



CCOC

Catholics for Change in Our Church

Working Together Toward Our Future Church:

CCOC Statement on the First
Anniversary of the Release of the
Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report on
Child Sexual Abuse in the Catholic
Church



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As the first anniversary approached of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report on Child Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church (PA Report) being released by Josh Shapiro, Pennsylvania Attorney General, on August 14, 2018, Catholics for Change in Our Church (CCOC) decided to issue a Public Statement with commentary on how we arrived at this crisis point in our Church, where our Church in Pittsburgh has been over the last year, where it is now, and then offer prescriptions for positive changes in our Church going forward.

About CCOC

Catholics for Change in Our Church (CCOC) is an independent, grass-roots organization created and led by lay persons in response to not only what was revealed in the PA Report but also to the deep-seated, systemic problems plaguing the Church and aggravated by the realignment of parishes in Pittsburgh. The 1000+ members of CCOC are confident the Holy Spirit is working in and through our organization to help us discern and then seek to implement positive changes needed in our Church right now.

CCOC's mission statement is:

We are committed Catholics who care about their Church and recognize the need to empower laity to assume their rightful role through baptism as a priestly people within our Church. We, the People of God in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, call upon our Church clergy and hierarchy to work with us to collaboratively move our Church forward and to provide a template of change. We seek to work with anyone or any group seeking the same. We are focused on helping the survivors and their families of sex abuse seek justice. We also believe the only way our Church can be sustained is if lay and ordained Catholics share a co-responsibility for the leadership and culture within our Church. These must be rooted in the gospel values of justice and mercy modeled after the Beatitudes, along with having the qualities of transparency, accountability, and competency.

CCOC is organized around seven (7) **Focus Groups**. These are: 1) Supporting Abuse Victims/Survivors and Their Families; 2) Financial Transparency; 3) Addressing Clericalism; 4) Strengthening and Diversifying the Clergy; 5) Pathways to Lay Leadership; 6) Engaging and Empowering Youth; and 7) Lay Oversight of Diocesan Functions.





Why the Grand Jury Report Set Off a Volcanic Eruption: A History Often Ignored

The shock felt by most lay people in Pittsburgh upon the release of the **PA Grand Jury Report** was stronger in part because the revelations of child sexual abuse in Boston in 2002 were not adequately understood or appreciated by Catholics in Pittsburgh at that time or in the years to come. We believe this was also true of most, if not all, Catholics across the United States and beyond. With the release of the PA Grand Jury Report, Catholics in Pittsburgh finally realized that we had compartmentalized what happened in Boston without giving it its proper due as a harbinger of things elsewhere by being the proverbial “tip of the iceberg.” Catholics outside of Boston somehow collectively and individually concluded that what happened in Boston was unique. Maybe it had to do with the perception that the power structures in the Catholic Church and politics in Boston were so intertwined, and thinking that this was a unique arrangement that made the sexual abuse of children there possible. In retrospect, it is now clear that after Boston neither Church hierarchy nor laity looked in the mirror long enough to answer correctly the question, “Why and how did this happen?”

This collective ignorance enabled the culture of clericalism and secrecy within our Church hierarchy to protect the institution above the abuse victims. The narrative that emerged after Boston was not only that somehow Boston was unique, but that abusive priests there were somehow “bad apples” in different and unfortunate circumstances. This narrative allowed the U.S. bishops to placate the laity by implementing some protections against Church sexual abuse in 2004-2005, convincing most, if not all, laity the Catholic Church system and culture was not at fault and that adequate safeguards had been put in place to handle, or even prevent, future abuse. Put another way, even with the revelations that came forth in 2002 and which received so much attention within the acclaimed film, *Spotlight*, in 2015, including the litany of dioceses around the world shown at the movie’s end, most Catholics in Pittsburgh allowed themselves to think that the situation in our diocese was somehow different.

Spirited Away: The Typical (and Unfortunate) Example of the Servants of the Paraclete

One contributing factor to the reality of sexual abuse not being known was that offending priests were sent away and hidden from view. The PA Grand Jury Report notes that priests were often sent to various treatment centers across the country to address their psycho-sexual issues. These included St Luke Institute (MD), St. John Vianney Center (PA), and the **Servants of the Paraclete (NM)**. Taking Servants of the Paraclete as an example illustrates the lack of efficacy of these programs in rehabilitating these priests. Between its founding in 1947 and the mid-1960s, the treatment plan at Paraclete was not based on modern psychology or psychiatry or even the Alcoholic Anonymous (AA) model, but rather was a





spiritual program. This changed in the mid-'60s with the hiring of a resident psychologist and implementation of AA and other psychiatric programs, and Paraclete grew to 20 facilities in the U.S. and parts of Europe. In 1989 there was a document destruction policy at the Paraclete facilities that included destroying status reports sent to the bishops as well as treatment records for guest-priests. Over 40 lawsuits were filed against Paraclete through the 1990s as priests who once attended were being returned to ministry and were sexually abusing minors again. Due to these lawsuits, Paraclete halted its psycho-sexual treatment programs for priests in 1995.

Vatican II: A New Vibrancy in Our Church

While Church leaders were grappling with how to address this sexual abuse event, Vatican II was announced and implemented during the 1960s. While there was much excitement and a sense of new energy among many lay Catholics – exemplified by such ideas as Mass now in English; Church is the People of God, each Catholic is called to holiness and missionary engagement; and openness to dialogue with other faith traditions - there was also an appreciation and understanding that there were those who were not ready for all of the changes. Many struggled with the loss of the Latin mass and moving away from traditions which had been a stalwart of their faith.

The laity who welcomed the changes were inspired and called into service based upon Vatican II principles. *We Are the Church* was a common slogan: by this was meant the laity, a core constituent of this Body of Christ, were responsible to help shape, add life to, and protect the integrity of the Church. Many in the U.S. felt this was also a call to act within society. Beyond protesting the Vietnam War, the cultural phenomena of the Civil Rights Movement, the Women's Movement (ERA), Workers' Rights, and other events aligned with the Vatican II vision of a personal call to holiness and engagement.

Vatican II also provided, via the document *Christus Dominus*, the **spirit** of collegiality and collaboration within the Church. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops and other ecclesiastical bodies were created from this vision, promoting mechanisms for Bishops to more freely exchange ideas and establish new fellowships. New expressions of activism and engagement by Religious Orders flourished, as sisters, brothers, and order priests marched with the diocesan clergy and hierarchy along with the laity in protesting much of the cultural sins of the 1960s and '70s. The *Nuns on the Bus* group, led by Sister Simone Campbell, SSS, is still advocating for peace and justice causes today.

Many have benefited from and appreciate these conferences and the resurgence of activism as lay Catholics have been communicating with religious sisters, brothers, priests and bishops for the past 50 years directly and through the various conferences on many Catholic matters, especially representing lay voices in matters of peace and justice.



So, the laity, religious, clergy and hierarchy are each empowered to be responsible and life-affirming Catholics – and the Holy Spirit through Vatican II reinforces these calls.

A Painful Disconnect

Despite the progress resulting from Vatican II, there is still a disconnect, an inequity in the relationship structure between laity and clergy. We call this schism Clericalism. Clericalism has many definitions. But within CCOC we believe they all share a common thread which describes the concept that priests and bishops can be seen by themselves as well as the laity as being superior to and exempt from accountability to others.

A negative consequence of clericalism is the laity have been taught and groomed to defer to the clergy. One small example among many will suffice to make the point: We laity who attended Catholic elementary school all stood up from our chairs when Father walked into the classroom. This deference to and authority from the clergy has created a fractured relationship between the laity and clergy. Some examples include: the sense among many laity that homilies at Mass are often scolding us (or our brothers and sisters who are not attending); many clergy not recognizing the laity's gifts and skills; laity often feeling intimidated by the presence of a clergy member; many clergy choosing not to invite laity to participate in Church affairs; and the laity not being comfortable taking the initiative to volunteer to address needs they see in their parishes.

The laity, in turn, have become complicit in this unequal relationship. We have kept clergy on the pedestal; we tend to get angry about what priests do instead of attempting to empathize by “walking in the shoes of clergy”; we do not ask our pastors what they need or how we can help them.

This disconnect does not diminish the many and fulfilling personal relationships and friendships that we as laity have with religious and the clergy. These friendships provide mutual grace, love and affirmation and are cherished gifts in our lives. The disconnect instead occurs when laity and the clergy view each other not as collaborators and co-creators, but rather as entities who are confrontational, wrestling for control, and not able to trust each other. In healthy lay-clergy relationships, we would view each other as individuals who are called by our Creator to engage in the world lovingly and use the talents and gifts that have been graciously given to each.

To move forward, laity and clergy need to be aware of the current dynamics and move towards a model where they recognize each other as co-contributors and active members in the Body of Christ.





Where We Have Been in the Last Year

Reaction to the Release of the PA Report

The release of the PA Report “helped the scales fall from our eyes” (Acts 9:18) and revealed that sexual abuse happened in every diocese of Pennsylvania (Note: The dioceses of Philadelphia and Johnstown-Altoona had their own abuse reports released previous to the August 14, 2018 Report which covered all other dioceses in the state.) Where laity had been blind, they now saw. And the laity were shocked, appalled, and angered. There was no instant or cohesive group reaction. Rather, individual responses were based on each believer’s unique experiences and faith journey within their Church.

However, through listening sessions organized by laity as well as those held in parishes and the sessions with Bishop Zubik, certain shared themes emerged. People expressed outrage at how innocent children had been taken advantage of by predator priests whose behavior was either kept secret or excused by our Church hierarchy. The most damning statements came from abuse victims and their families. They asked why members of our Church hierarchy would choose to protect the institution and the perpetrators over our children.

Laity

The Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report on August 14, 2018, made our Church in Pittsburgh ground zero for the global abuse crisis. Catholics here were placed in a crisis of conscience because we had supported a Church hierarchy that could act without our knowledge and input.

On the evening of September 20, 2018, a group of 200 committed, hurting and outraged Catholics met for an evening of prayer and listening. Catholics for Change in Our Church was formed that evening. Since then we have been joined by many more members, now numbering over 1000. A follow-up workshop on November 13, 2018, “Our Hearts Are Broken: Mending the Breach,” resulted in five Focus Groups created to further discuss a lay response. These Focus Groups began meeting to form a collective dialog leading to corrective actions with the ultimate goal of revitalizing the Faith Community through healing and restoring trust through transparency. Another large gathering of CCOC members convened on March 31, 2019, and two more Focus Groups were created, leading to the current seven.

In the past year, Bishop Zubik and bishops across the country have tried to explain and defend the Church structure in which the sexual abuse occurred. We have been told that the standards of psychology at the time of the worst abuse suggested that it was a depraved disease that could be cured. We were told experts advised the bishops to handle the cases as they did. We were told incidents of abuse were kept quiet to protect the abused and their families. CCOC asks that even if all of this were acknowledged and accepted, (and, we might





add, it is not), why was there such a high level of secrecy and non-transparent behavior? To us and many other believers, this behavior is self-incriminating in that it reveals the institution knew something was wrong and fearfully responded with secrecy. To this we proclaim the gospel message of “love drives out all fear.” (1 John 4:18) If there had been no fear on the part of the Church hierarchy, they would not have hidden the abuse in the shadows of the diocesan chanceries, and at the very least parishioners would have been told that there was “a wolf among the sheep.” (Matthew 7:15)

What also fueled strong emotions by the laity in Pittsburgh within the past year was the growing realization that the sexual abuse crisis was not an accident, but was in many ways self-made, fostered by the very culture of our Church. This culture includes following orders out of obedience; issues with how seminarians are selected, screened, and trained; difficulties with how priests’ psycho-sexual issues are dealt with after ordination; problems with how secrecy is encouraged and maintained; the absence of safeguards against corrupt conduct by highly-placed members of the clergy; the absence of checks and balances, transparency, and whistleblower protections; and the lack of authority and responsibility vested in specific and separate independent persons in a clearly understood chain of command. All of these are facets of a complex mosaic that was self-made and allowed the sexual abuse to happen and continue over decades, if not centuries. These same factors have also contributed to the larger problem of which sexual abuse is a part, and this is the culture of clericalism that is entrenched in the Catholic Church. Clericalism, defined above as the concept that priests and bishops can be seen as superior to and exempt from accountability to others, has been put forward as the root of many of the ills that plague our Church today. This culture of clericalism has created a Church where there is abuse of power and authority.

CCOC also wants to say loudly and clearly that the culture of clericalism in the American Catholic Church, and beyond, could not have existed and cannot continue to exist without lay cooperation. The laity have given deference, honor, and money to the clerics. We put clerics on a pedestal within our communities of faith. We call them Father, Monsignor, Bishop, etc. These titles distinguish them from the laity and connote a special, elevated position within our Church. In return, the laity have trusted that Church officials would not use their authority to abuse innocent children, and would not use their authority to protect the abusers at the expense of the abused. This was a sacred trust. As leaders of the Church, as vicars of Christ entrusted with conveying God’s love to believers and helping believers understand that love, the trust in them went beyond human-to-human dimensions. When the abuse occurred, in every single instance, there was a sacred trust broken. We, the laity, have been disappointed and angry at the reluctance of our own bishop, and many bishops in our country, to acknowledge and apologize that a sacred trust had been broken not only by the abusers, but by the Church hierarchy in how they handled the abuse cases.





Bishop Zubik and the Diocesan Staff

Initially, Bishop Zubik and the diocesan staff struggled to understand the full impact the PA Report had on laity and parishes. There was often defensiveness combined with a tone in public comments which demonstrated a shepherd not in touch with his sheep. To Bishop Zubik's credit, he listened to both supporters and critics, both inside and outside the diocese, both laity and clerics. In the fall of 2018, the bishop announced he wanted to have four listening sessions, one in each vicariate area of the diocese. The purpose of the sessions was simply to allow people to speak directly to the bishop about what was on their hearts and minds, and for him to listen.

Each of these sessions had the same format. They opened with hymn and prayer to ground the evening, and then had an open microphone for people to share with all assembled. The dynamic at each session was different, however, reflecting the individual stories and feelings of those assembled. Bishop Zubik, to his credit, stayed at each session until the last person had spoken; one session lasted four hours. And once again to his credit, the bishop listened. Only at the very end of each session did he speak for a few moments, simply conveying to those in attendance that his purpose was to listen, and that he had heard them, all of them. In his closing remarks at each session, Bishop Zubik announced he would take all of what he had heard into prayer and create a Pastoral Letter to be released before Ash Wednesday.

Bishop Zubik was good to his word with the Pastoral Letter being released Monday, March 4, 2019, titled ***The Church Healing***. The first part of the letter consisted of Bishop Zubik listing what he had heard at the four listening sessions. The second part of the letter contained a five-point action plan that went beyond issues directly related to the sexual abuse by Catholic clergy, addressing accountability and transparency in Church governance, spiritual and human formation for clergy and seminarians, and promising additional channels for parishioners to bring their concerns to the bishop. The five points and the key actions associated with them were:

1. Healing and Enhanced Support for Victims/Survivors, Their Families and Loved Ones.

This will have long-standing diocesan programs streamlined and strengthened with new initiatives in the newly formed Secretariat for the Protection of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults. It will also involve the Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Program (IRCP), established in January 2019 as a vehicle to address financial settlement with victims/survivors. An expanded role is created for the Independent Review Board, created in 1989, where the Board will receive quarterly updates on all issues related to any allegation of sexual abuse or any inappropriate sexual behavior received within the previous three months, and the Board will be authorized to monitor and follow up on any previous allegations until they are fully vetted and resolved. The diocese also committed to establishing support groups and spiritual retreats for victims/survivors.



2. Greater Financial Transparency

This will include making public a broader scope of financial information, including the aggregate amount of past victims' compensation through legal settlements and the total amount disbursed to victims/survivors from the IRCP; the amount of the legal fees incurred by the diocese related to clergy sexual abuse; and the annual amount that the diocese is canonically obligated to pay as sustenance to clergy who have been removed from ministry due to substantiated allegations of child sexual abuse. In addition, Bishop Zubik promised to expand the membership of the Diocesan Finance Council to now consist of lay representatives from each of the six counties of the diocese.

3. Increased Accountability.

This will include creating a Church Healing Commission, consisting of up to 12 laypeople who are Catholic and non-Catholic, including abuse survivors, with representation from all six counties in the Diocese of Pittsburgh. This advisory commission will assist the bishop in monitoring progress on the five-point plan. Bishop Zubik will also establish an independent, third-party system for reporting concerns about suspected financial, professional, or personal misconduct in any parish, school, institution or office of the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

4. Ongoing Spiritual and Human Formation for Clergy and Seminarians.

Bishop Zubik promises that "every possible step is being taken to provide current and future clergy with the support they need to live a healthy, chaste life with a heart free to love as Jesus loves, by laying down their lives for others." This will include reviewing and improving efforts to screen seminary applicants, evaluate candidates for ordination and provide spiritual and psychological support to priests and deacons.

5. Continued Listening to Seek Truth and Reconciliation.

Bishop Zubik promises to continue to meet individually with victims/survivors and to hold eight annual public listening sessions (two per vicariate area) on various matters of concern to Catholics.





Where We Are Now

To review where we are now, it is instructive to look first at how each of four groups are coping with the revelations in the PA Report, from CCOC's perspective: first, the victims/survivors and their families; second, Bishop Zubik and the diocesan staff; third, diocesan staff at the parish level, including pastors; and fourth, the laity.

Victims/Survivors and their Families

CCOC is not qualified to speak to the pain revisited by victims/survivors and their families in the aftermath of the PA Grand Jury Report. Each person's experience as a victim/survivor is unique. CCOC holds up for God's blessing the courage victims/survivors have had in bringing their pain and suffering, and that of their families, into the light. CCOC hopes that our parishes become healing environments where victims/survivors can seek assistance, start the healing process, and not suffer unnecessarily.

We pray that healing has begun for them.

CCOC recognizes the road to healing, recovery, and restitution for many victims can be a long and harrowing one. The damage done in a single abuse incident, or multiple incidents, was amplified in its severity and complexity by a Church hierarchy that denied the abuse occurred, and often shamed victims and their families into silence.

CCOC supports the PA Grand Jury legislative recommendations made last year in support of victims/survivors. These are: creating a window in the statute of limitations so that victims of long-ago abuse events can sue; eliminating the criminal statute of limitations on future crimes; clarifying that non-disclosure clauses in settlements with victims do not preclude reporting crimes to law enforcement; and tightening requirements to report suspected abuse of children.

Bishop Zubik and Diocesan Staff

Bishop Zubik clearly cares as a shepherd for his flock. As mentioned above, he has tried to listen to victims/survivors, clergy, and laity in the past year. But he and many within the Church hierarchy are hampered by paradigms that make it difficult for them to acknowledge and react to what is happening in the Church.

One such paradigm is the traditional, top-down management structure in the diocese. A typical and often-heard response from diocesan staff and advisory group members to requests to do something different can be, "We have always done things that way in this diocese." The "bunker mentality" in the diocesan hierarchy in the past year after the PA Grand Jury Report was released, while understandable under these difficult circumstances, has further reinforced this tendency to follow familiar and traditional paths within a top-down



management structure. CCOC wants to emphatically state that the same old way of doing things in the diocese will not get done what is needed to make the Church sustainable.

Change is always difficult when humans are involved. Even if the bishop is able to change his way of thinking and doing, it will likely be challenging to bring along the entire diocesan staff. Few diocesan staff or supporters seem to have embraced the idea that substantive changes are needed in the Church hierarchy and diocesan structure; instead, far more often the thinking is that modest modifications to the existing office, system, or way of doing things is all that is needed in the face of the recent crises in our Church.

This resistance or unwillingness to embrace substantive change has been evident in several ways in the Pittsburgh diocese over the past year. New people have been appointed by Bishop Zubik to advisory groups, but the functioning of the groups has remained largely the same. Even in the case of a new advisory group, the important and worthwhile Church Healing Commission, it was Bishop Zubik and diocesan staff who decided who was appointed to the Commission. When Bishop Zubik thought of how best to communicate his thoughts with Catholics in Pittsburgh about the church abuse crisis, he used a traditional means, a pastoral letter. Unfortunately, it was the experience of CCOC that a minority of Catholics in Pittsburgh knew about the pastoral letter when it was released in March, 2019, and even fewer people actually read the document.

Another traditional paradigm within our Church is that the bishop can operate without appropriate checks and balances. The belief among many if not most laity is that the amount of power and prestige concentrated into a single episcopal office is not healthy or beneficial, and in fact can lead to abuses of the power associated with that office. For an example of this, one needs only to look at the recent case of Bishop Michael Bransfield in the neighboring diocese of Wheeling, WV. [Link to article in the Washington Post](#)

Yet another traditional paradigm is how the shortage of priests is viewed by the Church hierarchy. For at least 30 years, the increasing shortage of priests was met with the same course of action: pray for priestly vocations among single men and increase efforts in their recruitment. As the number and caliber of single men decreased, the Church hierarchy maintained their same approach instead of asking, "How can we find the best qualified candidates among all of our Church members?" The Church hierarchy seem never to have seriously asked themselves if the selection criteria for candidates needs to change.

We in CCOC prophetically state that fewer single male candidates may not be the result of insufficient prayer or recruiting effort; instead, we think it should be seriously considered that God may be asking our Church to change our paradigm of who might be called to be a priest, a servant of God, a mediator between God and his flock. Could God be inviting the Church to prayerfully consider that a single woman, or a married woman or man, might meet the requirements of priesthood? We in CCOC think this topic needs serious and prayerful consideration, and should be studied further by all the Church. While Bishop Zubik cannot





unilaterally decide to ordain women or married people in our diocese, he can encourage this prayerful consideration by his fellow members of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the pope.

Diocesan Staff at the Parish Level

While there are many variables in pastor, parish staff, and circumstances related to the clustering and consolidation of parishes within the diocese, and these variables affect how the PA Clergy Report has impacted the parishes, there are still some themes to note and generalizations that can be made.

The first is that pastors and parish staff are under enormous demands and pressures as a result of the PA Grand Jury Report being released in the midst of parish reorganizations, further aggravated by a drop in attendance and donations at parishes. To make matters worse, the diocese's own financial difficulties due to lower donations and less commitments to the Parish Share program have left the diocese with diminished capacity to provide assistance and support to pastors and parishes.

Another theme is that many pastors feel ill equipped emotionally and spiritually to handle the current situations that exist in parishes. Many, if not most, priests over the age of 40 (the large majority of priests currently in ministry), if given a safe environment to share it would admit that this is not the Church they signed up to serve. Many joined the Church in better times, hoping to have a parish-based ministry where they as the priest would have ample financial assets, adequate staff including other clergy, and the support of the congregation. This is not the case today. Parish financial stresses have caused staff to be reduced. Pastors are often the only clergy in a parish, many without even a deacon. And priests lament that their parishioners are withdrawing from them personally, sharing that many parishioners look upon them warily and suspiciously in the wake of the PA Grand Jury Report. The disillusionment many if not most parish priests are experiencing with the current state of the Church is sapping their energy to move their parishes forward in ways that are needed.

Pastors and other parish-based clergy also have had little or no training for the crisis they are now experiencing, both personally and in their parishes. The same thing can be said for the parish staff, especially in teams which have been shrunk due to financial shortfalls in parishes.

CCOC implores laity and parishioners to empathize with and pray for the clergy and staff in their parish! The parish clergy and staff need our support! We laity are called to stand in solidarity with clergy and parish staff, offering them encouragement and affirmation.

This does not mean laity need to continue in a subservient role within parishes. Instead, laity need to find ways to offer and use their talents and skills in parishes. Like the bishop and diocesan staff, parish clergy and staff need to be invited by the laity to think beyond the paradigms in which they are accustomed to operating. Instead of embracing change



and looking to deal with the current demands in their parishes, some pastors and clergy are withdrawing, becoming less willing to engage, and some are adopting authoritarian approaches as a way of coping with the changes happening which are beyond their control. Laity cannot be subservient in these situations; they must assert themselves for the benefit of their parishes.

Laity

At the one-year anniversary of the release of the PA Grand Jury Report, CCOC believes that the Catholic laity can be viewed in three groups.

The first group are the Catholics who have left the Church. CCOC would like to focus on two subsets within this group.

The first subset of those who have left the Church include many Catholics who had been barely practicing their faith and who viewed the PA Grand Jury Report as sufficient reason to cut all ties to the Church. Upon hearing of the abuse and that the Church hierarchy kept the files secret for so long, these Catholics simply decided enough was enough and moved on to another church or stopped going to church entirely. The second subset were Catholics who have been struggling with their faith and the institutional hierarchy for years. Many of these Catholics have had strong disagreements with the Church teachings on a variety of issues. For them, the PA Grand Jury Report was the last straw and they could not see themselves as part of the Catholic Church any longer. They moved to Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopalian, or other Christian denominations that they feel are more aligned with their personal faith journey. Sadly, many in this subset of Catholics who have left the Church had talents and treasure they wished to offer the Catholic Church, but they did not believe their talents and treasure were respected or appreciated.

The second group is largely diametrically opposed to the first. Instead of struggling with the Church hierarchy, this group staunchly supports it. While initially shocked and saddened by the revelations in the PA Grand Jury Report, in time this group of Catholics felt the need to defend the hierarchy of the Church against growing criticism from the laity and society at large. This group of lay Catholics felt the Report was unfair to the Church, and that it sensationalized the acts of a small group of priests. They also felt the Church hierarchy was being too harshly criticized for decisions and actions made many years earlier in a different time and context. While this group was empathetic to the traumas experienced by abuse victims and their families, after the Listening Sessions and the release of the Bishop's Pastoral Letter, this group of Catholics began to repeat the refrain, to themselves and to other laity, including victims/survivors and their families: "It is time to move on." This refrain was sometimes repeated by priests and clergy.

The third group of Catholics can be characterized as committed Catholics who care about their Church, but are hoping for and also demanding change. Most of the members of CCOC



belong to this third group. This group was shocked and angered by the revelations of the PA Grand Jury Report. The Report was an epiphany and an impetus to act to this group. They saw the abuse as a result of clericalism and a sacred trust broken between Church hierarchy and clergy and laity, especially the vulnerable children abused. And the extent of the violation being kept secret by the conscious choices of the Church hierarchy was an abuse of power that was a result of clericalism within our Church. This group of Catholics channeled their anger and outrage into wanting to do something for and in their Church, to help make positive changes in the Church that were necessary for real healing.

What was exciting for members of this third group of Catholics who joined CCOC was they started to experience a new sense of Church. The Holy Spirit was active in the meetings of CCOC, both large gatherings of all CCOC members and smaller Focus Groups where issues and action steps were discussed. CCOC members began to find their own voice within their Church and ask the Spirit to guide them and to help them discern how they as individuals and as a group were to act. A clear sense emerged that CCOC was called to express six basic principles: co-responsibility, transparency, accountability, competency, justice and trust.

CCOC was pleased that when they reached out to Bishop Zubik to engage in a dialogue, the bishop agreed. CCOC has been having meetings once every two months with CCOC Focus Group coordinators ever since to discuss areas of mutual agreement on what must be done to make positive changes in our Church.

CCOC also feels it is important to declare to the Catholic Church, both clergy and laity, that each Catholic must decide on her or his own when it is time to move on from this present crisis. Many Catholics are not yet ready to move on. For these Catholics, many issues are unresolved. They will only be ready to move on when they see full acknowledgement by the Church hierarchy of the extent of child abuse and other abuses of power within the Church. And for many they will also require seeing substantive changes within their Church and its structures and hierarchy before they are ready to move on and forward.

CCOC also wants to state loud and clear that its members, and many members of the third group of Catholics, need to see the positive changes needed happen soon. While belonging to CCOC has given its members a reason to hope and to remain a member of the Catholic Church, it is also clear in talking to many CCOC members that their time frame for seeing substantive changes in the Church is one more year, and possibly up to two or three years, but not longer. If the committed and caring Catholics of this third group of Catholic laity lose hope and leave, the Church in Pittsburgh will struggle to recover.

The Catholic Church in Pittsburgh is at a crossroads one year after the release of the PA Grand Jury Report. As with any other crisis, this represents both an opportunity to improve and a peril to worsen. CCOC wants to share thoughts now on how the Catholic Church in Pittsburgh, and possibly beyond, can find a way forward.



The Way Forward

Both laity and clergy need to pray in this time of crisis in our Church. This is why CCOC placed this verse from the Gospel of John at the top of our website's homepage: *I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)* All of us in the Church need to spend time in God's presence asking for guidance by the Holy Spirit. While many Catholics are restless for change and want to act to make it happen, we must first discern where the Spirit of God is calling us to go. Then we all need the Spirit's help in finding the courage and energy to go there!

Calling for Changes in Structure and Approach

Going forward, substantive changes are needed in the structure of our Church, particularly including expanded roles for and oversight by lay people. For CCOC, "substantive" is defined as something foundationally and structurally different that is also visibly different to many people, including the laity. Examples of this might be that independent groups such as CCOC or religious orders appointing members to the diocesan advisory commissions; independent lay oversight of a whistleblower protection program in the diocese; and independent lay involvement with the review of the bishop's performance.

CCOC encourages Bishop Zubik to resist the temptation to focus too heavily on "putting out the fires" directly in front of him on a day-to-day basis and take the time necessary to effect real and substantive changes by delegating the handling of immediate needs to others so that the bishop and senior Church hierarchy members can focus on long-term strategic changes that are critical for making the Church sustainable.

CCOC acknowledges and affirms the initiative Bishop Zubik is considering, using the Future Search model of issue resolution to generate ideas for change in our Church. But we believe such a process can only lead to substantive, needed change if the Bishop allows independent entities, such as CCOC, to choose their own representatives to participate in this process; and these independent entities, which might include women and men religious orders, Catholic non-profit organizations separate from the diocese, and others, should comprise a larger percentage of the participants than just token representation. For the outcome of this process to be meaningful and accepted as such by the Church, including laity, both the perception and the reality must be that all voices were heard and all significant groups, not only those historically aligned with and invested in the status quo, had a seat at the table.

Recognition of the Breach of Trust by Church Leadership

As a crucial step on this healing journey for victims/ survivors, their family members, and the entire Church, it is imperative that the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops creates and publishes an explicit and unambiguous statement that, collectively and institutionally, the hierarchy of the Church over the past 70 years has broken a sacred covenant and



trust with the victims/survivors and the laity. Ideally, this statement would also include an acknowledgement that laity are required to participate in co-creating a healing and restored Faith Community. While bishops of several dioceses have issued similar statements of accountability and have outlined broadly defined action plans with laity involvement, more needs to be done. CCOC believes these individual episcopal gestures need to be built upon and done on a wider basis at the bishops' conference level. This step should reflect a ***moment in time acknowledgement*** and should be declared via ***One Unified Voice***. This is a Sacramental response, directly derived from the Sacrament of Penance. We all have been taught that the examination of our conscience is a core component of making a good confession. This examination always includes our understanding of our level of responsibility, what we did, what we were aware of, and what sins of omission we committed. This Bishops' statement acknowledging their breaking of this trust is a Sacramental Act that is required to initiate true and authentic healing.

A Call to Action: Recommendations from the CCOC Focus Groups

Each **Focus Group** of CCOC will act to move our work forward, to effect positive change in our Church, and to meet the perceived needs of the Body of Christ. We call upon the hierarchy and clergy of our Church to join us in these efforts. In all that we do, we are committed to six basic principles: co-responsibility, transparency, accountability, competency, justice, and trust. We believe that the following are the most critical issues that deserve the focus and efforts of the Church – hierarchy, clergy, and laity.

Supporting Abuse Victims/Survivors and Their Families

The goal of this Focus Group is to instill healing and empathic environments to address the needs of survivors, their families and parishioners, at the individual, parish and diocesan level. We call for education and awareness related to sexual abuse, advocating for support structures for survivors, and implementing healing models. While this needs to be done at a diocesan level, we also believe that parish-based programs may offer the best and most effective compassionate presence to abuse victims/survivors and their families.

Financial Transparency

Improving financial transparency at all levels within the Church, starting with parishes and our diocese, is imperative to the financial viability of the diocese and to rebuilding trust. This Focus Group is committed to working with the Diocese to create independent, lay oversight of financial functions that adhere to best practices and provide detailed financial accountability to all Catholics in the Diocese of both diocesan and parish finances. There is also a need of working at the parish level to develop transparency there as well, and have there a foundational piece for the diocesan process.





Addressing Clericalism

This Focus Group seeks support from the Church to bring about a healthier balance within our parishes and diocese by exploring and promoting the concept of *shared responsibility* between the laity and the clergy, and by encouraging the laity to have a greater understanding of and participation in the formation of the clergy that are trained to serve the People of God. In addition, we call on the Diocese to work to strengthen and consistently implement current structures such as parish pastoral councils and finance councils based upon the notion of shared responsibility.

Strengthening and Diversifying the Clergy

The goal of this Focus Group is to facilitate discussions and actions to diversify the clergy in order to enhance and strengthen it. Any person who is called to serve the Church should have the opportunity to fulfill that call, whether they are a man or woman, married or single. This service could be in the lay leadership of the Church, in the diaconate program, or as an ordained clergy member. We call on the Diocese to include women in highly visible diocesan-wide leadership roles and to work to increase women's voices and their votes in matters of Church governance.

Pathways to Lay Leadership


We are committed to the Vatican II ideal that the Church is the People of God. The laity, the clergy, the hierarchy – we are all the Church. Our Church can only be sustained if both lay and ordained Catholics share *co-responsibility* for the leadership and culture of the Church. To that end, this Focus Group seeks to encourage, educate, and prepare the laity to identify concrete ways that they can use their gifts and talents in leadership roles, both at the parish and diocesan levels.

Engaging and Empowering Youth

This Focus Group is committed to ensuring a vibrant, spirit-filled future for our Church by encouraging and giving a voice to the next generation of our faith – our youth and young adults. We seek to engage and empower youth through education, service, and fellowship, and to seek solutions both from traditional Church structures as well as other successful organizations.

Lay Oversight of Diocesan Functions

This Focus Group is currently putting energies into how lay oversight can be a part of reviewing the bishop's selection and performance, as well as making sure lay involvement is a part of the process of holding bishops accountable when there is wrongdoing. We call on the Diocese to include independent groups like CCOC and communities of religious women in the decision processes for appointing members to diocesan advisory councils,



implement independent lay oversight of a whistleblower protection program, and solicit independent lay input into the review of the bishop's performance.

Conclusion

It has been a year since the PA Grand Jury Report rocked not only the citizens of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, but its reverberations have been felt throughout the US and globally as this was the second “Spotlight”.

The Report revealed that Boston was not the anomaly, but rather a common piece of a larger pie where similar expressions by the Church's hierarchy of abuse of power, concealment, re-assignment of offending priests, and simply not being forthcoming and truthful to the laity were present. ***The Report has sparked similar grand jury investigations across the U.S. Pope Francis called a special Synod (Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church) in February 2019 to reinforce to the bishops and attendees that the sexual abuse event was real, that the Church must focus on the victims/survivors, and that bishops across the world need to embrace and comprehend these realizations.***

In short, the Grand Jury Report has established the sexual abuse crisis (and all its sinfulness) as **the issue** in the Catholic Church *that must be confronted, addressed, and resolved from all perspectives and by all the faithful.*

This comprehensive insight includes that the top-down, hierarchical governance structure within the Church, with little or no lay oversight, has significantly contributed to the abuses from the past 70 years and is no longer viable and sustainable.

CCOC was formed as an organic result of concerned Catholics who believe the Vatican II message of “We Are the Church” and who are committed to co-create positive changes to strive for healing and restoring trust within the Church.

This healing, first and foremost, must initiate with and be focused on the victims / survivors, and their voices must be heard and lead the way as we all continue this new faith journey. All voices should be heard!

A new relationship of trust and understanding is required between the laity and the hierarchy – one that recognizes each other as a child of God, including exploring ways of promoting dialogue. CCOC has begun a regular dialogue with Bishop Zubik and other senior diocesan staff to move forward and explore actions that can be taken to make the positive changes required. But more needs to be done!

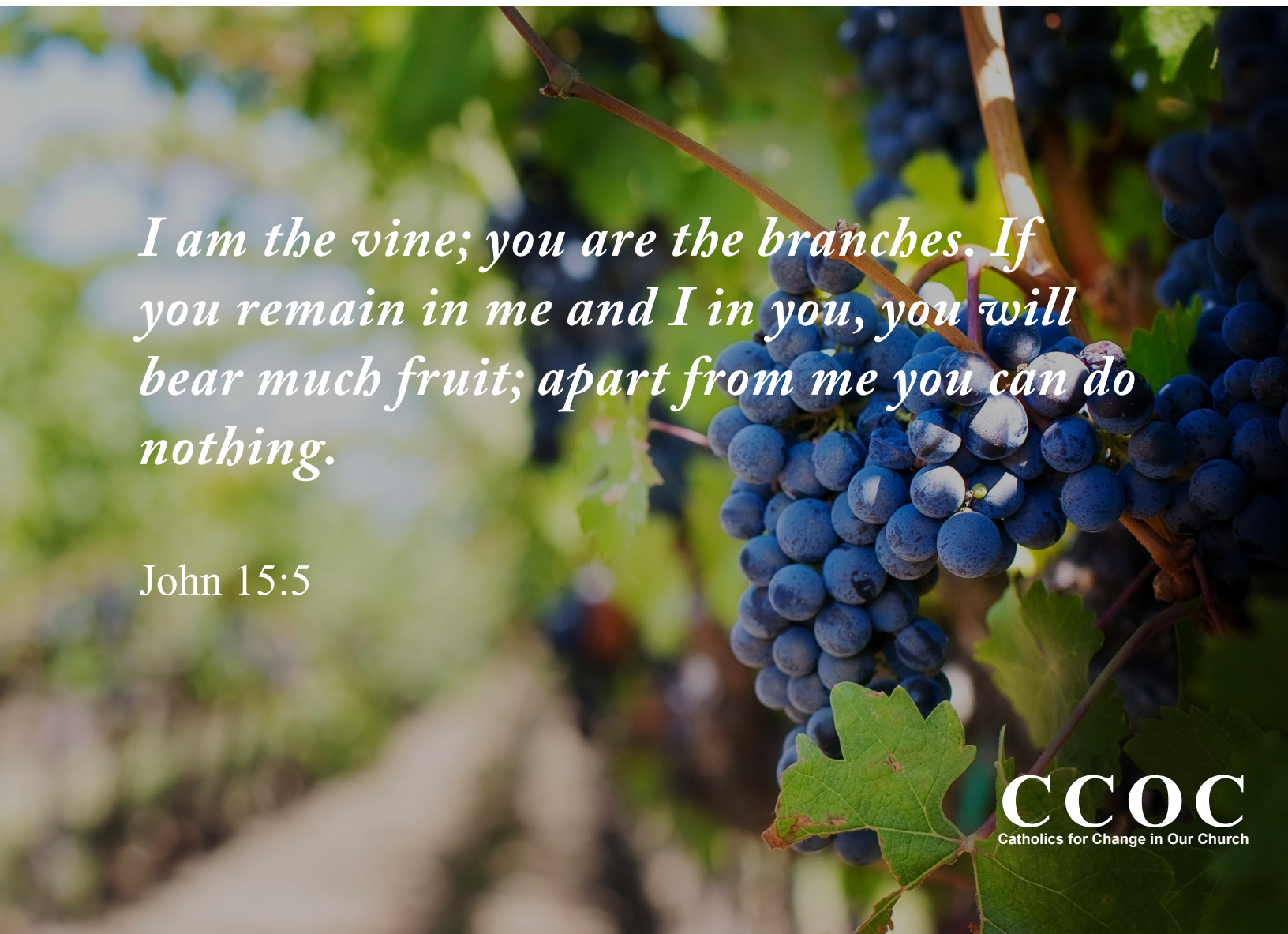
CCOC has already connected with other Catholic lay organizations whom the Spirit has motivated in similar ways to address the needs of the church – most notably with our friends in Buffalo, NY who are a part of *The Movement to Restore Trust* and *CAPACT* in the Washington, D.C. area. These grassroots connections of like-minded Catholics will only



enhance the many voices that can work and collaborate with clergy and bishops to repair the Church.

And finally, in the Gospels, Jesus again and again encourages and affirms his disciples with the words, “Do not be afraid, I am with you.” (One such occurrence: Matt 14:27) We call on all Catholics to reflect on these words, and draw from them the courage to confront the changes needed in our Church, and the gain the energy to do the work necessary to make those changes!

With hospitality and hope, CCOC invites all Catholics and people of faith to walk on this journey and do the work necessary to benefit all members of our Church. Please join us via the CCOC website at <https://ccoc-pgh.org/>.



I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

John 15:5