



**Report to St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Ithaca, NY**  
**Results of Listening Sessions, Courageous Conversations, and Youth Ministry Sessions**  
**Related to the Clergy Sex Abuse Crisis in the Roman Catholic Church**  
**October 28, 2018**

**Background:** St. Catherine's heard from about 200 people from 12–80+ years of age through the following events:

- Listening Session—September 16
- Listening Session for Parents—September 23
- Middle School Sessions—September 23 and 30
- High School Sessions—September 23, 30, and October 7
- Courageous Conversation—October 1
- Prayer for Healing—October 19
- Courageous Conversation—October 21
- Listening Session for Young Adults—October 21

**Feelings expressed during these sessions included:**

Angry, betrayed, shocked, terrible, disappointed, sad, not surprised, embarrassed, hopeless, horror, fearful, frustrated, struggling, powerless, questioning, discouraged, disgusted, pissed off, cynical, confused, disillusioned, troubled, heartbroken, scared, uncomfortable, shocked, mortified, overwhelmed, worried, skeptical, outraged, manipulated, conflicted, disturbed, violated, mad, upset, surprised, ashamed, helpless, worn out, bad, despair, tired, in pain, let down, empty, devastated, dismayed.

**Some of the reasons for these feelings included:**

- Heartbroken for the victims.
- A sense of loss for the Church they had trusted.
- Awareness that the current revelations are just the tip of the iceberg and they don't know where this will end.
- Mad at the lack of action to address these problems by the leaders of the Church.
- A sense of powerlessness as a lay person in the Church.
- Dismayed that this wasn't fixed years ago when it was first brought to light.
- An awareness that this will cause more people to leave the Church.
- Struggling to talk to my own children about this—in a way that will not destroy their faith.
- Skeptical that there will be real change in the hierarchy to address the problems that allowed for the abuse of children and adults and the coverup by clergy, bishops, and diocesan personnel.
- The Diocese of Rochester doesn't seem to be doing anything—or listening to the people.
- Attitude of the Church around issues of sexuality.
- Homosexual people are being unfairly blamed for this crisis.
- Questioning if I still want to belong to the Church, and if I do, will it indicate that I am okay with what happened?
- There is a corrupt civic and ecclesiastic culture.
- All priests are being stereotyped for the actions of a few.
- There has been too much secrecy and too little transparency.
- Anger that powerful people used that power to make victims of the most vulnerable.

- Some members of our community were abused or saw abuse and were ignored when they tried to report the abuse to Church leaders.
- Some young people expressed that they felt safe here but were worried to leave this parish as they go to college and beyond.
- Bishops need to be held accountable.
- Women are often mistreated in the Church and the lack of leadership roles for women is discouraging.
- The Church protected itself instead of the victims.

Some people also expressed more positive emotions, including being hopeful that change is possible, grateful for the opportunity to talk about this with others, proud of their Catholic faith, and motivated to ensure that change happens. Many of our young people expressed that they feel safe within the parish and youth ministry.

**People expressed the following ideas about what they believe to be the root causes of this crisis:**

- There was no independent investigation; too much secrecy; not enough parents and lay people involved in oversight; too much reliance on attorneys and protection of the institution of the Church.
- Too much power in the hands of the bishops and hierarchy; abuse of power.
- Poor seminary formation and assessment of seminarians.
- A distorted understanding of human sexuality; St. Augustine's view of sexuality has created dysfunction in the Church and people.
- Clericalism; theology of the priesthood that says that priests are unique, special, different from laity beyond function.
- Celibacy that is not optional.
- There was no punishment for those who were complicit in the coverup.
- Institutionalism; loyalty to the institution over what is right; People of God were taught not to question Church teaching and by extension, Church leaders.
- People who reported were demonized and ignored.
- Church has suppressed the voices of women.
- Because the Church ministers to the poor, weak, and children, they have access to vulnerable people who are easy to victimize.
- The bishops were too concerned with money, which precluded them from admitting guilt; worries about what would happen to their resources if people know that what was happening was prioritized over care for the victims.
- Bishops and other leaders believed social scientists who said that predators could be fixed.
- When this crisis happened, there weren't any parents in decision-making positions.

*(continued)*

**People want Church leaders to be aware of:**

- We are not going to take it any more.
- We are not powerless.
- *We* are the Church.
- The Church as we know it has to be willing to die so that resurrection is possible.
- We need to see real, concrete action so that we know things are going to be different moving forward.
- We are so very upset about all of this.
- We are horrified by what has happened and are determined to correct it.

**People expressed a desire for the following, related to abuse and victims:**

- All bishops in the United States should resign as an acknowledgment that great harm and sin has been done by the Church throughout the country.
- There should be independent committees in charge of all abuse situations/cases—with parents, lay experts, scholars, etc. Priests, bishops, and diocesan personnel should no longer be involved in decision making.
- There should be real punishment for the priests who were involved and the bishops and other Church leaders who were responsible for moving people around.
- There need to be settlements for all victims.
- There needs to be transparency—an opening of the records, full participation in any grand jury investigations, etc.
- Listen to the victims; ask what they want and need.
- Ensure that police are involved in all cases moving forward.
- Church leaders need to sincerely apologize—to the victims and to the People of God.
- Stop relying on lawyers to protect the institution of the Church.
- We want and need to hear from Pope Francis.
- Public acts of penance from Church leaders—Pope Francis, Vatican officials, bishops, diocesan officials, USCCB.

**People expressed a desire for the following, related to the overall structure of the Church:**

- Laity is and should be equal to the clergy; we understand a difference in roles and responsibilities but want a stronger voice within the Church and decision-making authority in some situations.
- Give real, scholarly attention to the issues of human sexuality and transform the Church by what you learn; don't scapegoat or further stigmatize homosexual people in responding to this crisis.
- Review the vetting of seminarians; transform the training the seminarians receive and their formation.
- Open up leadership to women; the feminine voice and spirituality is desperately needed.
- Be open to priesthood that is not dependent on celibacy.
- All children should receive information about how to keep themselves safe from predators of all kinds.
- All parishioners should go through the Creating a Safe Environment (C.A.S.E.) training program.
- Lay people should have a say in who is raised up as their bishop.
- Study Scripture about equality and servant leadership—and then walk the talk.