such listening sessions on Sunday, October 28th to provide an opportunity to gather as a family of God's faithful, to pray, lament, reflect, and to give voice to the cries that we are offering up to our Lord. It was an opportunity to feel where we are as a parish family in the midst of all of this and a first step on the path forward out of this darkness. This memorandum provides the context for, and summarization of, the listening sessions as well as shines a light on the next steps in the journey toward healing, renewal, and transformation in our parish and in our Church.

Why Listening Sessions?

We are a family of faith. When a family experiences a crisis, we gather together to feel where we are as a family to understand how we are doing and to find a way to move forward. It was decided that listening sessions would be an effective way for us to come together as a family of faith to share our thoughts, frustrations, suggestions, and hopes with one another. The goal being two-fold: 1) to prayerfully support one another and the victims, whom we may or may not know; and 2) to hear the voice of the people of God in order to gain the collective wisdom of our faith family as to how we can meaningfully move toward the healing, renewal, and transformation needed.

Trail Guides: The Ad Hoc Committee

An Ad Hoc Committee comprised of parishioners, lay leadership, and parish staff and clergy was formed to shepherd and guide the process of offering listening sessions, as well as determine how to best care for and tend to the needs, experiences, thoughts, and ideas of our brothers and sisters in Christ. The members of the Ad Hoc Committee are: Dick Belmonte, Gus Brown, Sandy Chabot, Germaine Hughes, Fr. Nicodemus Konza, Kathy Reilly, Kristin Rupprecht, Fr. Kevin Schenning, and Michelle Sullivan. The Ad Hoc Committee invited Ximena DeBroeck to serve as our facilitator.

Details and Format of listening Sessions

Two Listening sessions were offered on Sunday, October 28, 2018

12:30 – 2 pm at St. Mary Magdalen Mission

7 – 8:30 pm at St Margaret Church

Both Listening Sessions were opened with prayer and a reflection on Scripture. Participants were invited to reflect on the following three questions and share any thoughts, experiences, comments and suggestions in an open microphone setting.

1. What are your thoughts and primary concerns on the crisis facing our Church?
2. What have you heard from others in our community about the crisis facing our Church?
3. What can we do here in our parish to bring healing and reconciliation?

Four parishioners were asked to serve as scribes for the listening sessions (recording comments made, no names). The notes of the scribes are a basis for this memorandum.

Attendees were also given the opportunity to submit written comments to be included in this summary memorandum, as well as questions, comments, and suggestions for Archbishop Lori.

Attendees: Facts and Figures

Approximately 140 of God's faithful people attended the two listening sessions. The vast majority of those in attendance were middle-aged and older. Very few 'young adults' or adults with young families were in attendance. Approximately 60 people shared thoughts at the listening sessions (about 35 spoke and about 25 submitted written comments).

Tone

The tone of the listening sessions, most evidenced by those who came forward to speak, was heavy with emotion. Strong feelings were shared including disappointment, anger, resentment, and shock. Some of the faithful who gathered that day spoke of a loss of trust and respect in the hierarchy of the Church. Some expressed a lack of confidence in the bishops to effectively lead our Church. Some shared a sense of disbelief that we could be here, yet again. Some came with a sense of urgency to address this crisis once and for all. Some wanted answers. Some wanted to share experiences. Some wanted to demand change and offered suggestions and insights to that end.

Purpose of Memorandum

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide a synthesis of the comments, concerns, questions, and suggestions that were shared at the listening sessions. The Ad Hoc committee reviewed the notes taken and written comments shared by attendees and have attempted to discern the major themes that arose during the sessions. This memorandum will also lay out the next steps in this process. In other words, it will try answer to the question that many of the faithful who gathered that day gave voice to; the question which sits deep and unspoken in the hearts of many others who sit in stunned and prayerful silence before this crisis: "What now?" This memorandum is not intended to be a transcript of individual comments, except for those that were expressly addressed in writing to Abp. Lori, the AoB, or the parish, which is in a separate section below.

Major Themes Noted

Thank you to all who attended the listening sessions. Our parish family is grateful for the generous sharing of your time, experiences (often at deep personal cost), comments, concerns, questions, and suggestions. We cannot move forward without your input and wisdom. The following is a synthesis of the comments received. Comments can be loosely grouped into four major categories:

- 1) Root Causes of the Sex Abuse Crisis,**
- 2) Impact on and Care of the Direct Victims and their families,**
- 3) Impact on the People of God, and**
- 4) Call for Response and Structural Reform.**

Where We Are

Although some comments shared were looking back -- trying to identify the root causes -- and others were forward looking – how can we envision a renewed and transformed Church – the point of departure for all comments was our present context: where we find ourselves right now at this moment in time. And for the vast majority, if not the totality of those gathered, the place we find ourselves now is one of pain and crisis; a place of sadness, frustration, anguish and anger; a place of heartache, disbelief, and, at times, despair. And while many people, if not most, expressed a solid and sure faith in God, the tone of the conversation and many comments explicitly expressed a lack of faith in the hierarchy of our Church and a sense of distrust toward those who are entrusted with leading the Church, specifically the bishops. Having said that, the first of our two primary themes are related to where we find ourselves now. The first is the very specific context of those directly affected by the crisis: the abuse victims and their families

Impact on Direct Victims and their Families

People expressed heartbreak over the abuse and noted the devastation that victims experience, specifically the damage to a person's relationship with God and the annihilation of faith that can result when someone is abused at the hands of a clergy person. One attendee used the word 'soul-breaking' in describing the callousness by which the bishops chose to protect themselves and the institution at the cost of the young and the vulnerable. Ministering to the victims cannot be limited to prayers and financial support for counseling. It must also include a change in the way we operate as 'Church' (see Structural Reform below) including an unqualified support for the lifting of the Statute of Limitations for civil cases.

People called for the support of victims and care for their families as well, since the devastation wrought by such abuse reaches out further than the person who was abused, but touches everyone in the family. What is the Archdiocese doing to care for the spiritual and psychological needs of the family members?

Impact on the people of God

The testimony of those gathered at the listening sessions gave witness to the pervasive and insidious effects of the sexual abuse and cover-up. Many people noted that although they have not been directly affected by the abuse, they expressed frustration, powerlessness, anger, despair, disillusionment and distrust. The damage that the failure of leadership in responding to this evil has done to the people of God cannot be overstated. People want change, and they want it now. Several people noted that the scope of the crisis is broader than the sexual abuse of minors, but at the core, is an abuse of power. One of the consequences of this is a loss of respect and trust in all members of the clergy. All have been tainted by the sins of some among their ranks.

How did this Happen?

Root Causes of the Sex Abuse Crisis

It is only in correctly naming the problem and in appropriately understanding the root causes of the problem that we are able to move forward. Many of our attendees shared their insights into both of these points. It was noted that the sexual abuse of minors and the subsequent cover-up by members of the Church's hierarchy is born of an *abuse of power* (especially in the cover-up by the bishops). Others noted that the sexual abuse of minors by some of the clergy is rooted in deficiencies in the formation of men for priesthood, the culture of the clergy, and the distinction between clergy and laypersons, including the power differential, which is present in our Church structure. Those gathered at the listening sessions shared the following:

Abuse of Power: some stated that the core issue is one of power, and the abuse of it. It is the abuse of power that allowed for the long history and repeated occurrence of the sexual abuse of minors as well as its subsequent cover-up. The hierarchical structure of the Church has all the power. And, power corrupts.

Deficiencies in Seminary Formation: some stated that the pervasive nature of the sexual abuse of minors must be rooted in improper formation of men for the priesthood, particularly as it relates to developing a healthy and mature sense of self and sexuality. We are not talking isolated incidences in one or two diocese. Rather, the abuse is pervasive and systemic. Deficiencies include how men are accepted into seminary formation, as well as the protocol once men are in formation.

Clerical Culture: some noted that the very culture of the clergy (priests and bishops) fostered the abuse. The 'set-apart' nature served to both elevate clergy over laity and foster a closed-rank community among the clergy. It was noted that the elevation of the clergy was mutually fostered by the hierarchy of the Church and the laity. The clergy is given great power and authority through the sacrament of ordination and canon law, which has been claimed and misused. Many among the laity have been overly deferential to the clergy. Several people gave witness to their view of the priest as "Christ on earth". It was noted that the priests cannot be 'relaxed' or 'themselves' in most settings. This dynamic not only fed the power differential but also fostered secrecy among the ranks of the clergy. The word 'clericalism' was frequently mentioned when discussing the clerical culture.

The Way Forward

Throughout the comments that were shared and questions that were raised before, during and after our listening sessions, there was a sense that a significant segment, if not all, of our Church leadership (ordained, primarily the bishops) has lost its way. Those gathered want to have their voices heard in an effort to usher in the renewal that is needed.

Renewal and Reform of the Church

Those who gathered also shared some insights as to how we can return to the vision that Christ has for his Church: One that is marked by servant-leadership. Suggestions were made by those gathered to meet both the immediate needs that the situation demands (such as justice and healing for the victims and their families and policies to protect minors from abuse) as well as the structural changes necessary to remedy what is perceived to be the root causes of the crisis.

Immediate Needs Specific to the Sex Abuse Crisis: In meeting the immediate needs of the crisis, people advocated for generous support for victims and their families. It was noted by one attendee that 'families are destroyed' by sexual abuse of one of its members. We as a Church must always be sensitive to this reality when we speak of the crisis. Pastoral care and counseling **for families** of victims should be offered. The policies to protect minors need to have a zero tolerance in application and be 100% transparent, especially in the disclosure of allegations against priests and bishops. As noted above, unqualified support for the lifting of the Statute of Limitations for civil claims in such cases must be the position of the AoB and all dioceses in the United States. Archbishop Lori should bring pressure to bear on any of his brother bishops who have failed to advocate for the victims of sexual abuse by a member of the clergy. A deficiency in the current screening program, Virtus, was noted: It is cumbersome to navigate and there is no reciprocity between US dioceses.

Structural Reform: The call to reform was a common theme. People were trying to answer the questions: Where do we go from here? How do we ensure this doesn't happen again? How can we address the abuse of power? Suggestions included: a) increased role of laity, b) increased role of women, c) reconsideration of the discipline of celibacy for priesthood, d) ordination of women, and e) an overhaul of the formation of seminarians to the priesthood. Throughout the sessions there was a deep desire for the voice of the laity to be heard and effective in Church governance. The Holy Spirit is active and efficacious throughout the whole body of Christ, and this needs to be respected. A call for increased lay leadership and decision making authority was called for at all levels of the Church, beginning at the parish level. Accountability for bishops is an imperative, including the input of the laity as to the names of those proposed for ordination. Specific mention of the role of women in leadership and decision-making roles was voiced, including a call for the ordination of women. Several comments were made that a 'mother' would not have allowed this to happen. Celibacy for those ordained to diocesan work should not be required. Married clergy would bring a different and broader perspective to the ministerial priesthood and would help to change the current clerical culture. Finally, a critical look at the formation of candidates to the priesthood should be undertaken with an eye to not only ensure healthy formation, but also to break the clericalism that is endemic in the clerical culture noted today.

Submitted Questions/Comments for Archbishop Lori, Auxiliary Bishops and the Archdiocese of Baltimore

At the close of our listening sessions, attendees were invited to submit written questions/comments for Abp. Lori. Attendees were told that all written comments would be submitted to the AoB. Below is a list of what was received:

Hand-written notes (herein transcribed) submitted by attendees of the Listening Sessions for Archbishop Lori

“Statute of Limitations needs to be eliminated. It took my son 37 years to tell his mother about his sexual abuse at the age of 12!”

“Great PR agency! What a way to put a spin on things! The problem is not sex abuse, but the abuse of power!! There are no checks and balances and no accountability. Unless the organizations changes it.”

“Clergy/Bishops meeting in February allow chosen lay persons to be present in order to help bishop in decision making toward resolution.”

“Who is paying for the legal costs, etc.? The parishes are already being hurt by the decrease in attendance and offertory with no ease up in the taxes paid to the Archdiocese.”

“To show sincerity in asking forgiveness (the Bishops) I suggest they resign en masse in a letter to the Pope and let him decide whose resignation he will accept and whose he will not!”

“We the church, want Archbishop Lori to carry our concern to the pope. We need reform from the pope down to rectify this abuse of power by hierarchy of the church & the priests who committed the abuse. The continuance of the Catholic Church depends on it!!!!”

“Laity involvement with Bishop to formulate solutions and how to carry out.”

“The word ‘noble’ used by Pope Francis in reference to a cardinal resigning his post makes me question the acknowledgement of his wrong doing. I can’t see this as being noble.”

“The PA report was lots of lies. Read Sept. Catalyst by Bill Donahue of Catholic League. Please defend the Catholic Church against these accusations by telling how we are protecting youth.”

“The Archdiocese needs to start talking about their plans for structural changes and how they are listening to the concerns of the laity and become more transparent on how the Archdiocese operates more than just financial statements. My biggest concern with the church is the Archdiocese’s complete disregard with the ‘will of the people’ and its one-sided approach to decisions on how my church operates.”

“We need to address abuse of power from both heterosexual and homosexual priests and bishops. We also need to know how the laity helps the bishops and priests to be holy.”

“Thanks for sponsoring these sessions. The church needs fundamental structural change in our organizational structure. More light and diversity is needed in our leadership. Also, the Latin Rite is one of the few with a celibate priesthood and that was not always so. I would like you to call on the Pope to hold a council on these issues. Our children depend on you.”

“After the MD AG Brian Frosh continues to investigate and more abuse survivors come forward... will the fact that the Archdiocese of Baltimore covered up the murder of Sister Cathy be addressed? Will files be opened that are currently closed?”

“As you know, the Church is a FLAT ORG. Requiring the managers to have a large SPAN of control. This will only work well if you have very good people at every level who are dedicated. It appears the Church has failed to maintain proper procedures to ensure continued high quality management. A new View of the Church’s MANAGEMENT STYLE is REQUIRED.”

“I would like you & every other Bishop in our STATE & Country to:

- *Verbally and document that you have NOT covered up for ANY priests who have been accused or found guilty of molesting/abusing children.*
- *If YOU or ANY OTHER Bishop has knowingly covered up for a priest I EXPECT you to STEP DOWN from service*
- *I expect and we deserve full transparency regarding abusive priests – NOT just what you decide to disclose. EX: Bishop Malone in Buffalo.*
- *You should ALL hold Bishop Malone and every other Bishop involved in this cover up accountable, which means he should be discharged and criminally liable.”*

“The issues facing the Catholic Church today are the most serious of modern times. Major reforms are needed in order to preserve its long-term future. A Third Vatican Council should be called immediately, but this time, members of the laity must be actively involved.”

“Is the list of priest who served in the diocese going to be put back on the diocese website? It was there until was removed by Bishop O’Brien. As a genealogist it was very useful to help find which Parish the priest who officiated at a marriage was serving in so I could locate the parish.”

“The bishops need to include the people in the decision making. As long as the parish priest has the final say about any decision, we are not part of the church. My only vote is with money – that is always accepted!! Wake up – we have just lost a whole generation of young people.”

“Full disclosure all parties in power - disciplined, jailed etc. The Catholic Church needs to rebuild with transparency.”

The Next Steps on this Path

You, too, go into my vineyard. Matthew 20:4

At this time we cannot see too far down the path. As much as we want immediate results, and actions, it is apparent that the path forward will not be quick and it most likely will not be easy. Change, however, is coming. At this point in the journey, we see three discernable next steps and a slight fork in the path. The first step is the publication of this memorandum to our parish family. It has been made available to our faith community in the bulletin and on the website. Second, this report has been shared with Archbishop Lori.

It is here that we come to the fork in the path: our parish family's response to the memorandum and the hierarchy's (Archdiocese and beyond) response to our memorandum. One we can control, the other we can only affect. We will continue to walk along the fork in the path that is ours while advocating for progress on the bishops' leg of the journey. To that end, in January, an open opportunity to reflect on this memorandum in small group conversation will be offered. We, the people of St. Margaret Parish, can discern together how God is calling our community to be one of healing, justice, reconciliation, renewal and transformation in light of the crisis before us. We can tend to that part of the vineyard which God has entrusted to us.

Conclusion/Synthesis: Hope for the Future

And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. Matthew 16:18

Many have suggested that we are at a watershed moment for our Catholic Church. Although this may not be the biggest crisis to face the Church over the course of her 2000 + years, some who gathered for the Listening Sessions noted that the time in which we now find ourselves, particularly the Church in the United States, is the worst crisis experienced in our lifetime. We are a people in exile – attempting to reclaim our identity as the people of God and wondering how we got here. Many feel conflicted – disheartened, disillusioned, and heartbroken at the pain inflicted and experienced within our Church family. We lament at the failure of the Church's leadership to protect the vulnerable in our midst. Following the lament, however, is the plaintive cry: but where else would we go? This is our Church! We echo Peter: *Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. John 6:68*

It is in our Church, flawed as she may be, that we encounter God in word and sacrament. It is in our Church, guided and protected by the Holy Spirit, that our faith, the faith that we hold dear, has been handed down over the course of 2 millennia. It is through the very flawed human vessels, consecrated for service to the people of God, that we are able to encounter God in the sacraments.

The evil that is present within our Church challenges our unity. We pray that our leaders work with the laity to help restore that one-ness. The evil that is present in our Church threatens our holiness. Let each of us, the baptized, embrace our own unique call to holiness, and in so doing renew and transform the pilgrim church.

The evil present in our Church threatens to narrow our focus to the brokenness in our body. We pray that we, the people of God, avoid the temptation to be drawn too deeply into the abyss of the evil and brokenness. May we view it from a universal perspective and context, that of the broader Church, so we can rightly see the brokenness in perspective and invite Jesus into that space to heal us. May we follow the Spirit where the Spirit leads.

This evil threatens the apostolic roots of our Church. May we not throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater as we work for change in our Church. The apostolic lineage of our Church has protected the deposit of faith that Christ entrusted to his first faithful, albeit flawed, followers. We, the Roman Catholic Church, are here today, because, *on balance* and owing to the Spirit's presence and guidance in our midst, those in ordained ministry have handed on the teachings of the Church that they received, have served the people of God well, and have, *on balance*, been faithful, albeit flawed, stewards and ministers of the sacramental life of the Church. For it is through the sacramental life of the Church, in particular the Eucharist, that we are given hope and that our faith is sustained in the midst of this crisis. May we, the faithful – ordained and lay alike, prayerfully support our Church, take ownership of our faith, fully engage in the sacramental life of the Church, and encounter Christ in word, sacrament and one another, so as to be conformed to Christ and be guided by the Holy Spirit, that we may bring Christ's healing and saving ministry to all whom we encounter, including those who have been consecrated to shepherd our Church.