

Bringing Hope to the Louisiana Delta PAGE 30

Liguorian

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Cultivating Empathy

*We must empty ourselves of ego
to take on the pain of others*

Jesus Lives on Colfax Avenue

*On a street some call wicked,
people touch their faith*



Laypeople's group works to revitalize faith community

Catholics for Change in Our Church

Catholics for Change in Our Church is an independent organization of laypeople whose mission is to empower the laity to assume their rightful role through baptism as a priestly people within the Catholic Church. Two leaders, board President Kevin Hayes and board Vice President Gretchen Jezerc, discuss the CCOC's work.

Q. Please provide a brief history on Catholics for Change in Our Church (CCOC) and its mission.

A. Catholics for Change in Our Church (CCOC) is an independent, grass-roots organization created and led by laypeople in response to the Pennsylvania attorney general's bombshell report in August 2018 about the sexual abuse of children by Catholic clergy. Catholics were placed in a crisis of conscience because we had supported a Church hierarchy that could act without our knowledge and input. The Pennsylvania Grand Jury report was released while the diocese of Pittsburgh was already reeling from major parish consolidations that were announced in April 2018, to be implemented in October 2018.

On 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, others have joined and we've grown to more than 1,000 members, including several groups from throughout

the diocese that formed to focus on specific issues in response to the consolidations and the disclosures of abuse. A follow-up workshop in November 2018, "Our Hearts Are Broken: Mending the Breach," resulted in the creation of five focus groups to further discussions on a lay response. The ultimate goal was to revitalize the faith community through healing and restored trust through transparency. Another large gathering of CCOC members convened in March 2019, and two more focus groups were created. CCOC is organized around these seven focus groups:

- Supporting Abuse Victims/Survivors and Their Families
- Financial Transparency
- Addressing Clericalism
- Strengthening and Diversifying the Clergy
- Pathways to Lay Leadership
- Engaging and Empowering Youth
- Lay Oversight of Diocesan Functions.

CCOC's mission statement is: "We are committed Catholics who care about their Church and recognize



Members of Catholics for Change in Our Church (CCOC) gathered in January to develop priorities for actions during 2020. The day ended with a Mass to ground the concerns and hopes explored throughout the day in prayer and the Eucharist. PHOTOS FROM CCOC

“It’s important to remember that our Church is a living institution that is constantly evolving. The members and leadership of CCOC are diverse. We love our Church and are faithful to it. Rather than complaining, giving up, and leaving, we have chosen to stay and work for positive change that will make our Church better and stronger than ever through transparency, coresponsibility, accountability, and trust.”

—Leaders of Catholics for Change in Our Church

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 coresponsibility 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.”

Q. How has this ministry touched lives?

A. Gatherings since our inception have enabled Catholics to process feelings about what is going on in their Church. Many participants often express deep appreciation for the chance to simply be heard. They also express desires to meet others who feel hurt and angry but want to do something to make their Church better. All of this has facilitated the ability to discuss and discern specific steps needed to make positive changes in our Church.

On the one-year anniversary of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury report on clergy sexual abuse, CCOC issued a statement describing how the Church arrived at this point and recommending changes that would enable the Church to emerge from this crisis stronger and ready for the future. The statement and resulting media coverage spread awareness and hope for the future of our Church.

Bishop David Zubik and senior staff in the Diocese of Pittsburgh have met formally with representatives of CCOC to review our concerns and discuss ways in which the laity and the clergy can become more co-responsible for our Church. CCOC is collaborating with the diocese on programs and efforts where we find common ground, including augmenting the diocesan staff to deliver the diocese’s Pathways to Healing program, which is designed to support victims of abuse and their families and to help parishes work toward healing. CCOC is working to develop pathways to lay leadership to increase lay participation in our Church.

Currently, CCOC is focusing on working with three to five parishes to make positive changes

there. CCOC has developed a parish pilot program meant to complement an individual parish’s efforts to evangelize and retain members, as well as to facilitate the creation of a coresponsible model for parish life and administration based on transparency, accountability, competency, justice, trust, and continued healing for those impacted by clergy sexual abuse.

Q. How can people learn more or support your mission?

A. People can follow CCOC on Facebook and Twitter and check out the website at CCOC-Pgh.org, where you can sign up for email updates. #



Gretchen Jezerc, vice president of the CCOC board, was interviewed in Pittsburgh by KDKA, the local CBS affiliate, in August 2019 after CCOC released its statement on the first anniversary of the release of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury report on child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church.

**A BIG COALITION
WORKING FOR CHANGE**

Catholics for Change in Our Church (CCOC) and its members have also connected with similar groups across seventeen states and Canada, joining with them to form WATCH (We Are the Church), a coalition working together to effect positive changes in our Church.

“What has been amazing and profoundly touching is that the origin stories of all of these groups are similar, as are their goals and aspirations,” CCOC board President Kevin Hayes said. “The organic development of these groups is a sign to us that the Holy Spirit is at work in them,” board Vice President Gretchen Jezerc said.



A SPECIAL OFFER TO CCOC MEMBERS FROM LIGUORIAN

CCOC members can receive a digital-only, one-year subscription to *Liguorian* for only \$5.00. The subscription will include the current July-August edition which features the CCOC article. Here's the link to the promo:

<https://www.liguori.org/liguorian-magazine-digital-only-subscription.html>

About *Liguorian*

Liguorian conveys a consistent joyful message of God's plentiful redemption. In its tone and selection of material, it communicates a timely pastoral message to Catholics on matters of the faith, practices, Christian living, and social justice in order to continue their conversion to Christ. *Liguorian* represents the best of the Catholic Tradition. While not championing positions contrary to core Church belief:

- It reflects the complex and rich nature of Catholicism found in its institutions and individuals
- It respects the ways by which men and women receive, examine, and pass on the Christian faith
- It exposes its readers to the best elements of Catholic spirituality in order to help them navigate the contemporary world assisted by their faith

A little about audience:

Liguorian readers fall unequally into the grandparents who love to take care of their grand toddlers, the middle age group of readers who represent all careers, and lastly younger readers, usually married, beginning their families. These are men and women who appreciate the sacraments, especially the mass, have a devotional life, and are interested in knowing more about their faith. (Their catholic faith is important to them, and we receive a healthy dose of letters to the editor when we publish something they don't agree with!) Rooted in the vision of St. Alphonsus and the Redemptorists, *Liguorian* has an optimistic view of the human person. The work of conversion to Christ has moral, intellectual, physical, and spiritual elements; in short it's for the entire person.