

NOTES FROM CCOC GATHERING – JANUARY 11, 2020

Personal Church Issues from a Lay Perspective

- “Church” is something of value we want to keep. It belongs to us!
- There is a desire within the Laity to be the Church they want to experience
 - Semi-seriously, many ask: Could CCOC be its own Church? CCOC to model behavior we want to see
- Love of God is central for us and in response we want a community built on love and respect
- We have a passion for a Church of Jesus, rooted on gospel values of love, respect, and affirmation
- We want to worship without rage
 - Many laity feel they are in a “hostage situation” regarding the Eucharist and are at the mercy of a clergy whom are neither empathetic or understanding towards the needs of the laity
- We have a deep frustration with the lack of transparency from the clergy and from the Church hierarchy
 - Not just with the clergy sex abuse crisis, but at many levels and in many areas of Church administration
- We have a deep sadness over losing many young people in our Church who have gone elsewhere looking to have their spiritual needs met because the clergy and church hierarchy have been “tone deaf.”
 - The conservative, traditional approach to young people (e.g. say the rosary) appeals to a very limited segment of the younger generation. There is such a need to “meet young people where they are.”
- We have a sense of urgency for change
 - What about the idea of a Vatican III based on co-responsibility and lay empowerment? While this is a dramatic image, it conveys the importance laity place on needed change
 - Anecdotally, many practicing Catholics in Pittsburgh express they are only willing to wait to see substantive change for another year, or maybe two. After that, they could look elsewhere, as 30-40% of Catholics have already done so.
- Change that is needed: Seismic; noticeable; substantive; a need to “shake it up”
 - Can we embrace the “groan” of the laity in this moment of “childbirth” of change in our Church?
 - Who are our allies in our quest for positive changes? Who are opposed?
- Many laity are experiencing the “dark night” of our journey into the unknown within our Church
- A desire to see religious women as mentors and companions in the quest for positive changes
- Among laity, there is a real and genuine desire to serve
 - Many talents among laity that could serve the needs of the Church
 - Laity are often rebuffed from serving by pastors who do not let them, or only let them if they are “under the thumb” of the pastor or parish staff.
- There is also a need to reduce lay participation in Clericalism
 - Laity needs to understand our role in clerical structure and power imbalance within Church; but we also need to see the primary role of clergy within this clerical structure, too.
- The Laity are responsible for evoking and bringing about the positive changes in our Church we want
- There is a need to empower Laity more
 - Laity need to demand that women are treated more equally within our Church
 - There is also a need to call forth the power for our Church within Laity
- There is a need for laity to develop a rootedness in prayer to persevere in our faith and in our efforts; confront the needs within our Church; and discern how best to work to effect the positive changes needed.
 - Can our difficulties and suffering now to effect the positive changes needed be grounded in the Paschal mystery? Can we see the “deaths” that are needed to sow the seeds for resurrection moments?

Current Church Issues at a Parish Level

- Is the Pastor willing to listen and share power/authority within the Parish?
 - Power/authority sharing a must if laity are to remain engaged and supportive of the Parish
- There is a need to reimagine Laity in each Parish and how the Laity function within a parish structure
- Laity are leaving parishes to “match” with another, or to leave the Catholic faith for another faith community
- Often there is a lack of people or pastoral skills in the clergy
 - Can we challenge priests to improve skills?
 - Can seminaries put more emphasis on improving the pastoral skills of clergy?
- There is a need to increase the hospitality within Parishes, with or without the Clergy.
- Financial transparency in Parishes is a must to maintain lay engagement and support.
- In Pittsburgh, a large challenge remains that as Parishes merge, how are their structures integrated?
 - Clear communications and transparency is vital to meeting this challenge
 - With consolidation, how can the “separateness” of former parishes be reduced
- Often at the parish level, talents of parishioners are not acknowledged or utilized
 - Can CCCO be a resource to help develop, shape, and share “Best Practices” for Parishes?
 - Can we learn from other faith communities how to use talents of parishioners?
 - Applicable especially to outreach efforts for youth and marriage ministries
- Reimagine community in each Parish and how lay leaders can facilitate community building there

Current Church Issues at a Diocesan Level

- Diocesan hierarchy don't understand what is happening
 - Clerical structure of dioceses is hurting bishops and diocesan staff from fully acknowledging the challenges they are facing and their role in perpetuating those challenges
 - They can often see issues only through a financial or legal “lens” only without moral or spiritual sense
- Seminarian recruitment and training are also perpetuating the culture and problems of clericalism
- Having lay councils which are only advisory is perpetuating the culture of clericalism in our Church.
- Can Bishop and Diocesan staff acknowledge their “circling of wagons” as they cope with challenges and change their inward focus at this time of crisis in our Church?
- Can Bishop and Diocesan staff acknowledge lay abilities and allow Laity to exercise independent authority over efforts to address the challenges?
- There is a need for the Bishop and diocesan staff to acknowledge and appreciate Laity's role in supporting priests at the parish level. And also encourage partnering Laity and clergy in mutually addressing the challenges faced within our Church
- Laity's experience of the Church hierarchy is that fear is rampant, which fuels suspicion of lay efforts and hurts the engagement by clergy with Laity who are willing to help
 - It can be helpful in engaging diocese if Laity can be specific in making proposals for changes
- Financial transparency is a must at the diocesan level to maintain lay engagement and support of Laity.
- Parish priests could benefit from their own Listening Session.
 - It would be critical for this Session to create a “safe space” for priests to share their real feelings about what is happening in the Church today
- The charge of “secularism” is often used against Laity seeking changes as a way to discredit their efforts.

Current Church Issues at a National Level

- The national Church hierarchy, as expressed in the USCCB, is patriarchal, “top down” in their mentality, and slow to respond to the needs of the faithful.
 - The USCCB seems more interested in perpetuating a clerical institution than shepherding the faithful
- There is a need for the bishops to offer a genuine penance for their role in the sex abuse scandal as a group of individuals acting as an institution
 - This could be expressed in an apology approved by all the bishops which would be announced by the USCCB leaders that in some way would convey the sentiment of , “We are sorry on behalf of the entire USCCB for the role we have played in the sex abuse, not only allowing it to happen and continue but also acting as an institution to keep the truth from most if not all of the Catholic faithful”
 - As a complement to an apology, would it be possible to implement a restorative justice document by the USCCB?
- The lack of the USCCB acting in unison and with a strong voice to raise awareness of important issues of morality in our country --- the reality of climate upheaval on a global scale and its negative impact on the poorest of the world; the growing inequity of wealth the vulnerability shared by millions of Americans (and Catholics) who do not have health care; the dignity of the immigrants in our country; the fraying of decency and respect within our public institutions --- while at the same time seeming to perpetuate a clerical culture of privilege and largesse for themselves contributes to a perception of irrelevance of the USCCB among Laity (and also others beyond the Church)
- The antagonism by leaders of the USCCB towards Pope Francis, especially in the Pope’s call for change within the culture of clericalism, is very disappointing and discouraging
- The issue of women’s equality in the Church gets little more than lip-service from the USCCB
 - Could this be an issue for a schism within the American Catholic Church? Or if not, a reason many Catholics, women and men, choose to leave the Catholic faith and go to congregations where women are co-equals with men?
- Accountability of Bishops needs to be shared with independent lay boards who are separate and apart from the USCCB hierarchy.
 - Bishops monitoring bishops has very little credibility with Laity, especially after revelations such as how the recent cases of Bishop Bransfield in Wheeling, WV and Cardinal McCarrick of Washington, D.C. were handled.
- At a national level, there is a need to “build up” the coalition of lay advocacy groups so that evermore numbers of lay persons seeking positive changes are connected with each other
 - WATCH, one such coalition operating mainly in the eastern half of the US and Canada, needs to be strengthened through conscious efforts of members to build relationships with each other.
 - And expand the WATCH network to other groups
 - Is it possible to create relationships with as many other groups as possible?
 - If nothing else, then at least a database of the various groups with contact information.
 - Can WATCH and other groups begin to get publicity to help Catholics not yet involved with an advocacy group for positive change to get connected to one?
 - Could a national “Statement” day among all advocacy groups be coordinated for attention?

Priorities for CCOC at a Parish Level

- CCOC needs to be better promoted within parishes as a resource to parishioners, and more members sought from within parishes. This promotion could be general, but it will likely be most effective person-to-person
- There is a need to identify and train lay leaders who can work at building up parishes from within
- One approach already happening is the Healing Association. CCOC is working with diocese on this initiative.
 - There is a need to identify counselors to assist in the Healing Association
 - There is a need for volunteers for all programs in healing
 - Abuse survivors/families/neighbors need to be a ministry priority within parishes
 - There is a need to support parish priests burdened by the challenges they face
- Best Practices List could be developed. Focus on the positive. Ideas from other faiths could be helpful.
- Financial Transparency
 - It is important to get the pastor to agree to this first. A limited basis may be necessary to start.
- Promote the better (and appropriate) functioning of Finance and Parish Councils within parishes
- Parish Pilot Program could be a resource for parishes to help grow the parish. Look to focus in 2-4 parishes.
- Seek sharing administration responsibilities where laity can provide expertise that a parish is lacking
- Consider developing a lay outreach group not picked by Pastor to give it some independence and credibility
- Weekly offertory collection and monitoring of donations needs to involve independent lay parishioners.
- Lay-led adult education is sorely needed to help laity understand their “priestly role” within a parish.
- Alternative financial vehicle for donations needs to be researched to help financial viability of parishes
 - Would parishioners give to an independent foundation for parish if they won’t give to parish?

Priorities for CCOC at a Diocesan Level

- Determining where parish capital funds are kept, their accounting and why they are not in specific parishes
- Continue dialogue with diocese on the need for greater and better financial transparency
- There is a real need for freer and unedited communication and news, including from a lay perspective
- The formation of seminarians needs to be reviewed and overhauled with independent, lay involvement.
 - Formation needs more training in emotional I.Q., conflict resolution, and interaction with females
- Diocesan standards and protocols need to be improved to be in compliance with USCCB at a minimum
 - Whistle blower protection/conflict of interest policy
 - Independent audits of all entities controlled and under the auspices of the dioceses
- Consider having/holding Mass of solidarity with abuse victims and also to promote lay involvement in Church leadership, sponsored by CCOC. See if diocese or priests/deacons of the diocese will participate
- Consider having a summit on the topic of co-responsibility in our Church in the Diocese
- Consider vehicle to evaluate the leadership of the bishop. Lay-led. Effort. Could be attention getting.
- Can Pittsburgh Catholic be revived and reinvigorated with more lay input, incl. letters to the editor.
- Healing Commission on abuse with lay advisory role. Any reporting function?
- There is a large need for rating implementation and execution of the pastoral letter (of Spring, 2019) resolutions and recommendations. Many promises of accountability were made but have they been kept?
- Consider a “March for Change” focused on women’s roles in our Church
- Consider a quarterly Mass for CCOC members at sites rotating through diocese (N,E, S, and W areas)

Priorities for CCOC at a National Level

- WATCH (We Are The Church) This is a coalition of like-minded Catholic lay groups across Eastern U.S. and Canada.
 - How can we encourage an increase in WATCH membership with other similar groups that exist?
 - And how can we expand/encourage other lay groups to start in other cities?
- Consider engaging the USCCB on lay issues within our Church through WATCH
 - What issues will be priorities?
 - What allies in the Church hierarchy might we be able to enlist for help and to have solidarity?
 - Archbishop Gregory in D.C.? Bishop McElroy in San Diego? Cardinal Cupich in Chicago?
 - Others?
- Develop a message/narrative around CCOC's experience and that of WATCH
 - Publicize this message/narrative through the national Catholic media?
 - More progressive publications like America magazine? NCR?
 - Other more mainstream publications, like U.S. Catholic, Liguorian, and Sunday Visitor?
 - Would ads in these publications be an option?
- Build up networks of solidarity with Catholic groups that have been around much longer, but also those in their nascent stages of development
- Continue to advocate on the issue of greater Bishop accountability with lay involvement
- Advocating to the USCCB as well as a wider Catholic audience the need to implement Pope Francis' call for a more decentralized church, and one in which synodality will be expressed more