

Abstract: Results of the Follow-up Questionnaire

Authors: Sebern, M., Von Roenn, G., Orr, C., Liska, C., Sanders, D.

Lumen Christi Human Concerns Commission, Mequon, WI.

Background: The Human Concerns Commission identified that clergy sexual abuse of minors and failure of church leadership (twin crisis) has had a negative impact on our parish. To better understand the impact of the twin crisis, Rev. Daniel Sanders, Lumen Christi pastor, conducted a listening session (11/2018), and the Human Concerns Commission conducted a *Follow-up Questionnaire* after the Parish Listening Session & Hon. Janine Geake's Presentation (4/2/19).

Aim: The aim of the follow-up questionnaire was to render a more complete understanding how the crisis affected a person's life as a Catholic and their thoughts on the reasons for the clergy abuse and coverup in the Church.

Methods: A voluntary, confidential, and anonymous follow-up questionnaire was distributed to parishioners attending Janine Geske's presentation, *Spirituality of Restorative Justice: Addressing the Abuse and Failure of Leadership Crisis in the Catholic Church* (4/2/19). Ninety questionnaires were distributed, and 41 completed surveys were returned (45% response rate). A sub-committee of the Human Concerns Commission conducted a content analysis of the completed follow-up questionnaires.

Results: The majority of respondents were female (65.9%, n=27), and 26.8% were male (n=11). Ninety-five percent of respondents were over 51 years old (n=39), with only 2 persons or 5% between 40-50 years. No respondent was younger than 40 years old.

Effects on Catholic Life. Nine themes were identified in the responses to the question, how has the crisis affected your life as a Catholic? These themes, with a brief explanation, are below starting with the most prevalent theme.

1. Spiritual desolation 48% (n=20). Respondents expressed emotional, spiritual, and physical hurt. Emotions *mentioned* included anger, sadness, disgust, embarrassment, shame, doubt, questioning, depletion of hope, and sickening feelings.
2. Loss of trust in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church 34% (n=14). People expressed loss of trust in the moral integrity and leadership of the church. There were statements such as, how can the hierarchy tell us how to live when they have committed these acts?
3. Family and friends left the church and no longer feeling comfortable inviting people to the Catholic Church was the next most prevalent 27% (n=11). Respondents stated they were discouraged to watch their children leave the Catholic church, and two generations of Catholics have been lost.
4. Destructive effects on family relationships were mentioned by 17% of respondents (n=7). For example, the crisis almost ended a marriage, and had a negative impact on a spouse who converted to Catholicism.
5. Abused. A few people stated they were abused or a close friend or family member was abused by clergy.
6. Donations. Some stated they have modified charitable donations and are less likely to financially give to the Catholic Church 7% (n=3).
7. No affect. Some stated they were not personally affected by the crisis 7% (n=3).
8. Structural Changes. Several respondents, 32% (n=13), made statements about a need to move forward and make structural changes in the church. For example, a need for the universal church to change how seminarians are educated and who is ordained. A need to include married men and women in church leadership and ministry roles. That our parish could start a lay movement to restructure the

Abstract: Results of the Follow-up Questionnaire

Authors: Sebern, M., Von Roenn, G., Orr, C., Liska, C., Sanders, D.

Lumen Christi Human Concerns Commission, Mequon, WI.

hierarchy of the church. Some respondents also stated our parish needs to apologize to parishioners who survived clergy abuse.

9. Spiritual growth. Some mentioned spiritual growth as a result of the crisis 9% (n=4). For example, Fr. Dan's listening session and Janine Geske's presentation were reported as respectful and thought provoking.

Causes of Crisis. Eight themes were identified in response to the question, what were the reasons for clergy abuse and coverup? These themes are listed below with brief explanations starting with the most prevalent theme.

1. Church hierarchy and laws were the most frequently mentioned reasons for the crisis 36% (n=15). For example, lack of accountability of hierarchy, hierarchy investigating the complaints made against them, mandatory celibacy contributing to the priest shortage, and ordaining unqualified priests.
2. Abuse of power and leadership failure were mentioned as reasons 27% (n=11). Examples of responses supporting the abuse of power were , power over others led to taking advantage of the less powerful, Vatican not taking action during St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI's tenure, and fear of scandal if truth was known.
3. Clericalism was mentioned as a reason for the abuse 22% (n = 9). For example, a belief that priests are above the laity, and a tradition of over-emphasizing the elitism and holiness of clergy.
4. Inability to assess, screen and/or remove men at risk, such as priest who feel no remorse for sexually abusing children, and child victims who perpetuate the cycle of abuse when they become priest 19% (n = 8).
5. An unhealthy understanding of human sexuality and treating sex as a taboo topic were also reasons 14% (n= 6).
6. Several respondents 24% (n = 10) believed the church would be healthier if women were not excluded from leadership and ministry roles.
7. Exclusion of laity in leadership roles and on lay clergy review boards was also mentioned 12% (n = 5).
8. Finally, homosexuality was mentioned by a few respondents as a contributing factor 7% (n= 3).

Conclusion.

These results only represent the attitudes and beliefs of the people who completed the follow-up questionnaire, and do not necessarily represent the attitudes and beliefs of the Catholic Church. The follow-up questionnaire found that the primary effects on parishioners' lives were spiritual desolation, loss of trust in the church hierarchy, and family and friends leaving the church. The primary causes of the crisis mentioned were the hierarchy's abuse of power, failure of leadership, and clericalism. To address harmed caused by the crisis, several respondents stated that the Vatican needs to make systemic changes to the structure of the church, such as inclusion of laity and women in ministry and leadership of the church.

Next steps.

The Human Concerns Commission and Parish leadership hosted the film Spotlight 10/12/19, and Rev Daniel Sanders hosted a parish listening session, 10/16/19, to continue to heal the harm caused by the clergy sexual abuse and failure of church leadership crisis. If you have questions about follow-up questionnaire contact Catherine Orr (262-512-8994).