

**Our Lady of Lourdes Church Town Hall Meeting**  
**Sunday, September 16, 2018, following 11:00am liturgy**

**Purpose of Meeting:** The purpose of this meeting is to come together as a community of faith to explore our thoughts, feelings, questions, and struggles about the very difficult and divisive topics of clergy sex abuse, the cover-ups that allowed that abuse to continue for many decades, and the inability of our bishops to create an accountable and transparent response. For many of us, this crisis has challenged our very identity as members of the Church. We hope to provide a safe space for personal expression and for determining a possible communal response.

1.     Introductory Activity

Participants responded to the following questions on post-it notes. Responses are listed AT THE END OF THIS DOCUMENT.

- How did you feel when you first heard about the problem of clergy sex abuse?
- How do you feel about the Church's institutional response to this crisis?
- How do you feel about identifying yourself as a Catholic right now?

2.     Welcome

Carrie welcome the group, reviewed the meeting's purpose and agenda, and led the group in a moment of prayerful quiet. She also drew the group's attention to the resources listed on the back side of the agenda, especially for those who may know someone who has been abused or who have been abused themselves.

3.     Agreements

Adrian led us in agreeing to the following "ground rules" for our time together:

- Confidentiality
- Agree to disagree
- Respect
- Be grounded in love
- Use microphone
- Pause after each comment to allow it to "sink in"
- Share what we agree on/accomplish with the wider parish community (keeping in mind confidentiality as noted above)

4.     Information about the crisis

Steve presented information to the group regarding the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report, former Cardinal McCarrick and the Vigano letter, and the Oakland Diocese response.

## 5. Discussion of Questions

We discussed the three questions listed above.

## 6. Our response

Steve led the group in proposing and discerning priorities for action. Possible action steps discussed include:

- Focus on needs not being met--i.e. Those who have left the Church, victims of abuse, etc.
- Encourage Bishop Barber to open/release all files on priests against whom there have been credible allegations of abuse (some discussion as to whether this should include other types of illegal activity, as well--DUI's, etc.)
- Organize ourselves--find our voice and use our power locally, regionally, and nationally
- Parishioners voting for members of an organization that will represent them (vs. parish/pastoral council, which, in accordance with Canon Law, is appointed by clergy)
- Forming some sort of diocesan board to which each parish would send two elected members as representatives [note that info--albeit somewhat outdated--about the Diocese of Oakland review board can be found at <https://www.oakdiocese.org/offices/safe-environment/Diocesan%20Review%20Board>]
- Write a letter to the bishop as a parish. Some discussion about:
  - Should the letter be private--just sent to the bishop--or published on the parish website?
  - Should the letter be sent to the Catholic Voice?
  - Would there be more power in a letter that was jointly drafted and signed by multiple parishes?

## 7. Next steps

- People who wish to be on a committee to work on the parish's response to this crisis came forward to share their email addresses.
- People who wish to simply be kept informed about the parish's response were invited to send their email address to [lourdesleadership@gmail.com](mailto:lourdesleadership@gmail.com).

## 8. Meeting Evaluation

### **Plusses: What went well?**

- The meeting happened!
- Participants were passionate
- Participants were polite
- Sense of relief to be able to talk about this and about what we can do
- Diverse viewpoints
- People freely expressed themselves
- Sense of community

- Considering concrete steps to move forward
- “Intergenerational”--i.e. “Cradle Catholics” as well as those who’ve joined the Church more recently

**Deltas: What could have been better?**

- Meeting ended about 20-25 minutes late
- Small group discussions or pair-shares along with large group discussion
- Simply listen to people’s comments and not respond, address, or refute what they said
- More background information about the history of this issue
- Hear from Fr. Jim
- Meeting had a negative undertone with regard to priests

9. Closing Prayer

Steve and Lael led us in a closing prayer and the song “In Every Age.”

The meeting adjourned at approximately 2:10pm. Many people stayed to talk informally with one another.

**RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS**

**Note:**

- Some responses were illegible (and therefore not included here)
- Duplicate responses are only listed once
- Responses were not edited, even if they didn’t seem to make sense

**1. How did you feel when you first heard about the problem of clergy sex abuse?**

- In disbelief, disappointed, infuriated, powerless
- At first I thought the scandal had nothing to do with me or my faith life. It was up to the victims, perpetrators, and authorities. Bystanders should focus on their own spiritual lives. More recently, I do feel connected to the pain of the worldwide Church, but don’t see God’s call at the moment.
- I heard about the abuse crisis as a young boy in Boston. It feels like a constant in my relationship with the Church.
- Not surprised
- Shock, disbelief, unimaginable that such a terrible thing could not only happen, but was not dealt with.
- Humiliated, embarrassed, angry. A few priests destroying the image of a Church already at risk.
- Disgusted and disappointed.
- I’m old. Issue has been around for a long time. Sexual issues have become more open now.

- Dismayed, disillusioned, disgusted
- I felt heartbroken that it persisted and it's so prevalent throughout the Church.
- When I heard 20 years ago, I was angry and hurt. I wanted to talk about it and help to make sure it didn't happen again but the tap down response gave me no peace. McCarrick and the PA report were like a sucker punch to my gut--almost as if I am so accustomed to it that I am broken.
- Shocked and saddened
- I kind of always knew about it. Though I came from a Catholic family, we never put priests on pedestals. As a junior in a Dominican (OP) high school, we were taught the (mis)quote "The streets of hell are lined with bishops' heads."
- It's been going on since before 1980 in media. Boston--2000. And centuries before. These are sick men, evil men, predatory on children. I am beyond angry.
- Which one? With the latest one I was disgusted but not surprised. Asking "What will the bishops do" after so many of these episodes makes me feel like we haven't addressed central issues of power and decision making.
- Sad. But also grateful that it "wasn't my problem." (I was Southern Baptist when the story broke in the news.)
- Devastated, angry, determined to remain and be part of the needed transformation.
- Surprised by the sheer numbers (not surprised it happened). Disgusted by some of the details pointing to the systemic nature of it and collaboration among some priests to complete these crimes.
- The geographic propensity of the sexual abuse seems to be in the East coast. Is there an explanation or reason around this?
- Not surprised. Have known about the gay and lesbian clergy since 1980's. This doesn't me. What isn't being addressed is the hypocrisy.
- Hurt, disappointed, concerned.
- Disappointed and betrayed. What ever happened to self-control and loyalty to clerical vows?
- Upset. Not again--
- Discouraged
- Disgusted
- Angry and sad

## **2. How do you feel about the Church's institutional response to this crisis?**

- Too little, too late
- Accountability and lay involvement are needed
- Currently, this is completely insufficient. Broad and deep change is needed. That means people in power offering up that power. I think it is possible but it won't be easy. And I don't buy that the Church and systems don't change over time.
- Large organizations move slowly. But the Church taught me about God and goodness, which never die.
- I feel as though there have been some positive steps, but these have been overshadowed by failure. Priests who covered up abuses.

- It's a large institutional response--has turned its back on the people
- I hope it has only just begun and that it will include public acknowledgement of the need for transformation into a broken and healed inclusive community of mutual respect and service for all.
- Not so hopeful about the institutional response as they maintain power in the hands of bishops except in cases of reported abuse. I am more hopeful about how parishes can respond locally.
- In being late, it has caused more pain and perhaps an opportunity for greater change.
- I'm not aware of a response other than general condemnation.
- "Political," disappointing, not enough, apologies rather than clear amends
- Disappointed but not surprised. The Church has let me down for the last 20 years.
- Very weak. Seems to be mostly swept under the rug, "business as usual," no surprise that more scandals are erupting.
- There hasn't been a response. They are still covering up. No transparency. Angry. He's not my pope!
- I feel the pope is doing so much yet so little!
- Very disappointed and angry
- Weak response. Should be stronger, more consoling, more hope of identification and monitoring of such issues.
- Pope Francis is perfectly right not to engage with Vigano's disgraceful letter and is raising an important issue about clericalism and abuse of power as clergy. The Church and Pope Francis and Benedict are most culpable for not launching a thorough investigation in 2002. They left the prophetic initiative of purification up to secular authorities.
- Ashamed that they won't admit guilt.
- I feel confused, not sure what to believe. I feel lost right now and as if my faith is being questioned and challenged.
- Does seem to be rather lethargic
- Disappointing
- Sad and embarrassed
- Too slow, too little
- Very poor. Lack of courage in being open and clear cover up of clergy and bishops and their bad behavior.
- If women were part of the hierarchy, this might not have occurred.

**3. How do you feel about identifying yourself as a Catholic right now?**

- Ambivalent
- Embarrassed, especially of the priests and bishops.
- Feeling like I need to explain/justify myself
- Overall still the same. I work in circles that are already suspicious of corruption in religion/religious life. This doesn't make it any easier.

- Not so good. I feel ashamed for the lack of moral compass and faith maturity within our Catholic religion.
- Feel just fine in some instances and denial feelings in others
- No problem--like being an American now. It's all about the people standing up for what's right.
- I feel responsible to reveal a loving compassionate face of the Church. We are the Church.
- Angry
- I'm proud to be Catholic but not proud of the Church.
- Quite confident
- A few months ago I felt more confident than I do now because now, when you mention Catholicism to identify yourself, many people think you support the scandal. I still am a Catholic and always will be and I'm not ashamed because the Lord is the Lord and the priests are the priests.
- Somehow embarrassed, expecting to be attacked and needing to defend myself.
- Since I joined the Catholic church after the priest abuse came to light, I had to work through identifying as Catholic and the priest abuse before I joined. I am grateful that OLL seems different and more open.
- I'm OK--this is not new.
- I am deeply Catholic and rely on Christ through the Church as the engine of my spiritual life. The scandal makes it more difficult for me to talk to secular non-Catholics. But I agree wholeheartedly with the quote this morning--the Church is a mess, and Christ is powerfully in charge.
- My faith is in God, not these shameful clergy.
- No different
- I speak and think of my Catholic identity without, or at least without being conscious of, using symbols associated with the hierarchy. I talk about my faith community and Scripture and experience with fellow Catholics at different places in the world (being part of a diverse global community).
- Disappointed and disgusted at the priesthood and the Church
- I feel comfortable identifying as Catholic, but that if I am to do so I need to take up more responsibility for healing our shame and growing the Church.
- I feel heavy-hearted about identifying as Catholic right now and I feel challenged by other Christians, non-Catholics.