

The pain of clergy abuse: results of listening sessions

[Diocese of Jefferson City

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In late 2018, Bishop W. Shawn McKnight hosted a series of listening sessions and shared prayer opportunities regarding the abuse crisis in the Church. His intent was to gather information, insight and prayers as he prepares to take part in the U.S. Catholic bishops' fall assembly in Baltimore. The listening sessions also became a time to express sorrow and request forgiveness.

Columbia —Monday, Nov. 5, 2018, at 6 p.m., Our Lady of Lourdes Church, 903 Bernadette Dr.

Hannibal —Sunday, Oct. 28, 2018, at 4 p.m., Holy Family Church, 1111 Broadway

For young adults only — Saturday, Nov. 3, in the Alphonse J. Schwartz Memorial Catholic Center, 2207 W. Main St. in Jefferson City.

Jefferson City —Sunday, Nov. 4, 2018, at 4 p.m., Cathedral of St. Joseph, 2215 W. Main St.

Kirkville —Monday, Oct. 2, 2018, at 6 p.m., Mary Immaculate Church, 716 E. Washington St.

Rolla —Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2018, at 6:30 p.m., St. Patrick Church, 17 St. Patricks Lane.

Participants were asked to direct their comments toward the following questions. Written comments and comments sent via email were also accepted.

1. How can the bishops rebuild trust in their leadership, both among Catholics and others?
2. Do you think bishops should resign if it is found they are culpable in enabling sexual abuse, whether of a minor or an adult? If not, how should bishops be held accountable?
3. The US bishops' administrative committee recommended several action steps for the full body of bishops to consider. What do you think of these?

Establishment of a third-party hot-line for complaints of abuse by a bishop

Development of policies to address restrictions of bishops who have been removed or resigned for allegations of sexual abuse of a minor or sexual misconduct with an adult; Development of a code of conduct for bishops

Support for a full investigation into the Archbishop McCarrick scandal, utilizing lay experts in relevant fields

4. What should Bishop McKnight and lay Catholics in the Diocese do together to ensure systems of co-responsibility for laity and clergy in the leadership and governance of the Diocese?

5. What Church do you want your children and grandchildren to inherit? What are your dreams for their Church?

The following is a redacted summary of the responses.

QUESTION ONE: How can the bishops rebuild trust in their leadership, both among Catholics and others?

We need for all bishops to be 100 percent transparent in what's being done. We need to be well informed and very open about what rules are being changed, what is happening. Would say I don't believe bishops should be put out on their own. I think they should be sent to where they spend their whole days praying about why they did what they did if they're guilty of these things. I think they should definitely be found guilty before they're chastised. And I know that's not always easy. It's easy to accuse someone 35 years later. I've seen that happen to innocent people. I've seen it happen to guilty people. So I would like to make sure that those who are chastised are truly guilty of having committed these heinous things. Thank you.

We have not been catechized properly in terms of sexuality. I would respectfully ask the bishop to always promote the teachings of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. There is a wealth of knowledge in it that we just don't know.

I think the principal question is, 'are you homosexual?' Then deal with some other tougher questions. I think that's where some of the problems started. Not all, of course. And I just hope and pray that through that concern, there can be a healing but also an opportunity to do what's right, to discern and take proper steps and ask those tough questions.

What saddens me so much — the bishops not caring if their priests are doing things that are hurting their souls. If a priest is carrying that holiness, then I think that is part of what's going to stop these things. I see a lot of bishops who are too concerned about keeping their positions and not concerned enough about holiness, about their priests' holiness, about their members' holiness. And they're too concerned with the PR and what it looks like. So whether or not a bishop should resign — are they too concerned with holding the position? Then they should resign.

I want to address the hierarchy of the Church and what we as laity could know and should know. Regarding the letter of Archbishop Vigano: it implies that this sexual abuse scandal was covered up by all the way to the Pope and that the hierarchy knew full well what was going on. How can you assure us, Bishop, that if the hierarchy going all the way up to the Holy Father was are of this, that all the way to the top it can be stopped?

What have you done to reach out to the victims of these crimes? Have they gotten an apology? Have they gotten to address their accusers if possible? We need to know, so they can get trust back in us that we have shown our human side in compassion, and whether it's accepted or not, that we are there for them and that they're still a part of to Church, whether they want to come back to us or not. We need to reach out to our victims.

I feel that transparency is one thing. Honesty is another. The thing that bothered me so much, other than finding out all that stuff that was going on, was that this has been hidden for so many years. And I guess I couldn't understand why when the first study came up, why it was hidden. Why wasn't it brought up then? Why was it all just shoved under the rug? Why didn't they deal with it right then?

Be the shepherd, the guide we can trust to follow.

I would like to see a system where there is complete investigation and complete transparency. We have to be careful of false allegations, though. I know of some priests who have been falsely accused. Those who have been part of the problem need to come clean.

It's going to be difficult, especially with news like what was on 60 Minutes, his executive secretary turned him in (Bishop Malone of Buffalo). You will have to be very transparent. How successful has the Charter been since 2002? Every diocese should report. The character of this organization must be rebuilt. Every victim and every priest should be listed. Disclosure of how much money has been spent. It is disappointing even with the implementation of the Charter, we don't know how effective it's been, we haven't had full transparency.

Bishops have to be taken out – maybe as much as half of them. To rebuild confidence in the church, when you have that kind of mishandling of responsibilities, you cut bait and move on. Whoever is in charge must make some tough decisions. Those with abuse on their plate have to go – now.

Obviously, there is a shortage of priests. I know the Holy Father has been talking about opening the priesthood to the deacons, lay people. I think bishops need to be open to that. Little more oversight of the closed organization. Plus it would give the bishops more people. Holy Father says it's a decision within the diocese. Include not just people who are supposedly celibate, but married men. You are starting to close parishes because of lack of priests. Deacons are on the sideline. Closing parishes will limit access to the Eucharist.

A lot of times it seems the church is more interested in protecting itself, rather than the children. Every time I take my kids on a field trip, I have to say I will protect the diocese if someone is negligent with my children. The school is teaching my kids they should be accountable for their actions. The church should be likewise.

You are a new bishop, you shouldn't have to bear responsibility. Even tonight, we can see a duality – you are literally sitting a step above the rest of us. Should bishops be held accountable? Yes. Code of conducts – I am pretty sure Jesus had a code of conduct we should all follow. No duality – equal expectations and opportunities for all, regardless of gender. The ministry of our baptism, democratic election of pastors and bishops, when you call the laity to a certain level of accountable. I appreciate all the efforts to improve communications in the diocese. I appreciate your efforts in social justice and Catholic Charities. I would hope you take this opportunity to make changes that will be memorable for the rest of our church history.

To me, these questions lead me to believe we are still in an era of non-transparency. What should we do with priests? That is a no-brainer. They committed a crime. I have worked with children in all of my career. There is no discussion about this – until we look at this from a legal standpoint. We build trust with transparency, in dealing with these situations as the rest of society. Because of the way the questions, I feel we still have a bunch of men making decisions cloaked in the hierarchy.

The church needs to be OK with relinquishing authority. It's not blasphemy against God to hold priests and bishops accountable. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. Being taught that the power of ordained clergy comes from God, suggests absolute power. This reluctance to hold authority accountable creates a culture of secrecy. It's the job of the news media to hold people in power accountable. The Church did not hold predatory priests accountable, so the media did. I'm a journalism student. I am here as a Catholic. The months of reporting by the Spotlight team came from a love of the truth. I almost feel like that line in the litany is a bit defensive. We don't make stuff up. We don't want to report things this awful. Over the summer AP wrote a story about the abuse of nuns by priests. I think the Church should brace for increased media scrutiny. My parents recently stopped going to Mass. If it weren't for the Newman Center, I don't know if I would still be practicing. But I am.

Young adults gathering:

- Welcoming third party agencies to do an investigation and facilitating the process for them to ensure everything is in compliance.
- Having an investigation done by a non-Catholic third party is an insult and weakens the faith of laity and young priests (one person expressed this minority opinion)
- Evaluating seminarians, and having the diocese be more involved in their formation and have them be more involved in the diocese during their formation.
- Taking measures not only from an administrative perspective but also spiritually.
- Keep in mind that members of the clergy are human and mistakes.

QUESTION TWO: Do you think bishops should resign if it is found they are culpable in enabling sexual abuse, whether of a minor or an adult? If not, how should bishops be held accountable?

Yes, I do think they should. I need we need to be careful not to find someone guilty by association. I think of Archbishop Wuerl. I think he was a wonderful bishop. And I'm just wondering if he wasn't thrown under the bus, unfortunately, because he was from the Diocese of Pittsburgh where some of the abuse took place.

I agree with you, Bishop McKnight, that this is probably the most serious issue we're facing. But I have to remember that there are so many good things going on in the Church. There are so many wonderful people volunteering their time to work with kids. So I think there's a lot positive going on in the Church. And I'm so proud to be Catholic.

We were very naïve. I didn't know the previous bishop but I was a good friend of Bishop McAuliffe. We would talk about this because it was really brewing at the time. And he would say, "They go to confession. We get them help and we send them on. Why do they keep doing this?" He just didn't get it. It's a puzzle. It's a combination of things.

When you're assembling your professionals, one of the things I try to share with them is they would get a lot of PhDs and a lot of doctors. And that was good and it looks good for legal. But very few of those

had real, actual, in-the-world experience with this topic. You're not going to get much wisdom. So when you're working with bishops and you're on teams of who's going to help figure this out, and who's going to treat whoever, try to be sure that you have persons who have been in court, who have dealt with both sides of these issues. They're out there. That, and to say that celibacy was not the issue of people who went to court. It may be in a small number, but mostly this is a separate and very serious problem.

Should any bishop ever encourage sin? Should any bishop enable serious sin to continue? As a parent, as a teacher, that's a no-brainer, but there are plenty of people without brains who lead.

Why is this even a question? If I am a parent, scout leader, attorney, I would be jailed. It's insulting this is even a question. It makes no sense. I am afraid it indicates the sea of difference between clergy and laity.

I work at an elementary school. If I was accused of something, I would be fired. I would be prosecuted. I am angry. I know kids this has happened to – by family member. It angers me, it shakes me up. We got to get it together here. My faith has been shaken. It just saddens me so much. What do you say? It is embarrassing. I have always been a Catholic They should be held accountable. They would be fired, they would be prosecuted.

Of course. No brainer.

I do not think bishops should necessarily resign when found guilty of any moral sin. There should be a standard of forgiveness and transparent confession of these sins. Meaning that enforcement shouldn't define what should be a simple discernment of spirit on an individual level. Excessive forgiveness should occur and complete forgiveness should be given to a complete penitent, adjusting accordingly. The pope and council of bishops should handle this directly.

I would suggest that the bishops admit publicly and privately that the sexual abuse of children and adults is a crime. We must cooperate fully with the public authorities in the investigation of the allegations. I want to make a note that the American Catholic Church is an entity of the United States and subject to the U.S. Constitution, its laws and the laws of its separate states. Those who abuse, if found guilty in a court of law, should be subject to the penalty of law. This is what infuriates me, when I see the questions concerning what should "we do about bishops who are found culpable of enabling sexual abuse" or "how should bishops be held accountable"? They should resign and be subject whatever penalties would impose.

I was outraged when I read that Archbishop McCarrick was to be “confined to a place of prayer and contemplation” at a site to be announced later. I don’t know how an 80-year-plus man would survive in a federal penitentiary. But my opinion is that’s where he belongs. Anything short of that is troubling, from my viewpoint.

Kant writes to the effect that morality is a priori. We already know what’s right and what’s wrong.

How can bishops rebuild trust? Y’all have to get out of this. We don’t need personnel management from the Chancery. We need people arrested, we need people to take this seriously. The victims are going to be paying for these crimes for the rest of their lives. The hierarchy should get out of our way – let lay people meet to discuss legal reform, help us get that going, if you are serious about reform. Please don’t blame the victims, or disbelieve or belittle them. Why is it a question that bishops should resign? It’s like the mob ... what are you doing? I grew up in Archdiocese of Washington – know McCarrick and Wuerl. They enabled others – I am not buying the argument we didn’t know then, why were they being moved in secret? I hope you and your brother bishops are serious about this.

We need lay people involved in leadership positions, both locally and universally. Vatican II looked at the church in a different way than what we grew up. Church became the people of God. Then we had a pope who centralized the Church. Now we have a pope who is trying to go back to Vatican II. The bishops, for their own protection, ought to bring in competent laypeople to do the investigations, then present to the nuncio, or whoever, to follow up on the findings. The vicar general or chancellor doesn’t have that expertise. The more that is brought in, the less separation we will have. There is a code of conduct in the diocese – the bishop should adhere to it as well.

Guilty bishops should resign. Anyone bishop who is found guilty should resign, or the pope should require him to resign.

My son considered being a seminarian. We need to know our sons are safe going into the seminary. What kind of checks and balances are there? We’ve been taught so much about obedience. These clergy were not obedient – how do we handle this spiritually? Reporting of abuse is a crime. Most of us know someone who was abused. I feel a little lost myself. That is part of the picture, too.

Code of conduct for bishops – I thought we had one, the Bible? Some of our priests are victims. They have their own PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) issues. That has to be very difficult. It may be an obstacle. Maybe it would be good to have counselors to go around to parishes, so people don’t have to talk to priests. This is what they do in schools when there is a tragedy– they bring in outside counselors.

QUESTION THREE

1. The US bishops' administrative committee recommended several action steps for the full body of bishops to consider. What do you think of these?

- Establishment of a third-party hot-line for complaints of abuse by a bishop

- Development of policies to address restrictions of bishops who have been removed or resigned for allegations of sexual abuse of a minor or sexual misconduct with an adult; Development of a code of conduct for bishops

- Support for a full investigation into the Archbishop McCarrick scandal, utilizing lay experts in relevant fields

And the whole idea of a code of conduct for bishops — you don't have one of those? I hope you mean revise the code of conduct for bishops, because I really hope there is something there. And this isn't like a new thought.

I would like to see something where not only the archbishops and bishops being responsible but I would also like to see something done with the priests that have created some of these problems in the Church.

I want to know if our diocese is addressing the issue specifically – the predatory nature of clergy against adults, young men. The sodomized clerics. I would hope the priests and the bishops would be willing to separate the issues – not conflate clericalism with pedophilia. With homosexuality in the hierarchy – we have wolves in sheep clothing. I hope the bishops specifically address that issue.

I don't understand why these issues have not been addressed before a priest even becomes a priest. I am a convert and when I joined the Church, I thought a priest was next to God. He can be such a holy man and someone you respect. That's what a priest was! So when all of this came out about the sexual abuse, I thought what are the guidelines? Do they go before a board? Before a panel? Are they questioned? Are there background checks? So I agree with every one of these steps that you could take. But I also agree that they should have been done before the priests were ever even allowed to be a priest.

The victims and what they had to deal with, it's like with any crime and anything. As far as a bishop being removed, a bishop can't always be accountable for his people. But if he knew what was going on, the biggest thing I would like to know is why did this cover-up occur? Why did these bishops continue and affect other people's lives? That's what needs to be stopped.

Will the person answering the third-party hotline needs to advocate for the victim, the diocese or both? I think that's a very critical concern. We've been going through the last few years this new #MeToo movement. I do know that rape victims do suffer very severe post-traumatic stress. And I think a person who's been sexually abused falls into that same category. So I hope that when they call that hotline, whoever is answering that is going to be there to support and advocate for them. I was advised by a colleague of mine who is a nurse that the decision of whether to report for prosecution should be left up to a victim to decide. Again, I think that part of the research that really needs to be done by your office, Bishop McKnight, would be the effect of the post-traumatic stress and the whole experience that rape victims. Because that is something most of the sexual abuse cases will be involved with. Post-traumatic stress has a diagnosis in psychiatry, that came out as a result of two populations. One was post-Vietnam War veterans and the other was rape victims. That was the two parties together that came to a real diagnosis.

If your brother bishops have forgotten their ordination vow, maybe they should do what married couples sometimes do – re-read their vows. I don't think we need to write anything more. What is already there needs to be enforced.

Some of the difficulty is that the investigation is not done in a public manner. We have a child abuse hotline and adult abuse hotline in the state of Missouri. If there is something already set in place, better approach to provide that information and readily available in all our parishes – so people can report abuse as they do anywhere else. With the exception of the confessional, the same rules should apply. Missouri state law requires some people to be mandatory reporters. Smart policy to require all church personnel should be mandatory reporters. Having a different system for our church creates the perception we are trying to hide, and it is going to be treated differently

Yes! Full investigation of McCarrick

QUESTION FOUR: What should Bishop McKnight and lay Catholics in the Diocese do together to ensure systems of co-responsibility for laity and clergy in the leadership and governance of the Diocese?

Co-responsibility is important. And I would say equal responsibility. It's our Church as a group, together. In the secular world, there is the Freedom of Information Act. There's all kinds of things to at least try to be transparent. Transparency is critical for what's happening. It has to come back to the congregations.

The presbyterate, every priest that I know, it's got to be very tough out there to be in public and feel sometimes the negative verbal barbs. So I feel for them. Transparency is critical. Not only this issue but with all issues in the diocese. I understand that priests really have a career. And we respect that career. But that career needs to be held accountable also.

McCarrick must be investigated. The rage that is inside of me right now, knowing what he did, ravaged our diocese. Lucifer has found a way into our church. In the name of Jesus, out, out! For anyone who pursues power or wealth or authority or privilege or god forbid sexual pleasure, at the price of that man's blood. Fall to our knees in prayer, continue to be honest, pray for our priests. Pray for our priests who show us Jesus Christ.

Homosexuality is the real problem, not pedophilia. My biggest concern is that our innocent priests have been made victims. When an accuser comes forward, the accuser should be investigated as much as the priest.

I want us to go forward in a positive manner. Have we been doing enough for these priests for their sacrifices, for dedicating their lives to us. I want our children to feel the love of the faith and for our church.

We need to talk about this with our kids, all the time. We cannot be afraid to talk with our kids at school. I teach VIRTUS class, I have been dealing with this a lot. I used to have this really good spiel about Boston, etc., but now I can't do that. Every child knows how to cross the street. What are the constructs our children can use to protect their sexuality? We need systems in place for our kids. The VIRTUS training, 2.5 hours once in your life, is not enough. We need more education ... so we are on the side of prevention, not reaction.

QUESTION FIVE: What Church do you want your children and grandchildren to inherit? What are your dreams for their Church?

I dream of a growing church where priests are seen as spiritual guides and someone to turn to during difficult times.

I want them to inherit the true Catholic Church, founded by God.

As Catholics, we should understand that we are one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church founded by Christ through the apostolic succession of the bishops and the priests.

I think I would like clarification of “what is the Church?” I would like to see more of the universality throughout the world. That we are the Church throughout the world. It seems we’re being exposed to Satan and evil. I hope that the Church will stand firm on the founding of Jesus through Peter, the first Pope, and the apostolic succession of the bishops and the priests and we put our trust in that. I think that needs to be firmly reestablished that that’s the structure of the Church and we start losing our way if we even have to ask the question of what Church do we want. We should all want the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church. Thank you.

I want a Church that helps its members to grow in holiness.

I want them to inherit a SAFE Church. I want them to inherit a Church that they can believe in, that they can be PROUD of bringing their non-Catholic friends to — not something to run away from with their non-Catholic friends.

As a woman trying to raise Catholic young men, we need your help, and we need you to do the right thing when it comes to people doing the wrong thing.

I want them to have a Church that is faithful to the teachings of Jesus Christ. And if we’re doing that, I think most of the rest of this would not be an issue. Because the clergy, the laity would all be faithful to the teachings of Jesus Christ. That’s what I want.

I have two kids who graduated from school here. My son is 18. He’s a high school senior. And he is seriously discerning a vocation to the priesthood. And having read about the assaults, the sexual harassment, the blackmailing that has gone on in some seminaries in past decades, I absolutely want to support him as he discerns his vocation. But I have to admit that I’m very relieved that he’s looking at secular higher education or vocation education first so that he has the strength to face ... You think about, you send your kids to a Catholic college because you want them to retain their faith. So you think very hard as a parent about, do I want them in secular schools? What kind of philosophy or lifestyle are they going to absorb there? So to think that a seminary, which is a Catholic school, that I have to hesitate as a mom, to encourage my son to explore that, because I don’t know if it’s safe for him. And that’s hard. So what I want my kids and grandkids to inherit is a Church where instead of just being 95 in favor of that vocation but having such a check, that I can be 100 percent in favor and not have any reservations.

I think what I'm seeing from my friends and my community here is that we want the Church that I saw this summer: I saw the domestic Church in all of its forms and all of its mess and all of its glory. And it was open and it was real and people talked about things. And we helped them kids talk about things that they weren't necessarily talking about at home but because we provided that space for them, they were able to do so. So I think what they're looking for is a Church that makes good on its promises. And we just had the Year of Mercy. What I think we need is not only a Church that not only makes sure that we keep each other accountable, but that shows that we also are merciful and we can help each other grow out of this and help each other heal from all aspects from all sides.

My dream – for our church is that it is a place for sinners to still turn to become saints. Whether it is persecuted or flourishing, that it be a place where sinners become saints. Bishop McKnight, whatever influence you have, tell Pope Francis it doesn't matter what kind of Catholic you are, it's about Jesus Christ and his church. The price of failure is too great. If I lose faith in that, then I am done with the Church. Already gone through so many struggles of my own, working through my understanding of the hierarchy. I have two sons and a daughter – both of my sons have talked about the priesthood. If either of them are called to the priesthood, I just pray for the ability to support them.

I want my children to find Jesus in the church. Whoever scandalized one of my little ones, better for them to be drowned. Followed the story from the Boston Globe – Bernard Law. Spotlight. All about the reputation – not about Jesus. I am mad as hell. The priest was another Christ. If you married in the early 70s, you could go to hell for just about anything. Many of us were married by pedophile priests – told birth control, go to hell. Here I am confessing to a pedophile. I can go to hell, but he can hear my confession.

As a young adult, all I know is the church in the shadow of 2002. And yet, everything I heard this summer wasn't surprising. It was heartbreaking and terrifying, but it wasn't surprising. The truth never hurts anything. If someone is hurt or a crime is committed, the truth is not going to cause more pain. What causes more pain is the hiding and the lying. I want my children to have a church they can be proud of. My best friend is Jewish, she is in RCIA. Almost everyone tells her why they hate the Church. We have generations who have been raised in the Church, and they hate it. I want my children to be proud of their church. But when this kind of stuff is in the news every day, it's hard to say I'm Catholic. I don't want that for anyone.

What if the Vatican turns into a five-star hotel? Don't think God isn't capable of doing this! I think all bishops should offer to resign. I am 57 – I think anyone my age or older is culpable. We've been hearing these rumors for decades. When people in the hierarchy says we've had this problem solved, or we just found out in 2002: That is gross negligence, or sheer ignorance. They should go, standard of incompetency. The only reason to keep them is if you don't have anyone to replace them. What I do want to happen is lay boards. Any organization, including this parish, with expenditures over one million, should have a majority lay board. I have been an ED of a nonprofit below a million, I had to listen to a

board. I think it's fine to have papal authority, I have loved all my pastors. They should have a board to report them. That board should advise the pastor. You would not have had this if you have had boards. The diocese where I grew up has a school that is totally dysfunctional. I haven't been to a church that's a shadow of its former self. I am so grateful for our priests, we don't have enough of them. And guess what this is one reason why.

Whatever happens, we are going to inherit this church. A lot of us aren't educated enough to be able to talk about this. In my fraternity, only five are willing to talk about being Catholic. To build that trust, we need campus ministry to go out and talk to people. We should have these kinds of conversations with those under age 18. My grandmother is giving my little brother poor education about the Church. When he leaves high school and has these difficult conversations, he'll be ready, because I am preparing him. I've seen dozens and dozens fall away from the church. It's such a touchy topic for youth.

For the next generation – look at the demographics in this room. Very skewed. Reiterate transparency and dialogue – this is us, the laity speaking. The Church isn't responsible for policing itself. That's a criminal matter.

GENERAL COMMENTS

I think we should look at all five questions in a transparent manner of why we are where we are today and why that wasn't addressed initially 15 years ago, and how we are trying to get it right this time, because we were assured that it was being taken care of. Now it's come back to life again, distancing many Catholics of my generation and younger, and we're seeing so many folks fall away from the Church and this is another huge drawback for some of the young people. So I think this has to be all encompassing. We've got to make sure that we get it right time. These five questions should have been addressed 15 years ago. It needs to be a transparent process. How did we address it then, and how are we going to address it better this time.

It means a lot that everyone came out tonight. I am really uncomfortable with you lined up this way. Even when we say positive things, or when we are angry. The church should not be you there, and us here. The responsibility for God's church does not only lie with these people up here (the priests). We bear responsibility too. We have a culture that unfortunately makes us think we don't have authority, but we buy into it because it is easy. It is uncomfortable to break the silence. I think Satan has a toehold in this church, since we have you priests lined up. We are all culpable. I really think it is a time now – for lay people to have authority, responsibility, working side by side with our brother priests. Women can exercise leadership. It can be a different kind of leadership. Our feminine traits shouldn't get in the way leading. I would rather have you right here, surrounded by us.

What I want to see more than anything is, if I as a layperson were accused of these kinds of things, I would have to go to court. If found guilty, I would go to jail. I would pay the price for what I had done. And I think that we need to know that's going to happen to these people. Regardless of what their status in the Church was. I feel that if you're guilty, you have to pay the price for that.

I completely agree that they should be held completely accountable. But I think we as Catholics, as Christians, have one big plus: we have God on our side, and can we rehabilitate these bishops, priests and laity with the abuse? Can we do it? Can we as people of God, can we do what man says cannot be done? I think we can. I have been in prison ministry for nine years and I've also worked at the seminary the years before it closed. And I believe these are really good people being attacked by the devil and they come under his spell. I really believe that we as Christians are being challenged: Can we rehabilitate this whole issue? I think we can. I've seen God do miracles before and I'm sure you all have, too. So I believe the Lord can rehabilitate this whole thing.

One set of victims are the accused priests who are innocent. And I feel as badly for them as I do for the other victims. The other set of victims are those who had their lives just torn apart. Just like they do in 12-step programs, somehow these priests need to make amends. I know some of them are deceased and that's not possible. But somehow, these priests who have been found guilty of these crimes should make amends to their victims. I've been involved in prison ministry for 20-some years and I've seen many, many victims. And the hardest thing for them is the fact that no one has given them confirmation that they did something to them and it ruined their lives because of it. So I think these victims just need to know that someone wrong was done to them. They need confirmation of that. A letter or spoken word or something.

Everybody has had very good input about these things issues that in whatever way need to be addressed. Moving forward, and this is a confirmation of our strength in our Catholic faith, we're going to be tested. I remember a person coming up to the front of the altar and staying, "Many times throughout my life, I've been challenged as a Catholic. There have been times that as a priest, maybe I would give up being a priest. But I won't ever do it because God has never given up on me." We're going to face opposition. We've always faced opposition before this for being Catholic because of our beliefs that people don't understand.

I've got two teen-age boys. Ages 13 and 15. One just got his driver's permit. So watch out. I've been a member of my parish forever and my oldest one is at the public school because we have no other option. It's really tough out there to raise kids and to keep the faith. And it's not popular to send your kids to a Catholic school. It's not a Catholic town. Most kids go to the public school and in fact, Monsignor will tell you, most Catholic kids are in the public school. I think we have a wonderful school here. I'm behind it 110 percent. My son is making straight A's over at the public school. But they have tons of things pulling them in a million different directions. K-Life, which is the Evangelical (Youth?) House for Protestants that they can go to once a week and be fed spiritually and play games and do all

kinds of things. And when this abuse happens, it doesn't help. Because it's hard enough. You know, it's not trendy, it's not fun to say to my kids time after time after time, "Yes, but you don't get the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist at any other Church." And it just infuriates me that this is happening to my Church! To MY faith! Because it's wrong and it seems like 10 years ago we had this problem and we thought it was all being taken care of. And to me, what happened was they told US to get into "Protecting God's Children." I'm not the one who did anything! And what did they do for the people who were actually doing abuse? I didn't see too many things happen to them. And I don't know what can happen to them. I don't know enough about it to say can they be taken from the church? Can they be put in jail? I don't know. But it's very frustrating. It's hard enough raising our kids. And I just hope that this time, something is done about it so that real justice can be done and I can go to my kids and say, "Yeah, you know what? this all happened. But this is what was done to correct it." Because I want my kids to stay in the Catholic Church. You can ask any of my friends. I am on a rampage. I am on the soapbox. I want my kids to stay Catholic because I know that's the way to go.

I was principal and teacher here for a long time. And I watched lots and lots of things happen. We had a code of conduct that we all signed. It was for the pastors to sign, the teachers to sign, for the principals to sign, for all the volunteers to sign. We even had to sign that we signed! That is what we had to do. Now, if somebody had a predilection to abuse, that piece of paper wouldn't make any difference. We all went to Protecting God's Children. We took days off school. We carpoled, we did everything before we even got Protecting God's Children here in our parish. Many of you traveled distances you could take Protecting God's Children. We'd take things on the computer every month. And they were kind of jokes. It was, "How many can you get done in X number of hours?" And it was lower insurance for the diocese, I appreciate that, but it still did not hit the mark. It still did not take away the power of the clergy who were willing to do this kind of abuse. I would like to see mandatory reporting. We see lots of things happen, and it's like, "Weeeelll, I know we could call, but maybe I shouldn't." But people need to be empowered so that if they see something wrong or even think something is wrong, they need to call. And on the other side, our priests need to be protected, too. But we need to have a discrete investigation. Not just, "Father, I hear something went on. Can you explain?"

And my final comment is, and this is hard to say, I think we need to have a better discernment process in the seminaries on who we are ordaining. I would like to see us really do a little more psychological profile on people that we are ordaining, and if there is some problem, then all the dioceses need to know. You can't move secretly from one diocese to another.

I have two boys. It is very difficult to teach them right from wrong when people in authority and in positions that we revere are not doing the same, when people are doing the wrong thing. That's unfortunate and it makes it very difficult to guide our children in the ways that we should be guiding them.

In fact, if you can give me some kind an elevator speech — a sentence, two sentences — that I can say to my non-Catholic friends when they look at me and say, ‘How can your church HIDE this disgusting abuse that’s happening?’ — give me something to say, and I’ll say it. I’m happy to say it, but I don’t know what to say.

I’m a licensed therapist. I’ve been in court over 50 times over this. Now, I don’t want this to sound like I’m defending this behavior. But in the work God gave me, I’m a healer, not a judge. I want to offer another perspective here. I work with ministers of other churches who abuse their own children. It’s not just here. God is healing His Church. He is ripping the mask off of old, covered-up wounds and healing His Church. Yes, it’s hard. It’s humiliating. And I think you’re experiencing a lot of grief here. We haven’t really had a chance to say much of anything except talking among ourselves. And your transparency, I believe, is kind of a beginning. A real beginning. But not enough. Good beginning. I look at these people I’ve worked with and I say, ‘How do you sort this out, this innocence, that no one can violate the innocence?’ Priests and ministers — not all of them but a lot of them — who abuse have been abused at early ages. And it should be easy to say, ‘We won’t do that.’ But it gets all mixed up in their psyche. I’d like to see us figure out a way not to have victims. And maybe save a few priests from themselves, who are not all bad either, who are really sick and messed up. But let’s figure out the heck what’s going on and try to figure out how to have no more victims.

I grew up in a Protestant church and I’m not going back.

I do want to make the key point that you have a great opportunity and also a great responsibility, because you seem to be one of the people who ‘get it,’ judging by the statements that have appeared in the diocese’s newspaper. I would say what you need to take to the bishops is to help them realize, Hey, this is about YOU. At this point, this particular scandal is primarily about YOU. No matter how innocent you may feel. No matter how guiltless you may be. If you do not come out for mandated reporting, you will have no credibility. I think your situation is such that what we’re trying to do in this diocese is very positive, but if it’s not adopted by all the bishops, then it’s sort of drowned in a situation that people only see going on. So I think the Conference of Catholic Bishops need to say, “Hey, we realize that WE’RE the ones at fault here. We need to have a standard of mandated reporting.” The bishops really need to get the fact that they are ethically challenged. The CEO takes responsibility for what happens on his watch. And that has to be standard because that is the standard of our society. And if the bishops don’t get that, then their standard is lower, and that is a problem. And I do think you get that. My message to you is you really need to get this across. I’m sure you have had some training and background that some of your fellow bishops have not had.

I don’t think it’s just a bishop issue. It’s not just a priest issue. It’s not just a Church issue. It’s an individual person’s issue, how you deal with sexuality. And if we all don’t somehow accept some piece of all of this, and do that in context, I don’t think we will ever have the healing that we need. I think that we as a laity of this Church has to support our Church and acknowledge that yes, we all struggle with

this issue. None of us are free of any sin in that issue. That we all are asked to respect each other on the level that is very, very imitate and very important. You know, for us to sit in judgment in standards are different from what current law allows, going back and trying to have people who have absolutely no recollection of what they're being accused of, that just don't seem to make sense.

I will say that one of my best friends from college went into the seminary. And while he was in the seminary, he would tell me about his experiences. And he also told me about Archbishop McCarrick. I spoke with him a few weeks ago; I expected him to really cast fierce judgment now that all of these things have become known. And he said, "It is so sad that a man that was so prayerful, had an amazing vision, but still suffered with weakness."

I want you to tell the bishops you're visiting with: We need bishops who are courageous, who are not afraid to speak the truth with love, who are not afraid to let the light into the darkness. I think there's an awful lot to learn from the laity's experiences. And I think that women in particular have not always been included in the conversation. I agree with some others that some of us are from an era that we wouldn't dare to tell a bishop what was really in our heart, because it wouldn't be received very well. I pray for bishops to not be afraid to stand up for what is right and true and good and holy and beautiful about our faith. And that they with love challenge their brothers.

I'm deeply concerned about the priests who are accused falsely of allegations of sexual abuse. And the affect that it must have on their lives. Obviously, they must be turned upside down.

It just totally floors me to think that a priest — now I know that they're human — but that a priest could do that. Because they are holding people's lives and their faith in their hands! They can destroy that faith! And by the same token I would say bishops are more culpable if they let priests get away with it or ship them someplace else where they can do the same thing. I don't understand what the thinking is there. How anyone can justify that. I don't understand it. There is no place in Christ's Church for that kind of behavior. This isn't just OUR Church. This is CHRIST'S Church. Okay?

All the great men willing to hear the outrage. It has taken too long, taken investigative reporters and civil lawyers to finally come clean. My outrage has turned into sad and deep regret. My own family has been visited by a perpetrator. I don't mean to cast dispersion on any of you. There must be complete transparency and openness. We need to know who the ones who have dropped off the radar. We need to know the amount of money the Diocese has spent. Nondisclosure agreements need to be annulled. Victims find solidarity with other victims. Mandatory reporting for all church personnel to report to civil authorities. Update on status of priests — bishops elsewhere don't know that. Medical boards have public lists — can go to a national registry.

It breaks my heart this has happened. All we can ask is how and why. Please pray for the good priests of our diocese. We just ask you to do something for us – heal us.

I am 78 years old, I grew up in a church where we put priests on a pedestal. In the good old days, the priests were separated. I think it's a shame the priests are sitting up there. It doesn't bring the church we want. First thing the bishops can do is telling the truth. So sick and tired of hearing well we got bad advice from the therapists, or we didn't know. We should not just the past with the present. This is not about mistakes, this is about crimes. The bishops say, well it was just a mistake. It's not a mistake. Bishops who are abusers, bishops who are enablers. If I enable a crime, I am an accomplice to a crime. I didn't think bishops should resign, he should be removed. And the reason for his removal should be public. We are not going to get back to a church we can trust. Bishop of Buffalo says he didn't desert his flock. He deserted his flock when he didn't report abuse. He is doing the very same thing that leaves people feeling disgusted. How do we feel? There should be zero tolerance for bishops – worldwide. There are countries where it is not mandatory to report – it should be worldwide. There should be a worldwide commission – to deal with abusers and enablers. Until we have zero tolerance, the apologies are long gone. I have great respect for the Holy Father, but he has got to do something. This is not a cultural thing. Sexual abuse is wrong.

The questions miss the target. I have never considered this to be your problem to solve. The hierarchy of the church has abdicated their authority. I still don't understand why we aren't discussing the things of the future, not the things of the past. Something must be done, has to be done, by leadership regarding training of new priests. The people who have been perpetrating these crimes are not normal people, but they have been ordained. How did that happen? I don't believe any of these people decided on one Saturday night to do one of these crimes. Why aren't we discussing the future, not the past? What is the leadership going to do to solve this problem at its inception, not at its point of being reported? How are we going to ensure that men entering into holy orders are not pre-disposed to this problem? If we don't do that, the abdication of authority is just going to get wider and wider and wider. My son isn't sending his children to Catholic school or RE. He says there are a bunch of bad people in the leadership of the Church. It is going to take generations for this to work its way through. If the leadership isn't going to start sharing that responsibility with good people in the pews,

Christ structured his church in a family setting. I don't know what I would do if my brother abused my children. Mercy is not to hide it, but to get treatment for people. You are the fathers – think about the children you have.

I'm grandfather, three of them grew up in a community here in Central Missouri. About two years ago, a statement was read from the altar that a priest who had served them was being investigated for abuse. The priest stepped down, my grandson says he sees him occasionally at the post office and the diner. Not the same kind of attention/affection he had when he served at Mass. It seems to me something is wrong. An often lot of speculation, rumors, still going on. What's the story? What happened? This, I

believe, is hurting the church, the community. We need transparency, absolute transparency: how many other priests are living in single trailers who have been asked to step down? What's it costing the diocese? What body of people judge these things? What are their skills when they judge these things? I ask this: Pope Francis has the answers himself, although he too is dealing with a lot of problems. Bishop, go out into the desert and seek the lost. It's not sufficient to put on programs before Christmas and Easter. They need priests to get out there and wash their feet. The Holy Spirit is with us, the Holy Spirit has given you this job, and I pray for you every day for the rest of my life. Go out and wash their feet, feed the hungry. We need you on your knees, bishop.

Two items I am going to be watching for: acknowledging the victim, justice demands they be compensated, whether that is counseling, and you be transparent about that.

In my heart of hearts, I know if there were a grandma in the hierarchy, it would have all been very different. We need the perspective of married men and women in leadership position. It will cause changes and new problems. But just having celibate males is not the best way to lead the church. People can get used to that. I have an aunt, very, very conservative, found her way after Vatican II to a very conservative in San Antonio. Her pastor was a former Episcopalian priest, who was married, even had a daughter who had a child out of wedlock. People can change. We need to move in a direction that is just, that Jesus would want us to do.

If you are going to fix a problem, you have to identify it. The problem is homosexual activity. Pope is saying it, but he's not holding the church to that standard. If you want good, faithful priests, the bishops have to identify the problem, and we are going to rid the church of this evil.

I don't think our Pope is as involved as he should be. We should for sure hear more from our pope. There is a national sex offender registry in our nation. The offending priests and the bishops who move them should be part of a national registry. Our laity should be involved in every aspect, including the appointment of bishops. The laity make up the church, we should be involved in the hierarchy, where they are appointed. The VIRTUS training for adults is a joke. I went through it five years ago, we shouldn't have to worry about looking for the signs of what a predatory priest or bishop is – all of these things are mostly in the past. I think you have done a good job of being transparent. I don't think our former bishop did a very good job of it.

(Speaker introduced himself as being listed on the sex offender registry): I have nothing but sadness for the stories I have heard. I can only apologize for the harm. I have also lost friends from suicide. Whoever is in this situation, they will be put on a registry if they are convicted. Their lives will be changed, just as they have changed other people's lives. Hiding people is not excusable. I've seen it outside the church. It's got to be stopped. If I had the answer, I would be doing it now. Restorative justice: we need to look at the victims and the perpetrators. They don't want us to use certain key words. Evil, monsters. We

aren't –we are just people who made bad decisions. And we will pay for that for the rest of our lives. You probably know some, and probably don't know who they are until you pull them up on the Internet. Let's not be too harsh right off the bat. I don't know if clergy can function if they are convicted – those are hard decisions. Restorative justice is important. Recidivism is so high because people feel so isolated. In my heart I wonder if I am ever going to be a full member of my parish again. Keep that in mind as we are working through this problem. It's going to take a long time.

Commend you bishop, what you've already done. Hiring FBI agents, find out who is in the seminaries, who is studying. That is really important. Additionally, I talk to a lot of people around the country. I haven't heard any other bishops doing what you are doing. Get information out to parishes. We get lots of questions – what is going on. We need information, we need answers. As much information as you can – defending what has happened. So we can put this behind us and go forward.

I too, am a mandated reporter. It infuriates me that for so long my church swept it under the rug. You feel really helpless when you try to address a problem and you hit a brick wall, with the clergy, whom you were raised to trust. Our church is hurting, the trust is gone. It is very discouraging. Many of us feel we have nobody to go to when there is a problem It breaks my heart. Thank you for listening.

Last month's hearings in DC – innocence until proven guilty. It is often true, but sometimes it is not true. I think we will emerge from this a stronger, holier, purer church, but we are going to have to walk through some fire.

I think we are going about this the wrong way. If someone thinks they are abused, they should call DHS or the state hotline. If we let accusations run their course, we'll find out if it is abuse. Establishment of a 800 hotline isn't going to help. If you have a charge against the bishop, you should call the state.

I thank all these brave men and women who came to share tonight. Still writhing in pain from a church they love, but could not stand to be present tonight. For many the healing process has just begun. If we do not transform our pain, we most assuredly transmit it. If we do not embrace the pain here tonight, we will not move on. Our collective responsibility for one another's pain – hold it, admit it, release it. We can be transformed by other's pain. Our wholeness is found in brokenness. Any time we exert power over some, our false self is at work. Any time we submit to power from someone, our false self is at work. We are called to servant leadership. Jesus never called us to worship him, but he said to follow him. Choose to be in relationship rather than to be right. The question remains: which do we prefer, the little island of our own certainty, or the ocean of incomprehensibility which is God?

Pedophilia hit my family directly – three of my brothers were abused, one killed himself. It's a grave sin. Whether it's an aunt or uncle, priest, bishop or cardinal. Look at the victim first. Take care of the victim

first. My brother tried to kill himself three times. It's a grave sin. Be merciful, pray for mercy for the sinner, that's what we all need to do. At the end of the day, hell is forever. We are all saved by Jesus Christ, if we choose to be saved. Have to pray for the sinner and for the victim. We need to treat the victims, we need to treat the sinners. I can't tell you if they should be ex-communicated, laicized, etc. That's for the pope and others to decide. But we as members of this Catholic community have to pray for one another. We have to be merciful to one another. You guys have a hard job. Still hits me today. But hell is forever. Be merciful.

(Speaker was a staff member of a parish with an abusive priest who was convicted): My family went through hell. Our parish was divided and destroyed. I still have a hard time getting my husband come to church. Bishop begged me to stand by him, said the pastor was innocent. We had a lot of parishioners who hated us for that. The day the trial started, the priest came to me and said he was pleading no contest. At the end of the trial, all the diocesan priests were there, they ran out instead of standing by him. They left us alone with the reporters. It was horrible. Everyone who stood by me, went against me, To make it worse, the archbishop came in and fired everyone us. We had no church, we had nothing. I thank God we moved here – there are entire parishes of victims. They never ever stop living the pain.

Little bit concerned when you said you weren't worried about the church, but concerned for the salvation of souls. I thought of my wife. When all this hit in 2002, she found a church, a eucharistic church with a woman pastor, so inclusive, so welcoming. I thought, dang, I wish the Catholic Church would be a little bit more like that.

I have a son, would go to camp when he was a child. Every time he went to camp, I would give him the talk. But abuse did happen. At non-denominational camp, a letter went to every parent, we knew what happened, I was invited to attend events. Boy Scouts – sheriff came to our meeting, he interviewed all our children, if we were willing. We were kept informed. Catholic camp – came out years later. The person who had done it, was moved around. I am grateful for all of you – your calling is a gift to you, and your acceptance of that calling is a gift to us. Transparency, immediacy, we cannot keep covering things up. We cannot protect the Church, we have to protect the children who are victimized.

I love all of you. In the last 20 years, priests have distanced themselves from us. I have also noticed a loss of focus on prayer. Why don't we know the power of prayer

I am very grateful you are here. But I also have a lot of grief and anger in what has happened in our own parish. How two friends of mine were treated after they came forward to a previous bishop. They were dismissed, they were blacklisted from ministry in the Diocese. These women were smeared. One left the church, her four children were raised outside the church, her grandchildren are being raised outside the church. My anger is about the cover up. I think if women were involved there would be more

accountability. I think women will protect their sons, their children. I think women make men accountability. I would ask that women would be more in leadership in our parish, in our diocese.

I almost feel unworthy to come forward, I am in RCIA. I am speaking from the outside. I found it difficult coming into the church. I did not know what was happening. I didn't trust secular news. Very important that you give information to the laity, so people can speak with confidence to those outside the church. Very difficult to keep up with what is happening. Trying to be sympathetic. A lot of people are using this to attack the church in ways that I think are wrong. I am very appreciative of the stance the church has often taken when it is being accused. Although there a lot of bad bishops and priests, I have seen so many priests who have laid down their lives for the church: Taking it seriously, loving the people around us, even though it is hard. Facing so much anger toward you, you taking that with humility and love means a lot.

I would need more than two hands to list all the priests and deacons who came through this parish. One of the things I am most concerned about is the mental health of our priests. Historically, none of us want to see our parish close, why should we share our priest with a neighboring parish? We need to recognize the bishop's tough job of spreading clergy. We aren't going to have priests available as we once did.

Been here in this parish 35-36 years. I have friends in this parish who are outraged that priests propositioned these children. They did not care about these children. Some of these things that are being talked about would put you in hell. We are not respecting the laws of our God. Where's your credibility to your children and to those people who you live with? It's very, very hard. We played football and ate together after Mass. That's what we were about, community, being love. Then they came, the ones who wanted to touch our children. There are many who are destroyed by what has happened in our church.