

Most Rev. William Lori
Archdiocese of Baltimore
320 Cathedral Street
Baltimore, MD 21201

Your Excellency:

Many parishes in our diocese as well as throughout the country have attempted to serve our needs in addressing concerns over the recent scandals of our Church. As the Holy Father prepares to gather Bishops from around the world to address the challenges of these days, we offer this report of our local efforts as well as results from our consolations.

Our staff and parish leaders met on Friday, 17 August, to discuss and prepare pulpit announcements and prayers of the faithful to be read at all masses. A follow-up meeting occurred the next week and a mass mailing was sent to the congregation. The last weekend of August, index cards were printed and distributed at masses inviting all to a "town hall" meeting. We also conducted an octave of day and evening opportunities for Eucharistic Adoration. The pastor and/or parish leadership attended town hall meetings at St. Ignatius (Baltimore), St. Lawrence (Hanover), and Resurrection (Ellicott City). On Sunday, 09 September, you addressed our congregation on this topic during the mass in which you presided as part of the WLIFC dedication ceremony. On Wednesday, 26 September, mass mailing provided follow up to crisis action.

We held meetings to develop a task group on Thursday, 30 August, with 70 in attendance and October 4, attended by 38.

Thursday, 08 November, 30 people attended a Listening Session. A 15 November Listening Session was postponed due to inclement weather. The make-up session was held Thursday, 29 November, with twelve gathered. In February, anticipating the Vatican gathering of Bishops to address these issues, we offered a moment of silence in our Masses for prayer for sexual abuse victims as well as for our Church. Finally, we have sent this letter to you

The SJERC website provided a continually updated page <http://www.stjohnscolumbiamd.org/our-parish-response/> dedicated to homilies, pastoral statements, additional resources and a prayer for healing. Flocknote has been used to communicate updates to this site.

We listened. What we heard was outrage, devastation, and sadness expressed about the following issues. Action plans were suggested. Below, you will find a representation of our discussion during the listening session:

- 1) It is now clear that not enough was done when this crisis first came to light in 2002. Crimes need to be punished. Civil law must be followed; i.e. abuse reported to the law first. Church hierarchy policing themselves was not effective. Parishioners want trust to be rebuilt and are calling for a neutral third party consisting of laity to conduct full civil investigations.
- 2) Are our voices being heard? The high hopes we had for the meeting of US Bishops in Baltimore (mid-November) left us feeling disappointed. We don't want the February meeting in Rome to end similarly and would like to make an impactful statement there.
- 3) Parishioners expressed feeling like weak, dumb sheep in need of a more helpful shepherd. It was mentioned that some priests, such as our own, have been attentive. Nonetheless, we encouraged greater collaboration with other pastors and representatives of other churches. How do other organizations prevent illicit behavior? We need to implement what has proven to be effective.
- 4) While we have been assured recently that this is not the case, we want to be clear that we desire that our charitable contributions intended to the less fortunate go directly to these causes. We must be assured

the poor box is not being used to finance legal fees, insurance premiums, payouts, or lobbyist influence over the statute of limitations. Many expressed concern that parish donations are going to pay lawsuits.

- 5) Innocent Clergy/Hierarchy are caught up in the scandal. It's time to clean house and let us rebuild our church with the help of trusted priests, bishops and Pope.
- 6) From now on, church leaders need to be completely transparent. Betrayal by some of the church's leadership has exposed them as not only sinful but suggests that we are hypocritical. Engaging in cover-up is not an example of Christian discipleship.
- 7) At the listening sessions many suggested that priests should be allowed to marry, that women should be ordained and priests and deacons, and married deacons should be elevated. There are also many resigned priests who would like to serve.
- 8) The exclusion of women in positions of leadership exacerbates the issue, and many don't have an explanation of why it's still an "Old Boys' Club". Women need to be part of the educational training of priests.
- 9) The future is dying. There is fear that after the older faithful have departed, there will not be younger generations found in our pews. What are we doing to assure them that the church of the future will never again face this type of crisis?
- 10) The crisis has resulted in the loss of jobs, services, and faith. Several people who came to the meetings remain committed to affecting change. It is suggested that we all stay united and pray.

Archbishop Lori, recently the Holy Father sent a letter to you and all the US bishops gathered at Mundelein for a retreat. He addressed the issue of credibility, which we all seek to rebuild and reclaim within our Church.

Credibility is born of trust, and trust is born of sincere, daily, humble and generous service to all, but especially to those dearest to the Lord's heart (cf. Matthew 25: 31 – 46). It will be a service offered not out of concern with marketing or strategizing to reclaim lost prestige or to see accolades, but rather – as I insisted in the recent Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* – because it belongs to “the beating heart of the Gospel.” – Pope Francis

We commit ourselves, Archbishop, to service to “the least of these” – the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the vulnerable and those captive to the ills of the world. Our Lord made it very clear that holiness cannot be understood or lived apart from these demands, for “the beating heart of the Gospel” is mercy and love. Without communicating these values of our Savior, our message of hope in the Lord can only be heard by others as “a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal.” (1 Corinthians 13: 1)

Sincerely in the Lord,

Rev. Gerard J. Bowen

Pastor

(on behalf of the St. John the Evangelist faith community)