



CCOC

CATHOLICS FOR CHANGE IN OUR CHURCH

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

CCOC PROGRESS REPORT

Commemorating the Third Anniversary of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report on Clergy Sexual Abuse

November 4, 2021

CCOC PROGRESS REPORT ON THE THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF THE PENNSYLVANIA GRAND JURY REPORT ON CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE

[Lay Group Lauds Pope's Efforts to Change Church](#)

The Laity Are Called to Prophetically Love Our Church Into New Life

August 14, 2021 marked the third anniversary of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report on Child Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church. Three years and three months ago, this Report rocked the world, Catholic and non-Catholic. On the third anniversary, focus on the Grand Jury Report has dissipated. Progressive Catholic media wrote a few articles. CBS news was the only major secular news organization who did a story, and it was an effective one. (See [video and narrative at this link](#)) There was no pronouncement or apology issued by any diocese in Pennsylvania or elsewhere in the U.S. Church hierarchy and lay people alike want to “move on” without the apology and atonement needed for true reconciliation. The sin of clericalism remains powerfully present within our Church. [Catholics for Change in Our Church \(CCOC\)](#), an independent organization of Catholics in Pittsburgh seeking to reduce clericalism coupled with a greater role for the laity in the Church, was created in the fall of 2018. We released a [Public Statement](#) in August, 2019, on the one-year anniversary of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report on Child Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church.

Then, on the second anniversary in August, 2020, CCOC released a [Progress Report](#) which provided a two-year assessment of the changes occurring in the Church in Pittsburgh. That report gave an assessment for the efforts of the Church in nine categories, resulting in an overall grade of C-.

The key issues reflected in that grade included the fact that the bishop and many priests, deacons, and yes, laity, were unwilling or unable to concede the clerical structure of the Catholic church is not what Jesus envisioned. Also, there continued to be reluctance to acknowledge the pain and suffering of victims and survivors of clerical abuse and their families in the initial crimes committed but also in the systemic coverup within dioceses. This, unfortunately, was also the case with much of the Church in the U.S. and around the world. The result: little progress has been made by the Church hierarchy and most parishes towards dismantling clericalism within the Church.

Now, three years after its founding, CCOC continues to prophetically proclaim the need for laity and Church hierarchy to love the Church into new life. The Holy Spirit is blowing in our Church where it pleases (John 3:8.) And right now, the Spirit is inspiring laity in many groups around the world to claim our baptismal mission of being priest, prophet, and king. And once we do this, the Spirit is encouraging us to dismantle the clericalism that is harming the Corpus Christi (body of Christ) of the Church, and make the changes necessary for the Church to be the image of a loving and merciful Christ.

CCOC waited to release this Progress Report to emphasize the importance of the pronouncement just made in October by Pope Francis of a two-year period of discernment and journeying together by Catholics worldwide that will culminate in a synod on synodality in 2023. We are heartened by the encouragement offered in this historic initiative. CCOC has developed areas of focus outlined in this Report to support and impact the synodal process.

The Way Forward Rooted in Hope

Though the lack of progress in structural change within our Church is frustrating, CCOC and its members remain hopeful. The reason for this is a combination of prayer, scripture, and seeing the Holy Spirit animate activities happening everywhere.

Prayer helps us to remember God loves us unconditionally, appreciates our care for the Church, and is grateful for our willingness to remain within it despite its sinfulness. Through prayer, we can remain connected to the source of hope and be affirmed in trying to share God's love with our own Church, even when many in that Church seem indifferent or hostile to the message of change we bring to them. Prayer helps us to offer, as St. Ignatius does in his *Suscipe*, "...all my liberty, my understanding, and my entire will..." in service to others, including our Church, in recognition that all we have is a gift from God.

Scripture helps us remember God is with us, cares for us, and will bless our efforts to make the Church less clerical and more in the image of Christ. We read and re-read the prophets of the Old Testament, who desire to help the people of Israel stay close and remain faithful to an all-loving God. We focus on Jesus' words of admonishment and encouragement to his disciples and the Apostles to do the loving thing even if it entails suffering (Luke 9:23; Matthew 10:38, to name just a few.)

We are heartened by the Acts of the Apostles as the Spirit led early Christians to usher in a new way of thinking and being in community. And we are encouraged by the Letters of St. Paul that inspire followers of Christ to persevere (Romans 5:3-5), and fight the good fight and remain faithful to a God who loves us (2 Timothy 4:7.)

We in CCOC are also buoyed by seeing **the Holy Spirit working** through other lay-led groups in North America. This loose affiliation of similar groups is called WATCH (We Are The CHurch.) A list of WATCH members is attached at the end of this Report, but here are a few examples of why we find hope in them:

- Awake in Milwaukee (www.AwakeMilwaukee.org) has done superlative work lifting up the pain and suffering of those abused by priests.
- CAPACT in northern Virginia near Washington, D.C., has advocated the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) be more transparent and accountable, including regarding the Cardinal McCarrick Report and the need for a Lay Stewards Panel to be created and to be involved with any issue involving bishop malfeasance.
- Concerned Lay Catholics in Canada (www.ConcernedLayCatholics.ca) is making strides to promote co-responsibility in the Canadian Catholic Church.
- And the Movement to Restore Trust in Buffalo (www.MovementtoRestoreTrust.org) was instrumental in publicizing the need to respond to the abuse crisis there and in calling for a new bishop to be named when the former bishop refused to be transparent.

And we in CCOC believe the Holy Spirit has inspired Pope Francis to announce the synodal process, and to be fully committed to it, including hearing from marginalized lay Catholics about what they discern to be the needs of the Church at this point in history.

Seven Areas CCOC Will Focus Upon In The Next Year

Encouraging and Facilitating Synodality and Co-Responsibility

- Pope Francis has promoted both principles. Synodality means empowering faith communities to discern the best path forward for their area or region. Co-responsibility means real sharing of power and authority, not just lip service to the idea or small and inconsequential changes within the old clerical structure.
- Pope Francis has called a Synod on Synodality to occur in Rome in the fall of 2022. For it, he has called for engagement of the whole People of God to make fruitful the Synod on Synodality.
- Pope Francis has also called on all dioceses to hold their own diocesan synod. We applaud the dioceses of Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN; Lexington, KY; and Dallas, TX for commencing diocesan synod processes.
- CCOC welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with the Pittsburgh diocese on holding these sessions as part of the synodal process. CCOC was pleased to see Bishop Zubik offer a Mass on October 17 to begin the diocesan synodal process in Pittsburgh; we are prayerfully hopeful the process will be inclusive and transparent.

Promoting and Practicing Spiritual Resiliency

- Many Catholics, if not most, are spiritually tired and emotionally exhausted. Their faith has been shaken by what has happened in their Church, in our country, and in the world.
- We need to encourage Catholics to hope.
- This choice becomes easier if we give people the tools to pray, read scripture, and be aware of what other laity are doing to follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit.
- This includes gathering virtually and in person when possible to pray, reflect, form connections, and create a sense of belonging to a community with others who share our aspirations.

Redressing the Wrongs Within Our Church and Working to Be More Inclusive as a Church

- As a Church, Catholics need to celebrate, hear, and lift up those whose voices are not heard in the Church.
- We need to listen to victims of abuse and their families; all persons of color within our Church: Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and others; LGBTQ Catholics; separated and divorced Catholics; Catholics in prison and formerly imprisoned; homeless Catholics or those in transitional housing; women, the largest group in our Church not heard; and others.
- Many in the Church hierarchy as well as the laity need to open their hearts to the Spirit to hear these prophets. Let us pray for them and ourselves for this gift to be humbly received.
- CCOC continues to call for education and awareness on sexual abuse, support structures for survivors, and implementation of healing models, including those based on restorative justice. But we also need efforts at the diocesan, parish, and individual levels to help us open our ears and our eyes to those who are too often ignored.
- We will continue to collaborate with anyone who shares these goals.

Supporting and Promoting the Discerning Deacons Project

- The Discerning Deacons Project is a national initiative engaging Catholics in the active discernment of opening the diaconate to women. Pope Francis has formed a commission to consider ordaining women as deacons. The Discerning Deacons Project gathered the thoughts of over 1,500 Catholics on the topic of women in the diaconate and delivered a summary of that discernment to appropriate groups and individuals in Rome in October 2021, including Pope Francis.
- The Project has two objectives: (1) to educate Catholics on the history of the diaconate as well as its current status and (2) to gather the thoughts and hopes of the laity with regard to women being ordained as deacons.
- CCOC will support and assist the leaders of the Discerning Deacons Project to maintain and extend the momentum created by their initial effort in 2021.
- We encourage readers to visit www.discerningdeacons.org and learn more about this exciting initiative!

Organizing Liturgies of the Eucharist for Social Justice and Change in Our Church

- The COVID pandemic created many challenges for Catholics, none more than trying to have a meaningful experience of the Eucharist. Most CCOC members said the biggest spiritual loss they felt during the pandemic was not being able to receive the Eucharist.
- CCOC will sponsor monthly liturgies on the second Sunday of each month. CCOC will seek to model the type of Mass desired in our Church. Liturgies will be for in-person attendance but also simulcast through livestreaming virtually.
- These monthly Masses will express in their themes, music, Prayers of the Faithful, and homilies the core values from Catholic Social Teaching. CCOC believes that making social justice a priority can be an effective way of combating the clericalism plaguing our Church.

Collaborating with Other Lay Led Groups Who Want a Better Church

- In the past three years, those in CCOC have had the chance to connect with other lay organizations in Pittsburgh as well as in other parts of the country who also want to see our Catholic Church change for the better.
- We have been humbled and awed by seeing that the Spirit is inspiring people to pursue the same goals and changes that CCOC endorses. In fact, we believe it proves the Spirit is at work that so many people and groups are organically and independently being led to the same conclusions!
- In Pittsburgh, fruitful collaboration with the Association of Pittsburgh Priests and Pathways to Lay Leadership has occurred, most notably in virtual events that were held together during the pandemic.
- CCOC will seek to be a catalyst to deepening relationships among the various groups that belong to WATCH, to share successes and lessons learned in working toward real change in our Church.
- See the Appendix at the end of this Report for a listing of all the groups in WATCH we know about.

Working to Hold the Church Hierarchy Accountable

- CCOC has been disappointed in the Church hierarchy for not demonstrating more transparency and accountability in their activities and policies since 2018. The bishops through the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) have made a few notable public statements, but their actions have not been consistent with those public statements. Because of this, the USCCB has lost much credibility and trust from many lay Catholics in the last three years.
- Most concerning is the apparent attitude of many bishops in the USCCB to ignore the truism, “There can be no justice without accountability!” We laity and concerned clergy need to continue to call for accountability for and within our Church for all its members.
- CCOC calls on American bishops to advocate vigorously for an explicit and unambiguous statement accepting responsibility for their role in hiding many of the issues and details related to the clerical sex abuse of children. This statement would then be ratified by all the bishops at a USCCB meeting, and publicized widely. The USCCB could follow the example of their Canadian counterparts who in September, 2021, issued an apology for the abuse of indigenous people. (See link here: [Apology](#))
- CCOC calls on the USCCB to take concrete steps to guarantee lay involvement is a part of any process to hold bishops accountable. We support the initiative mentioned earlier from CAPACT to create a Lay Stewards Board. CCOC also calls on every 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 for each diocese; and solicit lay input into the review of each bishop’s performance.

CONCLUSION

On the third anniversary of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report on Child Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church, the sin of clericalism remains strongly present in our Church. The Church hierarchy and lay people alike want to “move on” without the apology and atonement needed for real reconciliation. In the face of such apathy, we are tempted to give up and seek a community of faith elsewhere.

But we in CCOC identify with Simon Peter in John 6:68-69. After many other disciples no longer followed Jesus because they found his teachings too difficult to accept, Jesus asked those remaining, “You do not want to leave too, do you?” To which Peter replied, “Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.”

Out of love, CCOC remains committed to being prophetic. And out of love for our Church we call ourselves, the Church hierarchy, and other laity to acknowledge our sinfulness, recognize our brokenness, place ourselves under God’s mercy and blessing, and seek to build the Kingdom of God here on earth and in our own Church without clericalism. We look to God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit for perseverance.

Helping to sustain us has been the transformative experience for CCOC members that we have encountered sharing our search for ways to make our Church better. Through our relationships with each other, the Spirit has been among us and been revealed in new and unexpected ways. The Spirit in and through us is forming a new experience of Church that we have not had before, one that is exciting, energizing and affirming. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, the Spirit has revealed that Christ is alive in our hearts. We will continue to work to dismantle and remove clericalism wherever we can and in whatever way is possible. We are and will be Eucharist for one another as we strive to make needed changes in our Church.

ABOUT CATHOLICS FOR CHANGE IN OUR CHURCH

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 1200+ 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.

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ON THE INTERNET

The CCOC website is: <https://ccoc-pgh.org/>, where you can find an electronic version of this report.

On our website, you can also learn more about our mission, our events and our leadership.

You can also join CCOC on the website at this link: <https://ccoc-pgh.org/register-with-us/>

(Continued on next page with Appendix)

Appendix to CCOC Progress Report 2021

WATCH (We Are The Church)

WATCH is an *informal coalition* of Catholic lay groups focused on *transparency* and *accountability* as it pertains to abuse within our Church. While our individual groups tackle these issues on a local level within parishes and dioceses, WATCH was formed to do two things:

- 1) Serve as a virtual gathering place to keep all of us pressing for positive change in our Church informed and connected with what other active lay groups are and are doing; and
- 2) At opportune times, **collectively mobilize** to advocate together around specific issues.

Here is the current list of WATCH supporting groups:

- Vienna, VA: Capital Advocates for Church & Transparency (CAPACT)
- Reston, VA: St. John Neumann Action Committee (SJN ACTION) (<https://saintjn.org/action/>)
- Reston, VA: Finding Your Voice (FOV)
- Baltimore, MD: Baltimore WATCH (BWATCH) (<http://www.stvchurch.org/2018/10/14/st-vincent-s-response-to-the-crisis-in-the-church-2018/>)
- Washington, DC and beyond: 5 Theses (<https://www.5theses.com>)
- Philadelphia, PA: Catholics 4 Change (C4C) (<https://catholics4change.com>)
- Philadelphia/Villanova, PA: WATCH – St. Thomas Villanova (<https://www.stthomasofvillanova.org/watch.html>)
- Chester Springs, PA: Catholics Actively Rebuilding Together (CART)
- Pittsburgh, PA: Catholics for Change in our Church (CCOC) (<https://ccoc-pgh.org>)
- Morgantown, WV: Lay Catholic Voices for Change (LCVC) (<https://www.facebook.com/Lay-Catholic-Voices-for-Change-2447187988668075/>)
- Wheeling, WV: A Church Together (ACT)
- Cincinnati, OH: Beyond the Scandal – Next Steps (BSNS)
- Buffalo, NY: Movement to Restore Trust (MRT) (<https://movementtorestoretrust.org>)
- Milwaukee, WI: AWAKE (<https://awakemilwaukee.org>)
- Minneapolis, MN: Catholic Young Adults Respond (YARespond) (<https://yarespond.wixsite.com/catholic>)
- Asheville NC: St. Eugene Committee on Child & Youth Protection (<https://www.steugene.org>)
- Charlotte, NC: WATCH Group (<https://www.stgabrielchurch.org/282>)
- Chapel Hill, NC: Abuse Response Team (ART) (<https://stmchapelhill.org/art>)
- Dallas, TX: Texas Catholics Advocating Transparency Abuse Response Team (TCAT)
- Seattle, WA: Heal Our Church (HOC) (<https://www.healourchurch.org>)

WATCH is always looking to expand its group of participating organizations!

If you are a part of a group of lay Catholics who want to join WATCH and benefit from being connected to other like-minded Catholics, we would welcome hearing from you!

Please contact Kevin Bae of CAPACT at kbae7223@gmail.com