

Family of Four Parishes Listening Sessions Summary

The parishes of Old Saint Mary, Our Lady of Divine Providence, Saints Peter and Paul, and Three Holy Women held Listening Sessions over the course of four weekends in October and November. These sessions took place after mass at each of our parishes, and all were invited to come and share their thoughts, feelings, and questions in response to the clergy sexual abuse and cover up crisis. Staff members of our parishes facilitated these conversations, while Father Tim and Father John were present simply to listen to the voices of parishioners. In total, seventy two people participated in our listening sessions to make their voices heard. Thorough notes were taken at each session, and the contents of these notes were condensed into the following summary. This summary has been sent directly to Archbishop Jerome ListECKI for his consideration.

Our pastors and lay parish leaders encourage your continued input and dialogue as we move forward in addressing this crisis with honesty and faith. Please feel free to reach out to us at any time.

The people of God are deeply angry, sad, and hurt by clerical sexual abuse and by the way it has been handled by Catholic bishops.

- Our people are experiencing a range of emotions including anger, frustration, and a feeling of betrayal, as well as hurt, sadness, and depression. They are broken-hearted and suffering on a deep level, and they were universally grateful to have an opportunity to be heard. People from other parishes even joined our listening sessions because they experienced a lack of response from their own parish leaders.
- In a real way, every member of the Catholic Church is a victim of this betrayal. The many people who have been directly affected by abuse, whether in the Church or in another context, are especially traumatized by these revelations.
- Over and over, our people shared that they have lost trust in the United States Bishops, and some have even lost faith in Pope Francis himself. They believe that church leaders are not leading with integrity and faith and that they are more committed to power than to caring for the people of God. Even statements of apology from church leaders often seem inauthentic and defensive.
- This scandal is driving people away from the church, especially young people. Parents and teachers are particularly distressed because they don't know how to explain or defend the Church to the young people in their care.
- In spite of this scandal, our parishioners recognize that most priests are good and holy men, and they want to support their priests during this challenging time.
- While they know that sexual abuse is a problem all over society, our people expect the Church to be held to a higher standard and even to become a leader in addressing this issue.
- In the midst of all of this pain and anger, many of our parishioners affirmed that they would not be driven away from the Church by this scandal. One attendee emphatically proclaimed these words: "I will not leave. This is MY church, and this is MY God."

(over)

The people of God have many questions about the handling of the abuse crisis, and they need clear and honest answers.

- Why has the Catholic Church in the United States not addressed these issues yet? Didn't we learn from the revelations of 2002? What are we doing now to make sure that this doesn't happen again?
- Do bishops understand how deeply people are hurt by their actions and inactions? Do they think if they ignore this crisis people will just forget about the issue and it will go away?
- Why are abusive priests not in jail? Why are abusers and those who enabled them assigned to lives of prayer and penance, still supported by the church? Why have so few bishops faced consequences for their cover-ups? Why have more not been forced to resign?
- Why are we still asking survivors to come to the Church with accusations? Shouldn't crimes be reported directly to law enforcement?
- What are our children being taught about sexuality, boundaries, and safety? Is there more we can do to empower them to protect themselves?
- Have we done studies to understand the root causes of clerical sexual abuse? Are we addressing those deeper causes?
- Why are so few parishes in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee doing anything to address this crisis? Why hasn't the Archdiocese given parishes any directives for responding at a parish level?
- What can we do for those who have been driven away from the Church because of this scandal? How can we show our concern and care?

The people of God want transparency, action, and transformation in the Church that they love.

- While apologies and listening are important, our people want more than just talk - they want action. Many feel that we've talked about these issues before but that nothing has changed.
- As a whole, participants expressed a strong desire for greater openness and transparency on the part of the church hierarchy, along with a commitment to really listening to the people of God and communicating with complete honesty.
- Some parishioners expressed that they would prefer to communicate directly with Archbishop Listecki and would like him to host open listening sessions throughout the Archdiocese.
- Many people called for a greater role for lay leadership in the Church, with laity and clergy working together as a team. This sometimes included a call for women in particular to have a greater voice in the Church, whether as ordained priests or in a more influential leadership role in parishes, dioceses, and seminaries. Some also expressed a desire for priests to be able to marry.
- Another common recommendation in our conversations was for the Church to talk about sexuality in a more open and positive way.
- Some suggested that the Church look for ways to speed up the process of these abuse revelations, rather than drawing out the scandal slowly over time. One recommendation was for the Church itself to invite a grand jury investigation in every state. Our people encouraged the Church to be proactive and bring everything into the open now, rather than wait for more allegations to surface.
- Several people asked that the Archdiocese recognize the damage done by Archbishop Weakland and stop honoring him, particularly at the Cathedral.
- The people of God recognize a need for continual, committed prayer for the Church that they love.