Lay Leadership for a Wounded Church and Divided Nation: Lessons, Directions, and Paths Forward
National Convening Report

Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
# National Convening on Lay Leadership for a Wounded Church and Divided Nation

June 14-15, 2019
Georgetown University

## Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convening Goals and Structure</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Directions</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Outcomes</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Discussions</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summaries of Strategy Sessions</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay Leadership in a Wounded Church</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay Leadership in a Divided Nation</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convening Participants</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endnotes</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative Gatherings on Clergy Sexual Abuse</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“If one member suffers, all suffer together.”

1 Corinthians 12:26
Introduction

In his Letter to the U.S. Bishops, Pope Francis reminds us that “we are not solitary pilgrims, for ‘If one member suffers, all suffer together.’” The twin crises of clergy sexual abuse and leadership failure have led to horrific suffering for countless victim-survivors and for the entire people of God, and demand a faithful, urgent, and effective response. Lay women and men are called to turn our anger and anguish toward finding a path forward that ensures protection, accountability, reform, and renewal.

This report reflects one response to this call: the “National Convening on Lay Leadership for a Wounded Church and Divided Nation” organized by the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life and held June 14-15, 2019 at Georgetown University.

The Convening drew together a diverse group of over 50 leaders from across the United States. They were heads of major Catholic institutions and ministries, university presidents, leaders of lay efforts to respond to the clergy sexual abuse crisis, victim-survivors, and leading journalists and scholars.

This Convening was not just another conference. Like other Catholic institutions, Georgetown has focused significant effort on the abuse crisis. Our Initiative has organized six distinctive gatherings at Georgetown – drawing 1,500 people – to address different aspects of the abuse crisis (see page 18). This National Leadership Convening was different. After a year of revelations, reports, and discussions regarding clergy sexual abuse, we invited a relatively small group of respected, experienced, and diverse leaders from across the nation, not to listen to panel presentations and speeches, but to engage in candid and strategic discussion on four linked goals:

1. To share, explore, and consolidate lessons learned regarding the clergy sexual abuse crisis;
2. To strategize on directions for reform and renewal;
3. To examine the neglected costs of the crisis and how to revitalize the Church’s role in public life, especially the defense of the poor and vulnerable; and
4. To explore how principles of Catholic social thought can help advance protection and accountability, faithful reform, a renewed commitment to mission, and principled contributions to the common good in a wounded Church and divided nation.

Over two intense days rooted in prayer and the sacraments, these leaders built relationships across institutional and ecclesial lines, strategized on common priorities and actions, and explored how to refocus and revitalize the Church in order to spread the joy of the Gospel, serve God and our neighbor, and promote the common good.

This report leads off with an executive summary, which focuses on major strategic directions identified by Convening participants, initial outcomes of the Convening, and general summaries of each day’s discussions. More detailed sections summarizing our strategy sessions on “Lay Leadership in a Wounded Church and Lay Leadership in a Divided Nation” follow. These sections can be read together or standing alone.

This report summarizes what was discussed without suggesting that all participants agree with all the ideas and proposals that emerged, or that this is a complete response to this overwhelming crisis. It is solely a product of the Initiative. Our unique gathering was made possible by the essential support of the Connelly and GHR Foundations.

At the opening of the Convening, Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory of Washington, DC, declared that “as a pastor and archbishop, I know that we can’t make things better without the leadership of the laity. The Church in the United States desperately needs your experience and expertise, your challenge and leadership, not only on clerical sexual abuse, but also as we seek together to share our faith and live out the Gospel.”

The Convening was an effort to answer this call to leadership in these challenging times. This report summarizes lessons learned, along with principles and directions for a path forward. We look forward to continuing to work together with our pastors and other leaders to help ensure protection and accountability, and to renew our Church through a return to mission for our wounded family of faith in our divided nation.

John Carr, Director
Kim Daniels, Associate Director
Executive Summary

Convening Goals and Structure

This executive summary by the Georgetown University Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life outlines the goals, process, and substance of the “National Convening on Lay Leadership for a Wounded Church and Divided Nation,” a gathering of a diverse group of more than 50 mostly lay Catholic leaders who met on June 14-15, 2019.

The Convening was hosted by Georgetown University and its president, John J. DeGioia. It was led by John Carr and Kim Daniels, the director and associate director of the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life, with the assistance of five moderators: Stephen Colecchi, John Gehring, Jeanné Lewis, Elise Italiano Ureneck, and Christopher White. Archbishop Wilton Gregory of Washington, DC, opened the gathering, sharing his experience as a pastor and an episcopal leader.

The Convening sought to build on previous efforts to explore the causes, costs, and dimensions of the crisis facing the Catholic Church. This gathering had four goals:

1. To share, explore, and consolidate lessons learned regarding the clergy sexual abuse crisis;
2. To strategize on directions for reform and renewal;
3. To examine the neglected costs of the crisis and how to revitalize the Church’s role in public life, especially the defense of the poor and vulnerable;
4. To explore how principles of Catholic social thought can help advance protection and accountability, faithful reform, a renewed commitment to mission, and principled contributions to the common good in a wounded Church and divided nation.

The first day of the Convening focused on “Lay Leadership for a Wounded Church.” Together the participants explored the clergy sexual abuse and leadership crises with a focus on recovering institutional integrity.

The second day the focus shifted to “Lay Leadership for a Divided Nation” and an exploration of the costs of the crisis in public life and paths forward for sharing Catholic social thought at a time of polarization in our Church and country.

The two days concluded with strategy conversations on “Lay Leadership and Paths Forward on the Clergy Sexual Abuse Crisis” and “Lay Leadership in Public Life: Assessment and Directions.” This report follows that structure.
On Friday, June 14, Georgetown President John J. DeGioia opened the Convening, saying that “the presence of such an impressive group of major leaders from across our nation, with differing responsibilities and perspectives, offers a unique opportunity to find ways to work together to address this crisis and to renew our family of faith.”

Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory of Washington, DC, followed President DeGioia, declaring that “I feel the need to apologize personally once again for the horrific actions of abusers and the awful failures of leaders in our Church. I especially apologize to the victim-survivors in this room. What happened to you was evil. It wasn’t your fault, and leaders in our Church often did not listen or act to make things right.”

Archbishop Gregory also affirmed the importance of lay leadership, calling on participants to “focus on what we can do together to move from words to action and to bring about the conversion of heart and resistance to clericalism Pope Francis has called us to in his Letter to the People of God.” He thanked the participants “for your efforts to confront this evil, reach out to victim-survivors, tell the truth, challenge me and other leaders, and find ways forward.”

After this opening session and Mass together, the leaders moved into smaller strategy groups to share lessons learned, strategies and priorities to ensure institutional integrity and accountability, and paths forward towards renewing the Church’s role in public life.
Strategic Directions

There are numerous specific recommendations and strategies embedded throughout this report. This executive summary focuses on the major strategic directions that emerged from our discussions:

1. **Put Victim-Survivors at the Center of the Church’s Response**
   The original sins of the sexual abuse crisis were the failure to listen and believe victim-survivors as they told us what had happened to them and the terrible harm it caused, and the failure to act quickly and decisively to remove the perpetrators and to protect others. These failures occurred over the course of decades, and they continue to occur today. As the Church seeks repentance, justice, reform, and renewal, we must listen to victim-survivors, their families, and all those affected by clergy sexual abuse. There are still not enough victim-survivors in the rooms when decisions are made.

2. **Confront Clericalism, Overcome Isolation, and Support Faithful Clergy**
   Clergy sexual abuse cannot be discussed honestly without recognizing the toxic culture of clericalism. Some clergy are both isolated and arrogant, seeing ministry as a form of status rather than service. This self-reinforcing culture – often exacerbated by failures to embrace contributions from women, those with diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds, and other underrepresented groups – is too often accepted and reinforced by laypeople. A culture of clericalism can lead to abuses of power, and it contributes to and permits institutional cover-up of abuse. We need a new culture of candor that calls on laypeople inside and outside of ecclesial structures to challenge the insular and self-reinforcing culture of some chanceries and ecclesial institutions.

   Isolation also leads to denial of the seriousness of the problems we face. As one participant said, “I don’t believe the bishops truly understand the anger of the faithful and the deeply rooted feelings of estrangement and loss that so many people have.” Lay leaders can support clergy in their own efforts to resist clericalism by speaking with directness and fulfilling our own responsibilities. We can also take steps to help clergy become less isolated, including exploring new ways for priests to live and serve. Challenging clericalism and affirming priests who serve faithfully, selflessly, and pastorally are both essential to a path forward.

3. **Hold Leaders Accountable and Insist on Transparency**
   While much remains to be done, this past year has seen some welcome developments in Church law, practices, and policies aimed at holding bishops accountable for clergy sexual abuse and its cover-up, including the promulgation
of *Vos Estis Lux Mundi* by Pope Francis and related efforts by the U.S. bishops. But these partial steps towards accountability cannot take root unless Church leaders internalize and embrace them, and in the process change ecclesial culture and practice. Lay leaders must be directly involved to hold leaders accountable.

Transparency is an essential tool of accountability, and we should insist that bishops tell the truth with candor instead of making excuses or seeking to protect themselves or the institution. Bishops should recognize lay leaders as co-responsible partners in these efforts. The speed and openness with which these new procedures are carried out and the active and integral participation of laypeople are fundamental tests of ecclesial credibility.

4. **Focus on Seminary Formation**
Seminary formation needs fundamental review and reform. Seminaries should be less isolating, more connected with the reality of local parish communities, and more open to lay participation, partnership, and feedback. Seminarians are too often formed in isolation and set apart. Elite seminaries can be a particular problem, sometimes suggesting that priestly ministry is a privilege, and isolating future priests away from family and parish communities. Laypeople should have a significant role in educating and assessing future priests.

5. **Promote and Reflect the Diversity of the Church**
The diversity of our Church is a source of strength, not weakness. We find unity in this diversity, and this can and should ground our ecclesial life and public witness. The Catholic Church needs greater participation from those whose voices are too often underrepresented in Church structures, including women, African-Americans, Latinos, those from differing economic groups, and those with different political or ecclesial perspectives.

This will strengthen ecclesial decision-making, enrich our voice in public life, and better reflect the experience of in-the-pews Catholicism. We must be on guard not to replace a clerical elite with a lay elite that does not reflect the diversity of our family of faith.

6. **Focus on our Gospel Mission and Build Unity**
The Church needs to repent and reform not simply to repair its institutional and ecclesial life, but to renew and strengthen its capacity to preach the Gospel, celebrate the sacraments, and care for “the least of these.” The Church’s mission will not be whole or engaging without overcoming the evil of clergy sexual abuse. And it will be the mission of the Church carried out day by day which can ultimately help restore trust and draw the support and confidence of the faithful. As one person said, “We have to make this right. We are more than our institutional failures.”
Participants consistently held up the importance of Catholic social teaching in assessing the crisis and guiding ways forward. Traditional moral teachings on human life and dignity, human rights and responsibilities, solidarity and subsidiarity, protection of the vulnerable, and pursuit of the common good offer essential criteria for changing the ecclesial culture and contributing effectively to public life. For example, poor families have often been especially vulnerable to abuse, and there are terrible examples of abuse and mistreatment in Native American, Hispanic, and African-American communities within our family of faith. We need to act with particular vigilance and a priority for protecting poor families and vulnerable communities.

7. New Voices to Share Catholic Principles in Public Life
The sexual abuse and leadership crises have severely damaged the credibility and impact of Catholic hierarchical institutions in American public life. This is especially tragic at a time of national division when it is crucial that the voice of the Church be clear and credible in defense of the poor and vulnerable, the unborn and undocumented, and in advocating for religious freedom and racial justice. New leaders need to step forward to share the Church’s social teaching and everyday experience in order to effectively defend the weak and advance the common good. Lay women and men need to step up to the call to become salt, light, and leaven in the world. Yet too often Catholic laity reflect their party or ideology more than their faith. This is a time for faithful, consistent, courageous lay leadership in public life.

8. National Collaboration Among Ministries
Catholic ministries and institutions can help the Church and heal divisions in our nation by focusing on our Gospel call to serve the poor and marginalized. The leaders of Catholic ministries that care for the poor, sick, hungry, and homeless around the world and in our communities; who educate the young and care for the old; and who care for pregnant women and their children especially need to be the face and voice of the Catholic Church.

These ministries should look for additional opportunities to work together and consider more effective structures of collaboration, communication, and advocacy. Catholic social teaching offers a principled and unifying framework around which Catholic lay leaders can come out of our respective silos and come together in efforts to resist polarization, protect the vulnerable, and advance the common good.

9. Build Partnerships and Enhance Collaboration Among Clergy and Laypeople
Bishops and clergy must work in partnership and co-responsibility with lay leaders, respecting their different vocations and utilizing their experience and
expertise. For this effort to be successful, it will be essential to build trust between lay leaders and the hierarchy, inviting genuine dialogue and sharing of concerns, hopes, and best practices. This collaboration and exercise of co-responsibility needs to be real and not merely rhetorical.

There are many areas of Catholic leadership that do not require ordination, and it is imperative that lay women and men be encouraged to serve the Church using their skills and expertise to help the body of Christ. Convening participants noted that it is long past time for Church leaders to seek increased leadership roles for Catholic women. Had more women been involved in decision-making regarding the clergy abuse crisis over past decades, we would not be where we are today.

10. Be Both Humble and Bold

Convening participants consistently lifted up our need for the virtue of humility rooted in prayer and reflection. All members of the Church need to learn to listen more, reach out to others with differing backgrounds and perspectives, and move beyond ecclesial and ideological divisions to work together for the good of the Church. This is a time for humility and openness. At the same time, lay leaders should clearly share their anger, anguish, and sense of urgency. We have a responsibility to boldly promote renewal and reform in partnership with bishops and priests, and to boldly live our mission to care for the weak and advance to common good in our divided nation.
Initial Outcomes

The Convening itself was a significant achievement in bringing together over 50 outstanding leaders with differing ministries, backgrounds, and perspectives to share what we have learned and explore how we can work together to renew our wounded Church and revitalize efforts to work together for the common good in our divided nation. Other initial outcomes include:

1. **Producing and sharing this report**, with specific findings on what we have learned, what needs to be done, and what we can do together in response to the clergy abuse crisis and its impact on Catholic contributions to public life, including recommendations for follow-up action;

2. **Making connections and building relationships** among diverse leaders, many of whom had never been in the same room before;

3. **Sharing lessons learned and actions taken** based on our differing experiences and responses to the crisis;

4. **Coming together around common themes, analyses, and contributing factors to the crisis**;

5. **Setting directions for common and complementary action to repair, renew, and reform our wounded Church**. Strategy session topics included:
   - Listening to and Learning from Victim-Survivors: Safeguarding, Care, Responsiveness
   - Institutional Accountability: Dioceses, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Vatican
   - Diverse Lay Leadership: Development and Promotion
   - Overcoming Clericalism: Preventing Abuse of Power, Improving Formation, Promoting Service
   - Context for Reform and Renewal: Historical, Theological, Ecclesial

6. **Focusing specifically on the neglected costs of the crisis for public life, and on what can be done to provide leadership in sharing and applying Catholic social thought in a divided nation**. Strategy session topics included:
   - Faithful Citizenship in an Election Year
   - Policy Advocacy by a Wounded Church in a Divided Nation
   - Shaping the Debate: Communications in a Time of Crisis
   - Pursuing the Common Good in a Polarized Church and Nation
   - Reflecting a Diverse Church and a Diverse Nation

7. **Encouraging and empowering key lay leaders** to work together to carry out their own responsibilities as laypeople given co-responsibility with bishops to carry out the Church’s mission in the world; and bringing together leaders from the Convening to follow up on significant directions and priorities, working with other groups and leaders, in the months to come.
8. **Organizing a major Public Dialogue on these themes** including evangelical and conservative leader Peter Wehner; award-winning columnist Melinda Hennenberger; Jesuit Refugee Services leader Joan Rosenhauer; and Los Angeles pro-life and social justice leader Kathleen Domingo.
Strategic Discussions

Lay Leadership for a Wounded Church
Friday, June 14

The clergy abuse crisis has devastated the U.S. Catholic Church. The failures of Church leaders have broken and, in many cases, destroyed the lives and faith of countless victim-survivors. These failures have grievously hurt victim-survivors’ families and loved ones. The failures of Church leaders at every level have damaged the body of Christ, destroyed trust in the Church and the credibility of its leaders, and hobbled Catholic public witness. One quarter of U.S. Catholics report that they have gone to Mass less often and reduced their financial contributions to their parish or diocese as a result of the crisis. Seven in 10 Catholics and eight in 10 non-Catholics believe the Catholic clergy sexual abuse crisis represents an ongoing problem.

The human, moral, spiritual, and institutional costs of the abuse crisis are massive, ongoing, and in some ways immeasurable. Despite some significant efforts to address the crisis over the last 15 years, the loss of faith, trust, and hope continues to fundamentally undermine the mission of the Church.

Any discussion of clergy sexual abuse must start with the enormous impact the crisis has had on victim-survivors and their families. Every victim has the right to be heard, and listening throughout the Church is the key to providing justice for victim-survivors. Both acknowledgement and accountability are crucial to those who have suffered most directly from this crisis and others. Acknowledgement includes creating spaces for others to hear their stories, with anonymity and confidentiality for any who request it. Accountability includes concrete, clear, transparent consequences for offenders and those who covered up or failed to act in response to offenses.

Since the implementation of the 2002 Dallas Charter, the Catholic Church in the United States has made significant strides in its efforts to prevent and report instances of clergy sexual abuse of children. Lay leadership has been central to these efforts. In the wake of Vos Estis Lux Mundi, the important Church-wide clergy abuse norms promulgated by Pope Francis in May 2019, the June 2019 meeting of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) sought to close the gap in the 2002 Dallas Charter that failed to hold bishops to the same standard of “zero tolerance” for abusive priests. While this is a positive step forward, Convening participants thought that...
the involvement of the laity in the process of bishop accountability should be made mandatory, rather than merely a recommendation. Necessary changes in Church law toward this end should be pursued.

Clergy sexual abuse cannot be discussed honestly without recognizing that the culture of clericalism provides a context which permitted institutional cover-up of crimes. If more lay leaders, especially parents, were at the tables when decisions were made in these matters, those decisions would have been different. Clericalism is linked to a sense of entitlement, the exercise of power and, in some cases, abuse and corruption. Clericalism is widespread and not linked to particular ideological or ecclesial perspectives.

Participants discussed how clericalism begins in seminary formation. Seminarians are too often formed in isolation and set apart. A number of participants expressed concerns about elite seminaries where students are formed apart from families and friends, their special status is emphasized, and their future leadership is assumed. The need for reform of seminary formation is clear and compelling. Seminaries need to be less isolating, more open to the participation of lay women and men, more connected with the reality of local parish communities, and more open to partnership with, and feedback from, the laity. The review and revision of the Program of Priestly Formation: Fifth Edition needs to be serious, substantive, and must address the dangers of isolation, clericalism, and elitism. The review should seek significant and authentic input from laity and religious communities of men and women.

Convening participants shared that professional formation programs and professions outside the Church and its clergy face similar challenges. As a general matter, expertise and an institutional mentality can lead to an unhealthy exercise of power and privilege. Lay leaders should help connect bishops and those charged with seminary formation with leaders of other organizations that face similar challenges so as to learn from their experiences and practices.

As the Church seeks to build a new ecclesial culture anchored in missionary discipleship, genuine diversity must be a priority. Otherwise a clerical elite could give way to other narrow elites (such as major donors, academic experts, and other specialists). These elites do not bring a perspective from the margins, a perspective that Pope Francis frequently reminds us is essential. Diversity in race, sex, and socioeconomic background is critical for developing authentic lay leadership.

Conversations about clericalism need to avoid reflexive anti-clericalism and be supportive of priests, bishops, and the many challenges they face. The laity must acknowledge the ways in which some lay attitudes and actions have reinforced clericalism and helped to isolate clergy. A number of participants suggested considering the idea of a more participatory synodal approach organized around Catholic social teaching in response to the clergy abuse crisis. Bishops, priests, and laity working together can resist a clerical culture and create a culture of candor and collaboration.
For response efforts to be successful, it will be essential to build trust between lay leaders and the hierarchy, inviting genuine dialogue, candor, and mutual accountability. Bishops should not keep lay leaders at arm’s length, and vice versa. We need a Church built on servant leadership in which the roles of clergy and laity are mutually respectful and supportive, and in which proclaiming the Gospel, celebrating the sacraments, and living out our mission in the world are central. The principle of co-responsibility must move from ecclesial rhetoric to institutional action.

Many Church institutions and ministries are now lay led. These agencies and institutions, and their boards, can provide models of how to move away from clerical dominance and toward clerical-lay partnership. These structures also need to reflect the diversity of the Church in their governance and leadership.

Lay Leadership for a Divided Nation
Saturday, June 15

Our advocacy in the public square should be grounded in a humble admission of our own wounds and failings as we reach out to a wounded world. This Convening made a major contribution by prompting an overdue and much needed focus on how the abuse crisis has damaged the credibility and impact of the Church in public life and beginning an essential exploration of what can be done to repair and renew an effective Catholic voice in our nation.

Our national political climate is polarized and demoralized. The lives and dignity of the poor and vulnerable, including the unborn and undocumented, are threatened and diminished. Crucial principles on racial justice, religious freedom, and economic fairness are threatened. The Church has significant resources, teachings, and on-the-ground experience to help heal these divisions and contribute to the common good. With its focus on the dignity of the person and service to the poor and vulnerable, Catholic social teaching is a crucial asset. Although the public standing of Church leaders has been diminished, the on-the-ground work of the Church and its ministries offers a source of credibility for Catholics in public life.

Recent research confirms that care for the poor and vulnerable is a central concern for Catholics regardless of political party. This concern lies at the heart of Catholic social teaching. Catholics might disagree over how to best embody this in public policy, but our shared goal of caring for the poor and vulnerable unites us.
The effectiveness of Catholic participation in public life is diluted when Catholic agencies and institutions too often work separately. It is also undermined when the Church fails to embrace safeguarding as an essential part of its mission, and when polarization is amplified by the echo chambers created by media outlets and social media platforms on the right and left. We live in an era where instant and strident reaction is rewarded and prudence and civility are lost virtues.

Unfortunately, too often political affiliation drives U.S. Catholics’ views on a broad range of public issues more than Church membership does. On public policies related to abortion, climate change, government anti-poverty programs, and immigration, party affiliation is a stronger predictor of a Catholic’s position than their Catholic faith.6

The Church’s moral credibility has been seriously wounded by the abuse crisis, and bishops no longer possess the moral standing they once enjoyed in public life. Yet despite some shortcomings, many affirmed the values and principles in *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, a document of the U.S. bishops, as valuable tools. *Faithful Citizenship* reminds Catholics that we should think differently about our engagement in public life. Our faith should shape our politics, not the other way around.

Catholics often find themselves divided on key issues, political parties, and individual candidates, but Church leaders should harness the principles of Catholic social teaching and the call to *Faithful Citizenship* to build consensus and opportunities for common action to protect the lives and dignity of all.

Convening participants repeatedly emphasized the need for Catholic institutions and ministries to continue to lift up their focus on the poor and vulnerable and collaborate on overarching public efforts, as well as on communication regarding those efforts. Communication regarding the work of separate Catholic ministries can sometimes be too diffuse, but with consistent and proactive strategies, unifying language, and efforts to build bridges, the Catholic community could make a more effective contribution to public policy discussion and decision-making. National Catholic institutions and ministries should explore new ways to strengthen cooperation and unify communication and advocacy efforts.

With both humility and boldness, we must lift up our Catholic identity and unify our mission in the public square. We must resist the reflexive suspicion of those with different perspectives that too often undermines the unity of the U.S. Church. A crisis this profound should lead us to reexamine our own assumptions, listen to others with differing perspectives, and seek to build bridges and act together to bring the principles of our faith to public life. We should build on what unites us – our Catholic faith in action, the sacraments, and service to the poor and vulnerable – in order to lift up the “least of these” and advance the common good in a divided nation.
Summaries of Strategy Sessions

Lay Leadership in a Wounded Church

On June 14, the first day of the Convening, participants explored “Clergy Sexual Abuse and Leadership Crises: Recovering Institutional Integrity.” In addition to two plenary sessions, the overall group divided into five smaller strategy groups in order to examine various aspects of the crises:

- Listening to and Learning from Victim-Survivors: Safe-guarding, Care, Responsiveness
- Institutional Accountability: Dioceses, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Vatican
- Diverse Lay Leadership: Development and Promotion
- Overcoming Clericalism: Preventing Abuse of Power, Improving Formation, Promoting Service
- Context for Reform and Renewal: Historical, Theological, Ecclesial

The results of these strategy groups were discussed in plenary session. Together the whole group grappled with three questions:

1. What have we learned?
2. What needs to be done?
3. How can we work together to make this happen?

What have we learned?

The costs and consequences of the clergy sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church in the United States have been morally, spiritually, and institutionally devastating, and they are continuing. A recent study from the Pew Research Center indicates that one quarter of U.S. Catholics report that they have gone to Mass less often and reduced money donated to their parish or diocese as a result of the crisis.7

Seven in 10 Catholics and eight in 10 non-Catholics believe the Catholic clergy sexual abuse crisis represents an ongoing problem. A third of Catholics and half of non-Catholics say sexual abuse and misconduct is more common among Catholic priests and bishops than among leaders of other religious groups.

Victim-Survivors

Any discussion of clergy sexual abuse must start with the devastating impact the crisis has had on victim-survivors and their families and loved ones. The participants approached this conversation with great compassion and care, striving to honor the perspectives of victim-survivors. The group of participants included victim-survivors of clergy sexual abuse.
abuse, and they shared perspectives regarding how their personal experiences have affected their faith, their lives, and their views about effective responses to this crisis.

The participants noted that victims’ groups have been formally in existence in the United States since the late 1980s. These diverse groups serve victims in a variety of ways, including offering psychological support, engaging in advocacy with the Church and the wider society, documenting stories and narratives, and building networks that seek accountability within the Church.

The variety of groups is valuable because victims and survivors express a range of needs and desires in addressing the abuse that they have experienced. Although survivors hold diverse opinions about what needs to happen, they consistently express feelings of isolation and rejection, not only because of the trauma of abuse, but also because of the inadequate response of Church authorities.

The participants acknowledge that Church leaders have made significant efforts to prevent future abuse and to address some of the harm done to victims. Survivors have been invited to participate in conversations, to serve on Church councils and bodies, and to advise bishops and the Vatican. Despite these efforts, Pope Francis and other Church officials have clearly recognized that Church efforts have been marked by failures and cover-up rather than pastoral care for victim-survivors. As Archbishop Gregory said, “No one did enough.”

One response to meeting needs of victim-survivors, the creation of Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Programs (IRCPs), is being carried forward in a significant number of U.S. dioceses. As of the Convening, IRCPs have been created in dioceses in five states (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Colorado, and California). Such secular programs, independent of the Church hierarchy, help provide some compensation and a sense of acknowledgment to victim-survivors. Indeed, victim-survivors often express a desire for such acknowledgement of their experience by those administering these programs, and also by the Church.

At the same time, these compensation programs do not provide pastoral healing or accountability. Church authorities have not fully acknowledged the toxic leadership that led to not only physical but moral injuries. Addressing these grave injuries and building accountability involves multiple approaches from the Church and its leaders, as well as the criminal justice system. Diocesan structures have too often led to victims not being fully heard, diminishing the acknowledgement and apology that a pastoral response would provide.

Church Responses

Since the implementation of the 2002 Dallas Charter, the Catholic Church in the United States has made significant strides in its efforts to prevent and report instances of the abuse of children by clergy or lay persons/ministers. Lay leadership has been central to these efforts. Cooperation between laity and clergy is far more common today than a decade ago. Diocesan review boards have institutionalized lay leadership, and...
the Leadership Roundtable and other groups have developed serious plans to foster greater transparency and accountability. Survivors have been bold and courageous in the public square, challenging institutional complacency and demanding urgent action. Dioceses led by bishops who prioritize lay leadership and co-responsibility are emerging as models, and some dioceses have exceeded the requirements spelled out in the 2002 Dallas Charter.

We should be truly grateful for the work of responsible journalists, Catholic and secular, who have done so much to reveal the extent of the clergy sexual abuse crisis when too many were working to keep it hidden. Without in any way minimizing the depth of the harm done, some participants expressed frustration at some of the media coverage of the abuse, for example regarding the Pennsylvania grand jury report. At the same time, bishops are not in a position to make this case. Defensive strategies led by dioceses and bishops often lack credibility and impact. Lay leaders could take up the task of developing a strategy to provide greater context regarding the Church’s response, highlighting both what has been done as well as the great deal that remains to be done.

At its February 2019 summit on sex abuse, the Vatican focused on three major themes: responsibility, accountability, and transparency. These three pillars of reform are inextricably linked to one another and to overall reform efforts. The February meeting was an important global step forward that produced several concrete results, among them promulgation of safeguarding guidelines for the Vatican City State and the Curia. Many issues have yet to be dealt with; for instance, when bishops are “retired” or “resign” early in cases of abuse or mishandling of accusations, there often remains no formal explanation as to why. If bishop accountability is to be linked to institutional transparency, this practice must change.

Pope Francis’ May 9, 2019 motu proprio, *Vos Estis Lux Mundi* ("You are the light of the world"), is a positive step forward, strengthening the Church’s global response to clergy abuse and its cover-up, whether committed by bishops or others. It requires dioceses to establish reporting systems, mandates that all clerics and members of religious orders report abuse and cover-up to Church authorities, protects whistleblowers, requires metropolitan bishops to investigate allegations of abuse and makes provisions when conflicts of interest exist, and makes clear that laypeople can be involved in such investigations.

At the same time, many participants expressed doubt regarding the effectiveness and credulity of an approach that relies on investigation by the metropolitan archbishop, particularly given recent revelations regarding the handling of the investigation into Bishop Michael Bransfield of West Virginia and the behaviors and actions of several metropolitan bishops. In particular, for authentic accountability, the participation of credible laypeople in these processes is essential, not optional. Finally, many participants were frustrated that the guidelines adopted by the U.S. bishops viewed *Vos Estis* as a ceiling for responsive actions in regarding clergy abuse and its cover-up, rather than a floor from which they could seek to build through strong leadership.
The June 2019 meeting of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) subsequently enacted new standards for U.S. bishop accountability and conduct. Many of the Convening’s participants appreciated that the new directives close the gap in the 2002 Dallas Charter that failed to hold bishops to the same standard of zero tolerance for abusive priests. Even so, participants also thought that the involvement of the laity in the process of bishop accountability should be made mandatory, even if that first requires changes in universal Church law.

“It’s the laypeople who have done the heavy lifting,” said one knowledgeable participant. “What has not changed is the leadership culture,” said another. Lay leadership already exists in some places, but this is not the same as real inclusion in governing decisions. Advisory roles are not enough. And even when the laity is given a voice, it is often clergy who choose the lay leaders for consultative roles in the Church.

While the institutional Church has taken some positive steps regarding clergy abuse and its cover-up, laypeople remain anguished and angry, and rightfully so. So many abuse cases have been mishandled, and existing clerical culture can enable mismanagement at best and wrongdoing at worst. As one participant declared, “The laity’s refusal to move from Good Friday to Easter Sunday is prophetic.”

Participants also agreed that the reaction to, and analysis of, the scandal too often tracks the same divisions as other ideological and ecclesial issues. One participant observed that “right and left have entirely different narratives in terms of diagnosis and what to do.” Yet all members of the Church have suffered from the crisis, and this should be a moment to come together where we can to craft a path forward. In a crisis this serious, it is time to go beyond our own assumptions and preferences to find ways to listen, learn, and work with others with differing perspectives to advance a common and effective response.

For many young Catholics, 2018 was their first real experience of the clergy sexual abuse crisis. Many were not alive or not mature enough to have processed the 2002 revelations and response. Their experience of the Church includes the failure of the Church’s leadership at its highest levels, bishops’ mixed records on abuse, and scandals tied to larger issues of power, competence, and character. This makes our responsibility to respond boldly and effectively all the more important.

Church Cultures and Clericalism

There was broad consensus that institutional protection has historically trumped calls for transparency and impeded the development of appropriate responses to abuse, instead often aiding in its cover-up. It was widely agreed that movement toward Church accountability has almost always come from extrinsic pressure, rather than from within the institutional Church. Three major sectors provided this pressure: the media (e.g. the Boston Globe’s “Spotlight” investigation; the National Catholic Reporter’s groundbreaking work; Minnesota Public Radio’s reporting on Archbishop John Nienstedt); the laity (e.g. abuse survivors; parish/diocesan reform groups); and the criminal justice system (e.g. criminal charges, civil lawsuits, and grand jury reports).
Over the last year, many participants noted that there has been a growing conviction that cultural changes are essential within the Church and its leadership. While cultural change is essential – and Pope Francis has rightly championed it – a consensus also emerged that in order for these conversations to lead to actual change, we must make some important distinctions.

Clergy sexual abuse cannot be discussed honestly without recognizing that a culture of clericalism provided a context for institutional cover up of crimes and sins that in turn rested on a system that frequently marginalized the laity. If more lay leaders, especially parents, were at the tables of power when decisions were made to send abusive priests back into parishes, those decisions would have been quite different.

Confronting clericalism is not only about reshaping old structures and modes of thinking. There also has to be a conversion of mind and heart. In many cases, laypersons themselves are too deferential to clergy when it comes to decision-making and express discomfort with the exercise of lay leadership in the Church. The laity can put priests and bishops on pedestals and can defer to them in ways that reinforce the clerical culture. The routine use of ostentatious clerical titles, such as “Your excellency” and “Your Eminence,” can express and enable damaging forms of clericalism. Retiring such titles would be one small step towards changing the culture.

The participants observed that the abuse crisis in the Church is both a particular problem and a sign of a wider crisis rooted in the culture of clericalism. Clericalism is linked to a sense of entitlement, the exercise of power, and, in some cases, abuse and corruption. Clericalism does not appear to be linked exclusively to liberal or conservative ideologies. It is in some ways analogous to other harmful group cultures, such as those that can be found in some professional settings, but it does have a distinctly Catholic component.

For example, an overemphasis on the hierarchical structure of the Church can contribute to identifying it primarily with priests and bishops alone and can reinforce an unhealthy clericalism. The fact that Church decision-makers are almost exclusively men reinforces narrow thinking and unhealthy isolation. The temptation to try to protect the Church from scandal can be perverted into wrongfully protecting abusers or minimizing the damage they have done. In trying to protect the Church, leaders have made the crisis far worse and caused greater damage to the faithful and the body of Christ. Byproducts of clericalism include a focus on institutional protection and an allegiance to members of the clerical club, elevating both over the care and health of the whole body of Christ.
The participants know many good and holy priests and bishops who exhibit faithful servant leadership. These priests and bishops find ways to function within a clerical culture without being defined by it. They do not succumb to clericalism, despite the many structures that promote it. But some participants observed that diocesan priests, in particular, do not have structures for “fraternal correction.” And the record of religious communities is as bad as dioceses. Finally, too few bishops have lay leaders who will consistently tell them the truth and help hold them accountable. Clericalism is not an “us versus them” issue; it is not laity versus clergy. Both laity and clergy can foster clericalism, and the work of overcoming clericalism belongs to the whole Church.

Clergy Formation

Participants discussed how clericalism has its beginnings in seminary formation. Seminarians are too often formed in isolation. They often enjoy institutional privileges and a certain level of entitlement. Lay supporters of seminaries often reinforce the view that seminarians have made enormous sacrifices and should be treated with deference. Seminary formation is also hampered by the presence of too few women on seminary faculties, and too often those that are there do not receive the professional respect they deserve. Efforts to diminish the role of women in seminary life have been a serious mistake.

Since the publication of the 1992 apostolic exhortation Pastores Dabo Vobis on the “formation of priests in the circumstances of the present day” by Pope Saint John Paul II, there have been many improvements in seminary formation, especially the increased focus on “human formation” as “the basis of all priestly formation.”12 Some seminaries lift up care and concern for others and the promotion of fruitful service in bringing others to love God and neighbor, but implementation is uneven. To compound matters, there is little input from laity into the guidelines for seminary formation promulgated by the U.S. bishops.

A number of participants named elite seminaries as a particular problem. Seminarians are isolated from family and friends and the life of a local Church. Priests from these seminaries are told they are the “best and the brightest,” future leaders who will save the Church. Some participants reported that at times there is an expectation of clerical advancement that eclipses a focus on servant leadership. This climbing of the ecclesiastical ladder is exacerbated by the growing practice of bishops not being “married” to their local churches and the promotion of bishops to larger and “more desirable” dioceses. The practice of Pope Francis in refraining from naming monsignors may be one small way to help break the climb up the clerical ladder.

The pattern of isolation in seminaries persists in some priests being more connected to other clergy rather than to their parish communities. The assignment and evaluation of priests to parishes is done with little or no involvement of the laity and the communities they serve.
What needs to be done?

Respond to Victims-Survivors

In the eyes of many participants, Church authorities need to better acknowledge the suffering of victim-survivors, apologize for their failures, and take additional steps to increase accountability. These steps are necessary foundations in the Church’s response to the clergy sex abuse crisis. The Church needs to create forums for the public to hear the stories of victim-survivors and to preserve these testimonies for future generations.

The group discussed a variety of options to provide acknowledgement and a level of accountability based upon examples of impressive efforts found across the world, including:

- Sharing or posting victim-survivor testimonies at the diocesan level;
- Listening to and sharing victim impact statements as a part of seminary formation and in Catholic institutions;
- Restorative justice programs or truth commissions could provide additional pathways for institutional Church leadership to learn from and respond to the harms caused through clergy abuse and its cover-up. These efforts require that both parties be willing to share and to listen.

While participants believe that sharing testimonies can be a powerful step, anonymity, confidentiality, and agency are important as well. One survivor said that he is not interested in sharing his story with Church authorities, nor does he seek validation from them. Instead he seeks accountability. Another survivor expressed similar sentiments. This accountability should include offenders in both diocesan settings and religious orders, since too often accountability initiatives do not cover abuse committed by members of religious orders. The concrete consequences for offenders should be explicit and transparent.

The collective lack of justice and acknowledgement from Church leaders over decades also requires collective institutional acknowledgement, apologies, and accountability as well. Some participants called on bishops to engage in penitential practices and demonstrate outward signs of penance and humility. For example, some proposed that as one part of larger efforts, bishops should shed some visible signs of their episcopal office for a year, dressing and living more simply and engaging in more frequent practice of corporal works of mercy.

Embrace Diverse Lay Leadership

As the Church seeks to build a new ecclesial culture anchored in missionary discipleship, diversity must be more than a buzzword. Real diversity requires sustained commitment. Otherwise we risk continued reliance on clerical and lay elites – leading clerics, philanthropists and donors, experts, and the like – whose perspectives, while important, are too often overrepresented. Diversity will enrich our efforts to change the clerical culture and improve decision-making across the board. Diversity in race, gender, and socioeconomic background is critical for authentic lay leadership.
Diversity can also come from including representatives of the myriad other forms of ministry beyond the parish and diocese. Leaders in Catholic education, health care, social services, victim-survivor programs, media, and others should be at the table because their collective wisdom is a significant resource.

Leadership must be cultivated intentionally. Participants identified a need to strengthen existing pathways to participation for the laity and to develop new avenues for diverse lay participation. Pathways to lay leadership should be more accessible, and bishops cannot be the only gatekeepers. At a deeper level, a more developed theology of the laity is needed to frame structural reforms in a spiritual context that roots actions and policy development in discernment and conversion of heart.

Lay formation is often overlooked. Education and formation must be available and encouraged, especially in underrepresented communities. Cultivating lay leaders cannot be an afterthought. People drive organizational change and shape cultures. Investing in people and in leadership formation are essential. Too often dioceses, parishes, and other Catholic institutions acknowledge the role of the laity, but in practice do not show enough respect for lay leaders when it comes to positions, salaries, health benefits, and parental leave.

It is encouraging that lay leaders of both the USCCB’s National Advisory Council and the National Review Board for the Protection of Children and Young People gave strong and candid reports at the June 2019 USCCB meeting. These bodies need more visibility and a greater voice. Members of the clergy should be encouraged to respect and engage lay women and men. Clergy and laity together exercise co-responsibility for the life and mission of the Church, but too often bishops do not draw sufficiently from the experience of the laity in carrying out the Church’s mission to the world, or draw on those who they know and who will not offer diverse perspective or challenge the status quo or current leaders.

Some participants agreed that for far too long the Church has failed to come to grips with the fact that lay theologians have increasingly taken on the task of transmitting the faith in schools and universities. There seems to be distrust of lay theologians by some bishops and of bishops by some lay theologians. Collaboration is essential in order to deepen the Church’s self-understanding, development of doctrine, and theology.

As Archbishop Gregory said, “Bishops cannot and should not try to do this alone. When I fought for zero tolerance, I knew we could not move forward without participation from lay men and women. The Church desperately needs lay expertise. We need to be partners in reform, renewal, and mission.”
Address Clericalism

In order to move forward in this era of twin crises of abuse and of leadership failure, many participants felt that Church leaders must become more concrete about specific steps that can be taken to change the clerical culture. Some participants suggested that every Catholic organization consider this question: “How are we to bring about the end of destructive clericalism within our own particular culture?”

The participants supported open public discussions of clericalism involving both clergy and laity. These conversations should be supportive of clergy and avoid becoming anti-clerical. The laity must own the ways in which lay actions have reinforced clericalism and isolated clergy. At the same time, more clergy need to acquire what Pope Francis calls “the smell of the sheep.”

More fundamentally, for too long virtually all decision-making has been tied to ordination, helping entrench clericalism. This leaves almost all significant decisions in the hands of men, impoverishing the Church’s ability to make well-formed decisions and thus to act effectively. This is particularly true when it comes to decisions regarding the abuse crisis. Women bring distinct perspectives to the table. A much greater involvement of women in decision-making is a matter of justice; when it comes to resisting clericalism, it is essential, and simple common sense.

To welcome a new era of cultural change in the Church and of accountability for bishops, participants noted that it is ultimately most important for Church leaders to create a vision of what they are aiming to create, not merely what they are hoping to prevent. How can we become a Church built on Gospel mission and servant leadership in which the roles of clergy and laity are mutually respectful and supportive and in which proclaiming the Gospel, celebrating the sacraments, and living our mission in the world are central?

Structural Changes

Participants generally welcomed the actions by the Vatican after the February 2019 Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church, including the promulgation of Vos Estis Lux Mundi. At the same time, many expressed fears that bishops will find excuses to stymie courageous or innovative action. Many participants recommended that necessary changes in canon law be made to rectify conflict-of-interest issues that the metropolitan plan does not protect against, to mandate lay involvement, and to empower episcopal conferences to have authority over individual bishops should they be defiant or deficient in implementing protection and accountability requirements.

Significant changes are needed to truly challenge clericalism. Like other professions and ministries, performance appraisals of priests ought to be routine and to have responsible lay input. Lay advisory boards ought to be established at every level of church governance. Bishops themselves ought to be encouraged to have lay sounding boards or advisory...
groups. Other proposed challenges based in the Church’s communication of its teachings and its response to the abuse scandal. Since distrust of the Church’s clerical leadership is widespread, some proposed a search for a theology of trust and transparency to enhance our understanding of how to place trust in human leaders at the helm of a divine institution. And given that so many, especially the young, are leaving the Church, how the Church communicates these teachings to young people is of vital importance.

Clerical Formation

There is a clear and compelling need for efforts to make seminary formation less isolating, more connected with local parish communities, and more open to engagement with, and input from, the laity. Screening of seminary candidates could be improved. Formation programs could be more integrated into university settings, where seminarians can interact with women and men, lay and religious. More women need to be appointed to teach in priestly formation programs, and there needs to be a look at how appointments are made and by whom. Church teaching must be respected within a more diverse faculty representative of the diversity of the Church in service to the world.

Beyond seminary formation, there is a corresponding need to promote the continuing education of priests more broadly. Participants pointed to research demonstrating a particular need to enhance formation in Catholic social teaching for both priests and seminarians. Priests should have opportunities to interact with lay experts and to have laity as co-learners in various program settings.

To help overcome the isolation of priests in parishes, it is important to facilitate their engagement with families in their communities. This interaction with families needs to be done in ways that do not simply have priests gravitating toward like-minded parishioners. It may be necessary to address the large size of many parishes that makes it difficult for priests to know the members of their community personally. One promising initiative that reduced seminarian isolation promoted the “adoption” of seminarians and priests by mature Marriage Encounter couples.

The movement of priests from one parish to another is not necessarily a problem in itself; the problem is the perception of vertical movement with insufficient consideration for the needs of parishes. The laity should be consulted in considering parish assignments and other ecclesial positions.

How can we work together to make this happen?

Empower Laity

Clergy and laypeople must remember and respect the baptism of all and the authority that is proper to both. What is frequently lacking is genuine respect and appropriate empowerment of the laity. This is necessary for victim-survivors, their families, and laypeople more broadly in order to hold bishops and the Vatican accountable. Outcomes
of the June 2019 USCCB meeting offer some movement in this direction. Many participants want to see stronger accountability mechanisms, mandated lay participation, and a deeper examination of the power exercised by Church authorities.

There were differing perspectives on how to ensure lay responsibility, participation, and empowerment. Some thought that laypeople should take a more active role in holding Church authorities accountable, and that we should shift the Church’s culture by recognizing the right and responsibility of the laity to do so. Others advocated for less of a lay focus on bishops and the Vatican and more on directly serving, protecting, and supporting victim-survivors and ministering more broadly to a wounded world.

A consensus emerged that while Vos Estis Lux Mundi and the subsequently enacted U.S. bishops’ guidelines provide a necessary step forward regarding lay involvement, lay involvement in the investigation of bishops accused of abuse or its cover-up should be mandated, not merely strongly recommended, even if this requires changes in Church law. Participants pointed to programs within the Church and its institutions that are worth sharing and considering. For instance, Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Programs (IRCPs) are now present in over two-fifths of dioceses around the country. These voluntary programs allow for victim-survivors to pursue their abuse claims outside of court. Victims whose cases fall outside the statute of limitations can seek compensation under these programs and cases can be handled in a responsive and expedited manner. Auditing programs established by the Dallas Charter are another example of responses that rely on lay experts to evaluate and assess claims independently from Church officials, providing an extra layer of accountability and impartiality in the process. While these are not complete solutions, they offer steps in right directions.

Finally, given the loss of credibility of Church leaders in the wake of the abuse crisis, it’s important to underscore that responses to the crises cannot come solely from Church officials, but have to involve the broader Catholic community.

Training
Every victim has the right to be heard, and listening throughout the Church is key to providing justice for victim-survivors. The Church too often has a culture of silence,
denial, or minimization of abuse. Formation programs should include effective training and opportunities to learn these skills, skills that will improve the culture of the Church well beyond the clergy sexual abuse crisis.

Participants noted that the offices dedicated to child protection are crucial and have made major contributions to improved responses. At the same time they are insufficient in themselves to ensure full institutional commitment and proper implementation of safeguarding norms. Building on ongoing efforts, every ministry must be required to have training and education in the protection of minors and vulnerable adults. Victim-survivors should be given opportunities to be a central part of these efforts, meet with ministry leaders, and share their stories; they can be powerful teachers. The Church, through parishes, dioceses, apostolates, and ministries, must also address persistent root causes of the crisis as we form clerical and lay leaders for the future.

Vatican

Some participants believed that in order for necessary changes to occur, Vatican officials need to come to a more complete understanding of the clergy abuse crisis and internalize its devastating human, moral, spiritual, and institutional fallout. Leaders of the universal Church are called to the conversion of heart that Pope Francis has urged. Many participants agreed that when it comes to necessary responses from Rome, much more is needed: deeper awareness, changed attitudes, greater urgency, higher priority, and strong and quick action.

Several participants noted the need to address the backlog of abuse cases before the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Others suggested the creation of a global database of accused priests and bishops managed by an office of the Vatican or another body, even though complicated legal questions have to be addressed. This mechanism could be more effective than current procedures in preventing priests who are accused in one country from going on to serve in another country unnoticed. There is a long history of bad actors gaming the system and taking advantage of the fact that crucial information is not always shared country-to-country and diocese-to-diocese.

In order to further aid in transparency, some suggested that the laity should have a role in the vetting process for potential new bishops. There is a clear need for broader consultation in the selection of bishops, such as inviting lay and clerical leaders into a carefully structured process to help assess the needs of the local Church, offer names for consideration, and vet potential candidates.

While of course only the pope has the authority to name a new bishop, some suggested that the nuncio, along with the Vatican’s Congregation for Bishops, would benefit from broader consultation and greater transparency regarding those under final consideration so that hopes and concerns could be voiced prior to an individual being made a bishop.

Bishops

During the June 2019 U.S. bishops’ meeting, some bishops proposed a formal evaluation system for implementation of Vos Estis Lux Mundi as well as the related, newly enacted U.S. guidelines. This would assess whether bishops and dioceses are meeting accountability
goals and determining where improvements might be made. Many participants endorsed this suggestion, and while no mechanism currently exists, suggested that lay groups working alongside bishops could help fill this void. This will require greater openness and new kinds of leadership from our bishops. leaders willing to champion bolder transparency and accountability measures. Many of the lay leaders felt it essential to consider concrete ways to encourage and work alongside these bishops, as well as ways to help other bishops to follow their example.

Over the last year there has been a dramatic increase of dioceses across the country releasing lists of names of priests and bishops who have been credibly accused of abuse. While this practice has been welcomed as a necessary step toward transparency, participants recommended the establishment of common definitions and standards for the release of these lists to help bishops and their dioceses produce credible, accurate, detailed, and comprehensive information. Among other information, these accounts should include when and where abuses occurred, how such cases were handled or adjudicated, and an accurate timeline of events. Participants also recommended that dioceses and religious orders improve their own recordkeeping so that personnel files for priests and bishops can contain more complete and accurate information going forward.

There is an important need for greater communication and collaboration to share best practices, useful resources, and lessons learned. Suggestions included more structured opportunities for bishops and lay leaders to share challenges, responses, tools, and experiences. Likewise, parishes, universities, and organizations dedicated to lay leadership should come together to reinforce best practices, share their efforts, and promote reform.

Bishops could also consider engaging outside expertise in analyzing ecclesial, corporate, and institutional cultures to help gauge the strengths and weakness of current arrangements and to recommend reforms of Church structures and decision-making processes that respect the differing roles of clergy and laity, as well as the urgent need for renewal and reform.

The group agreed that there ought to be more opportunities for bishops to participate in structured conversations with lay women and men, as well as priests and religious, on the impacts of the crisis, paths forward, and opportunities to work together to advance the Church’s mission. Current arrangements can isolate bishops, and they could benefit from participating in discussions with a more diverse set of Catholic leaders in public life. Lay leaders of national Catholic organizations should partner with bishops, and not just the usual suspects, to help shift the clerical culture to one of servant leadership. Engaging with bishops in smaller settings will also help build trust and help guard against an oppositional “laity versus hierarchy” dynamic. Even though Catholic leaders and organizations have distinct roles, we are all in this together.
**Lay Collaboration**

Those gathered expressed a genuine desire to make connections and pursue effective collaborations in service of healing our wounded Church. Catholic university presidents, clergy abuse survivors, women and men religious, heads of Catholic ministry agencies, Catholic social justice advocates, media professionals, philanthropists, and others all have vital contributions to make at this time of crisis. The group encouraged the development of smaller affinity groups, where people who share common opportunities and challenges can develop particular response efforts suited to their resources, abilities, and circumstances. Now is a time for less isolation and more collaboration in carrying out the mission of the Church.

Catholic lay leaders need to be more creative. Formal statements from Church authorities often fail to connect with most people in the pews, and we can learn from writers and artists using different mediums. We know that incisive and engaging examination of the abuse crisis from the perspective of survivors, experts, and advocates can help illuminate and heal.

At a time of deep polarization in the Church and politics, Catholics are called to model both candor and charity. The group encouraged the creation of more opportunities for Catholics across the ideological spectrum to gather and break down barriers that create mistrust, increase divisions, and prevent common action for the good of the whole Church.

One participant noted that universities “could serve as an independent voice and resource” as the Church moves forward in the clergy abuse crisis. Theologians and historians ought to teach the abuse and leadership crisis as a distinct area of study. Classes like this have been designed at several Catholic universities and have been well received. Additionally, scholars could draft case studies about the clergy abuse crisis that include expert assessments from various disciplines. These could be provided to Church leaders, particularly during training for newly appointed bishops.

Leaders from academic institutes and lay organizations offered to serve as sites for data collection and research on issues that dioceses might not be equipped or prepared to take up. There is significant work already being done on how to strengthen Church operations in areas of financial management and human resources.

The Church considers parents to be the primary teachers of faith. One group suggested developing resources for parents to discuss the clergy sexual abuse crisis with their children and offer reasons to hope and remain in our community of faith. Updating training materials, including VIRTUS training, with new technology, new victim-survivor testimonies, and information related to leadership accountability will also serve to emphasize the importance of safeguarding and accountability.

---

**At a time when formal statements from Church authorities often fail to connect with most people in the pews, we can learn from writers and artists using different mediums. We know that incisive and engaging examination of the abuse crisis from the perspective of survivors, experts, and advocates can help illuminate and heal.**
Many lay leaders present recognized their obligation to communicate more than their grievances to bishops. We also have an opportunity to encourage and support them, and to provide them with our experience and expertise. A shared commitment emerged to better understand the experience of today’s bishops and to accompany them in their mission.

The damage wrought by the clergy sexual abuse crisis cannot be forgotten. We need a depository of victim-survivor stories before too many of those involved pass away. Some major efforts under consideration include an effort to collect and archive video testimonies. Many victims find the telling of their stories cathartic. Diocesan newspapers could devote pages to the stories of victim-survivors on a regular basis. At the same time, we must respect the dignity of victim-survivors and remember that they are more than their victimization.

Clericalism

In his August 20, 2018 Letter to the People of God, Pope Francis says clericalism “tends to diminish and undervalue the baptismal grace that the Holy Spirit has placed in the heart of our people. Clericalism, whether fostered by priests themselves or by lay persons, leads to an excision in the ecclesial body that supports and helps to perpetuate many of the evils that we are condemning today. To say ‘no’ to abuse is to say an emphatic ‘no’ to all forms of clericalism.”

As members of the one body of Christ, laity, religious, and clergy must work together in efforts to overcome dangerous isolation and destructive clericalism. In his Letter to the People of God, Pope Francis went on to say that addressing clericalism and sexual abuse will require “every one of the baptized” to be “involved in the ecclesial and social change that we so greatly need.... Without the active participation of all the Church’s members, everything being done to uproot the culture of abuse in our communities will not be successful in generating the necessary dynamics for sound and realistic change.”

Participants pointed out that other institutions and professional cultures face challenges similar to those faced by Catholics in confronting a clerical culture. Professional expertise and a guild mentality can sometimes lead to an unhealthy exercise of power and privilege in other settings as well. The leadership structure of corporations, universities, and social service agencies can lead to cultures of competition and exclusion, and even abuse and corruption. At the same time, there is a particularly Catholic component to the clericalism evident within so many dioceses and other Church structures. The hierarchical nature of the Church, the fact that key decision-makers are almost exclusively men, and the ingrained desire to avoid scandal all permit and magnify the problem.
Catholics must work together to address this unhealthy clerical culture. A consistent theme was that the crisis involves at its core an abuse of power, authority, and trust. Participants discussed a number of practical suggestions. Lay leaders should offer to host an interdisciplinary discussion of identity formation and power with clerical leaders in order to share best practices and work together towards changing this culture. Lay leaders should directly engage bishops and those charged with seminary formation and connect them with leaders of other organizations that face similar challenges regarding power dynamics and relational challenges.

For clergy themselves, resisting a culture of clericalism should start in the seminary and be an ongoing process throughout a priest’s career. Resources for the continuing formation of priests could utilize long-distance training modules and involve clergy and laity learning together. Continuing Education Units (CEUs) across a number of relevant subjects are an ongoing requirement for all clergy and professional lay leaders in the Church.

The U.S. bishops’ Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life, and Vocations has the mandate to address both priestly formation and continuing education of priests; it also assists with issues concerning the life and ministry of bishops. According to a 2018 report the committee is reviewing the Program for Priestly Formation and is scheduled to submit its proposed revisions at the November 2019 USCCB General Assembly. This process should involve broad and intentional consultation with key leaders and communities in the Church, including victim-survivors, lay leaders, and those who collaborate with priests. This is not a time for business as usual on the review of seminary formation. A process by bishops for bishops without broader consultation would be a sign of the problem, not a solution. Laity and religious communities of men and women should have significant input into these proposed revisions.

Finally, many Church agencies and institutions are now led by laypeople. Consider Catholic education as an example. Relatively few schools are led by a priest or religious. Educational professionals with a strong sense of Catholic identity capably lead many schools and other Church agencies. At their best, these agencies and institutions, and their boards, can provide models of how to move away from clerical dominance and toward clerical-lay partnership. Catholic schools and other Catholic education, health, social service, and relief agencies offer practical examples of ways to enhance the engagement of laity in positive and productive partnerships with priests and bishops. We should also acknowledge that more work is necessary to ensure that Catholic identity and mission is clearly reflected in all the ministries of the Church.

Major reforms should focus on promoting accountability and transparency, ensuring that the voices of survivors are heard, ending the culture of clericalism, adopting outward signs of repentance, and praying for the reform and renewal of the Church.
Lay Leadership in a Divided Nation

On June 15, the second day of the Convening, participants explored “Catholic Social Thought in Public Life: Costs of the Crisis and Paths Forward.” As the first day brought together lessons and directions in addressing the clergy sex abuse crisis within the Church, this second day focused on beginning an overdue conversation about how the crisis has affected the voice of the Catholic community in public life and what can be done to renew and strengthen our public witness.

In addition to two plenary sessions, the overall group divided into five smaller strategy groups in order to examine various dimensions of lay leadership in a divided nation:

- Faithful Citizenship in an Election Year
- Policy Advocacy by a Wounded Church in a Divided Nation
- Shaping the Debate: Communications in a Time of Crisis
- Pursuing the Common Good in a Polarized Church and Nation
- Reflecting a Diverse Church in a Diverse Nation

The results of these strategy groups were discussed in plenary session. Together the whole group grappled with these questions:

1. What do we know?
2. What are opportunities and challenges?
3. How can we work together?

What do we know?

Catholic Social Teaching

The participants noted that the Church has significant resources to contribute to public life at a time of division and challenge in our nation, including an extensive network of institutions, respected leaders, experience caring for the poor and vulnerable, and our well-developed body of Catholic social teaching that provides both an analytical framework and a grounding for the development of effective responses.

For example, a consistent ethic of life is reflected in the USCCB’s Faithful Citizenship efforts and in Pope Francis’ warnings against a throwaway culture. However, one participant suggested that a Catholic committed to the consistent ethic of life championed by Pope Francis could not win the nomination of either political party or be approved to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court or in a major executive post. Some U.S. Catholics feel politically homeless, unable to fully embrace the agenda of either political party or recent administrations. And yet participation in political life is a moral obligation and civic duty. As an institution the Catholic Church is called to be political without being
partisan, principled without being ideological, civil without being soft, and engaged without being used.

This means Catholics can be “salt, light, and leaven” in our demoralized and polarized politics. It is also our best hope for our public advocacy to bear fruit. As an example, Catholic Relief Services, working with the USCCB and other religious and secular partners, has been part of a successful effort to protect national investment in poverty-reducing international assistance over several federal budget cycles.

Nonetheless, the challenges we face are real. As both political parties have used abortion and immigration as wedge issues, for instance, public advocacy for core Catholic commitments to supporting unborn life and welcoming, protecting, and integrating migrants has faced significant challenges.

By making explicit reference to Catholic social teaching in their contributions to public life, lay leaders can provide a moral foundation for our public witness, advocate more effectively, and help advance the common good.

**Lay Leadership**

The Convening participants agreed that the clergy sex abuse crisis calls for more lay leadership in the public square, not less. Catholic leadership and participation need to come from the broader Church, not just the hierarchy – from below and not just from above. The clergy abuse crisis has dealt a crushing blow to the Church’s credibility and moral authority in public life, not to mention its costs in time, focus, and resources. In this climate, the Church cannot rely on episcopal leadership alone.

A number of participants argued that we must demonstrate that the Church is more than our ordained ministers, as important as they are. Lay leaders will need to step up to increased responsibility to lead in efforts that convey Church teachings on contested public issues and advocate in the public square, working cooperatively with the Church’s hierarchy and clergy in these efforts.

**Faithful Citizenship**

The clergy sexual abuse crisis and the resulting loss of Church leaders’ credibility have hobbled Catholics’ ability to effectively advocate in the public square, a particular problem as we approach the next national election. Since 2007, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility* has served as the teaching document of the U.S. Catholic bishops on these issues. The document was revised and adopted by the full body of bishops in 2015. It has been reported that ahead of the 2020 national elections the document will receive a new supplemental letter and accompanying videos, but no substantive revisions.

Research shows that the positions of Catholics on a broad range of public issues of concern to the Church can be driven more by party affiliation than by Church membership. On public policies related to abortion, climate change, government anti-poverty programs, and the border wall, party affiliation is a stronger predictor of a Catholic’s position. In
some ways politics has displaced religion as the source of a worldview for many people in our divided nation.

Many participants agreed that the basic principles embodied in Faithful Citizenship offer a strong foundation, though some felt it may not adequately express the priorities of Pope Francis and nor reflect current national challenges we face.

**Principled Catholic Participation**

Research shows that care for poor and vulnerable people is a central concern for Catholics, regardless of political party. Such care lies at the heart of Catholic teaching. Catholics might disagree over how to best embody this in public policy, but they are united by the goals of caring for the vulnerable, reducing poverty, and lifting up those on the margins of society.

Yet participants agreed that effective grassroots mobilization of Catholics today is very challenging. Many lay Catholics have been demoralized by the sexual abuse crisis, and the unifying power of our faith been weakened by political polarization. The Church itself is caught up in such polarization. The divisions in public life are increasingly seen in Catholic life, as politics can shape our faith more than faith shapes our politics. This trend damages our ability to be united and effective in the public square.

At the same time, Catholic ministries report that public officials and other civic and national organizations seek their help in advocating for public policies that serve the common good in accord with Catholic principles. The on-the-ground experience of the Church and its agencies continues to give the Church credibility in public policy debates. The Church’s social services, international aid programs, educational institutions, and health care agencies anchor our advocacy in real life experience. Although the moral voice of the Church and its bishops as an institution has been weakened by the sexual abuse crisis, other Church actors can still make a difference in these public conversations.

The advocacy efforts of Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Relief Services, and other national Catholic entities suggest a path forward. In many ways, our Church’s outreach to the poor and vulnerable is the most persuasive face of the Church today. Yet there remains a gap between policy advocacy by the USCCB, national Catholic agency staff, and broad parish-level engagement. Many agreed that national Catholic structures need to expand parish outreach as a key to mobilization. Some participants cited the successful broad-based and grassroots effort in California to resist legislation that would require violation of the seal of confession in order to address clergy sexual abuse.

The power of these institutions and the broader Catholic community working together could have a multiplier effect. We know that Catholic witness in public life is more effective when Catholic ministries, institutions, and others collaborate and work with common purpose. In order to forge such alliances, Church organizations should consistently avoid the use of the divisive or polarizing language so common in our political and social culture. The language of Catholic social teaching can offer alternatives to our toxic political, cultural, and partisan battles.
Communications

In these difficult times, effective Catholic witness in public life requires strengthened, proactive, and coordinated communications strategies. Along with longstanding challenges in this area, participants observed that an increased lack of trust in the Church’s official leadership has helped lead to an increased resistance to the Church’s stances on public issues. One participant noted that the Church cannot hope the abuse issue goes away so that it can get back to the “regular business” of its mission. Insofar as the Church fails to embrace safeguarding as an essential part of its mission, its public image and mission effectiveness remain compromised.

Many participants were disheartened by Church leaders’ communications strategies in the wake of the revelations concerning former cardinal Theodore McCarrick and the Pennsylvania grand jury report. Even as some individual bishops made clear statements, offered support to victim-survivors, and engaged in public acts of penance, overall participants felt that the bishops’ communications in the wake of the McCarrick revelations were defensive, institutional, uncoordinated, unrepentant, defensive, and at times, tone-deaf.

The silence and divisions in the aftermath of Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò’s attacks on Pope Francis were particularly destructive. It seemed like the suffering of victims became just another way to advance narrow ecclesial and ideological agendas and divide the Church.

Adding to these challenges, in today’s social media landscape Catholic commentators are advancing conflicting and sometimes inaccurate understandings of the clergy abuse crisis and paths forward. A cacophony of commentators has created more confusion among the faithful. Some Catholic media outlets have also contributed to ecclesial division by pursuing ideological agendas over accurate reporting and journalistic best practices. And of course many Catholics receive their news about the Church from the secular media, whose coverage often lacks the context and nuance that Catholic media can provide.

Polarization

Many participants agreed that polarization in the Church reflects and is driven by deep divisions in secular politics and the broader national culture. Others observed that some responses to the clergy abuse crisis have exacerbated existing ecclesial divisions. The ideological agendas and echo chambers of media on right and left, along with the influence of Twitter and other social media platforms, often serve to harden and worsen ideological positions. We live in an era in which instant reaction and negative attacks are rewarded, and prudence and civility are lost virtues. Election seasons inflame these tendencies even more.

A number of participants lamented the frequent lack of basic knowledge and understanding as well as the distortion of core principles of Catholic social teaching.
This is especially problematic since Catholic social teaching rejects false choices and could help us navigate the challenges of polarization. There was some concern about how “common good” language can be helpful in the current climate. Some recognized the value of recovering the power of this historic principle, while others worried that traditional and abstract language can fail to connect and persuade, particularly with younger Catholics.

While we must be clear-eyed about the challenges we face, efforts to promote Catholic social teaching and the search for common ground are more important than ever.

**Diversity**

One of the strategy groups explored the role of diversity in addressing the clergy sexual abuse crisis. Its members acknowledged that the participants in the Convening itself lacked sufficient diversity, largely due to the organizational lay leadership pool from which it drew.

Participants discussed the various aspects of diversity and their importance. Racial, ethnic, and gender diversity were seen as essential requirements for moving forward. In addition, participants also suggested that diversity of thought, experience, and perspective are required as well. The Church needs to be committed to and vigilant about recognizing and advancing true diversity in our Catholic communities, especially in moments of crisis.

Some concluded that we do not yet reflect a diverse Church, and we are far from doing so. We often have an “illusion of inclusion.” Some hiring requirements within church institutions can place important positions out of the reach for many. To make matters worse, Church officials too often see non-white communities superficially. “Hispanics” are not a monolithic group, for instance, but are often lumped together, even though they have differing nationalities, experiences, gifts, and needs. The increasing number of Asian Catholics, including immigrants and refugees, are often ignored. The differences between African Catholics, Caribbean Catholics, and African-American Catholics in our nation are too often neglected. Convening participants pointed out that this diversity of the Church makes our community better equipped to address the sexual abuse crisis and to make an essential contribution in our pluralistic nation. The Church is blessed and can lift up the witness of those with a broad range of lived experiences, allowing us to understand and contribute to national life more effectively and broadly.

When we fail to reflect the diversity within the Church, we can allow abuse to fester, especially in communities of color and without power. Participants agreed that had Church leaders more often included women in decision-making regarding how best to prevent and address clergy sexual abuse, we would not be where we are today.
What are opportunities and challenges?

Integrity

Many participants agreed that there are a number of crucial challenges that must be addressed to strengthen and renew the Church’s public witness in social and political life. The clergy sex abuse crisis itself is a huge burden and undermines our credibility and impact. Improving accountability and transparency regarding the clergy abuse crisis is critical. As long as there is a public perception that Church leaders continue to fail to acknowledge past errors related to the clergy sex abuse crisis and are not fully accountable and transparent about these failures, the moral voice of the Church will be compromised, and its advocacy will be less effective. It will be difficult for the Church to champion human rights and justice for all if it is not perceived as dealing justly with victim-survivors of clergy sexual abuse and all those affected by it.

Polarization

The participants widely acknowledged the toxic polarization of our political system as another major challenge. It is one thing to be partisan; it is another to be polarized. This polarization is worsened by the role of money in politics. Ideological and partisan actors on both ends of the spectrum are using considerable financial resources to drive polarization on a broad range of issues. When combined with structural electoral issues and the rise of social media and news ghettos, polarization works to suppress civil dialogue on many critical matters facing our nation. It also undermines leaders and efforts to seek common ground and the common good.

Many participants agreed that principled disagreement and vigorous debate in our Church and in a pluralistic democracy are healthy. “Open and fraternal debate makes theological and pastoral thought grow,” Pope Francis has said. “That doesn’t frighten me. I look for it.”18 Civil debate grounded in mutual respect should be welcomed. In contrast, toxic polarization corrodes trust and deepens tribal factionalism. Catholics need to encourage and practice civil disagreement, do what we can to eradicate toxic polarization, and offer examples of people working together across ideological and ecclesial lines to advance the Gospel and the common good.

Catholics should model a faithful citizenship that is distinctive from the secular political culture. Catholic teaching offers us a vocabulary for rejecting false choices, and a consistent ethic of life framework can help us challenge partisan agendas and narrow ideologies.
A number of participants said that we need more spaces where Catholic progressives and conservatives can meet, build trust, and address polarization. Some of these encounters will be at gatherings like this one, but we also encourage smaller, more personal settings that foster intimacy and informal exchanges.

Catholics who engage with social media, especially Twitter, should use prudence and slow down before reacting. We live in an age of instant reaction, but speed can shed more heat than light. We should never reduce our perceived opponents to caricatures. We should not question motives or someone’s commitment to our faith. Charges of “not being Catholic enough” have no place in our discourse. *Ad hominem* attacks are a wound on the body of Christ.

We need to show more openness, humility, and curiosity toward those with whom we disagree. Parishes could play an important role in facilitating conversations that bring people together and help them develop a deeper, more authentic understanding of the common good. As Catholics, regardless of our party or political ideology, we are called to one Eucharistic table. Our communal faith life should bring us together, not simply provide another forum for combat.

*Catholic Social Teaching*

Catholic social teaching offers a vocabulary and framework that can build bridges across divisions in public life and serve the common good. We should look for opportunities to promote it within Catholic institutions and in the public square.

The fact that Catholic social teaching is not more broadly known and taught seriously hurts the capacity of the Church, and its institutions, to educate and mobilize for sound public policies that protect human life, promote human dignity, and advance the common good. To compound matters, many clergy are not familiar with the Church’s body of social teaching and its major principles and may not be comfortable preaching on the full range of the Church’s concerns. If this tradition is not reflected in our homilies, taught in our schools, or shared in our media, it is not really available to most Catholics.

Catholic social teaching also offers opportunities to build bridges. For example, a focus on addressing the root causes of immigration might be a good entry point that avoids immediate polarization on the issue of migration. Adopting policies that help support prospective parents and reduce the incidence of abortion may be another. Care for creation can also be an effective entry point to learning more about Catholic social teaching generally, particularly for young people, based on the conviction that “everything is connected,” as Pope Francis repeatedly reminds us in *Laudato Si*.

Support for human life and dignity, for the unborn and the undocumented, and respect for freedom of religion and care for creation can bring us together and offer an alternative to the predictable and disfunctional status quo.

In addition to greater coordination of Catholic institutional and agency advocacy, there are significant opportunities to create and promote resources that engage in-the-pews Catholics with Catholic social teaching and advocacy efforts informed by this teaching.

---

*Catholics need to encourage and practice civil disagreement, do what we can to eradicate toxic polarization, and offer examples of people working together across ideological and ecclesial lines to advance the Gospel and the common good.*
If Catholic social teaching is the Church’s “best kept secret,” it needs to be shared more broadly, deeply, and effectively. Once they know more about these principles, many Catholics find that it offers a helpful moral framework for public life.

Faithful Citizenship

In light of the abuse crisis, many participants felt that the biggest challenge in promoting Faithful Citizenship is the fact that it comes from the U.S. bishops. If the past year has made one thing evident, it is that bishops no longer have the same public standing that they once enjoyed. The clergy abuse crisis has severely impaired the bishops’ capacity and credibility in the public square.

Faithful Citizenship does not promote a political party or agenda, but rather offers principles for prayerful and thoughtful consideration. But there has been a tendency for some Catholics to try to use or misuse it as a voter guide, offering a rationale to support their own preferences or decisions regarding which candidate or party to support in a particular election.

Tensions felt by Catholic voters are often healthy. Some participants suggested that both major political parties in the United States have core positions that are in stark opposition to significant Catholic teachings but warned against the temptation for Catholics to disengage altogether. Another consequence raised by some participants is that, since both parties fail to live up to the full range of Catholic values, there can be paralysis at moments when it may be appropriate for Catholics to call out an entire political party for their violation of a particular Catholic principle. Lay Catholics bear a responsibility to bring Catholic principles to public life and to work with other people of good will to shape public policies.

Some argued that the current version of Faithful Citizenship lacks adequate reflection on the necessity of assessing the character of a candidate when considering whether to vote for him or her. They also noted that too often political mobilization in our country relies on identifying an “enemy” to defeat. This approach is inconsistent with the Catholic call to recognize the dignity of all human beings and the sinfulness of demonizing others.

Despite the challenges of Faithful Citizenship, some participants suggested that it is useful in insisting that participation in political life is a moral obligation and requirement of our faith. It serves as a reminder to Catholics that they should think differently about their engagement in public life based upon their faith. The title itself, “Faithful Citizenship,” implies that citizenship is a vocation. It is something that one should be conscious of every day rather than just every four years.

Some participants suggested that the “issues” section of the Faithful Citizenship document is a useful tool in forming individual consciences. While the document may present challenges when it comes to making decisions regarding candidates or parties to support because of the binary nature of elections, the moral principles offer a framework for common Catholic action and coalitions with others on the human and moral dimensions of public issues, beyond the requirements of the ballot box.
More Effective Communications

A group of participants pointed out that every crisis presents an opportunity. The Church has the opportunity to communicate its profound sorrow and demonstrate that its response to clergy sexual abuse and cover-up reflects its most deeply held principles: solidarity, justice, and the dignity of every human person, with a preferential option for the weakest among us.

Coordinating internal and external communications poses one significant challenge to and opportunity for the Church. At times the institutional Church can be so focused on public strategies that it forgets to communicate effectively to its own members; at other times the opposite is true. A multipronged approach, led by professionals who understand the faith and best practices in communications, is essential.

There was a group consensus that lack of unity, clear messages, and common action among bishops are too often destructive and demoralizing. Bishops need to talk to one another more often, with greater depth, candor, and mutual accountability. They can join with lay organizations that work with many dioceses to find ways to facilitate this communication and sharing of best practices. Bishops need to regularly work with lay leaders and communications professionals, including those who are not dependent on the bishop or who have potential conflicts of interests, to ensure that their words and actions are effective and responsive.

The Church should also regularly seek data on how people know, understand, and respond to the clergy sex abuse crisis and leaders’ efforts to address it. According to the Pew Research Center, 62% of Catholics said that they have heard a lot about the crisis, and 95% have heard at least a little.20 This raises additional questions: where are Catholics hearing about the crisis? From their pastors? From the bishops? From the media? More information on where Catholics are learning about the crisis could better inform a communications and outreach strategy.

Some thought that the Church should consider adjusting the language it employs, especially in addressing broader audiences. For many people, including Catholics, the “inside baseball” language used by Church leadership to talk about the crisis – in letters, statements, and with the press – is distant, abstract, and sometimes even unintelligible. Terms related to abuse of power; violations of trust, justice, and human dignity; and rights resonate more than more arcane theological language. At the same time, bishops and institutional voices should be very careful using broad language about “healing” and “forgiveness.” They should focus on protection, accountability, reform, and justice as ways to make healing for the Church a possibility.

Finally, some participants noted the importance of translating materials related to the crisis for diverse populations, including Hispanic and Asian Catholics. The lack of such outreach could lead to another wave of distrust and anger down the road. Latino and other communities experience the crisis in different ways and need particular tools and assistance.
Deeper Diversity

A deeper diversity – a valuing of different perspectives – is scriptural. We have all been given charisms through baptism and confirmation in the Holy Spirit, and we are called to these gifts to advance the Gospel of Christ.

This is not to say that living in a diverse environment in close proximity is easy. Increasing the diversity of an organization or community can increase conflict in the short term, but ultimately leads to more creative solutions and ideas in the long term if the group works through the conflict. Achieving equity is even more challenging. It requires acknowledging power structures and dynamics, then making specific choices to ensure that despite differences in power, everyone’s gifts are included, and everyone’s needs are met.

Clerical and lay leaders who have authority or responsibility in Catholic institutions may be ill-equipped to deal with conflict that can come with increased diversity, or to provide supports to help those who are different from most others. Even if leaders themselves are able to navigate challenges, other people in the community may not be. There is a need for the Church to offer more guidance in light of Catholic social teaching regarding how to address and navigate such conflict and about how to lead others in doing so.

We often speak about the value of “diversity,” but we are not always comfortable with real “difference.” Commitments to diversity often translate to postures of welcoming, which allow us to retain control and back away when we want. Instead, some participants suggested that we need a posture of homecoming – sharing and ceding control to people we perceive to be different from us.

Clergy sexual abuse not only harms victims and their families directly, but efforts to address the vast harm done take attention and resources from other important priorities and ministries of the Church. Furthermore, those experiencing poverty, displacement, incarceration, and other acute life problems have little opportunity or capacity to focus on the clergy abuse crisis given the other challenges in their lives. Tragically, some victims of sexual abuse by clergy also face these other injustices. Church institutions, many of which are led by laity, are struggling to respond to the needs of the wider world and the larger Church community, and they are facing shortages of funding, staffing, and even recognition of their work.

Church organizations should acknowledge the diversity within our Church and world, including the challenges that Catholics from diverse cultures face. Different cultures can have attitudes and norms around sex and sexuality that too often are not taken into account when Church authorities design responses to the clergy sexual abuse crisis.

Cultural norms also affect how differing communities and laypeople perceive and interact with Church authorities. Latino Catholics have differing experiences, expectations,
and interaction with clergy that shape how clergy sexual abuse has happened and been addressed in these communities. Other groups, particularly black Catholics, may distrust the Church hierarchy because historically some Church leaders have neglected their parishes by divesting from Catholic institutions or sending poorly trained priests to serve in the midst of the severe trauma or challenges of their neighborhoods.

Narrow solutions or one-size-fits-all responses developed by a small group of people who lack diversity cannot take into account the range of cultures and practices within our Church. This shortcoming becomes even more dangerous when applied to violations on the scale of the sexual abuse crisis.

How can we work together?

Wounded Healer

We are a wounded Church that reaches out to a wounded world. We are a sometimes-divided Church serving a divided nation. Our advocacy in the public square today should be grounded in the need to humbly admit our own wounds as we seek to reach out to a wounded world. This means, among other things, acknowledging the sins and crimes perpetrated by Catholic clergy and those who covered up their actions, implementing accountability measures, and promoting healing and justice for victim-survivors and their families. Only then can the Church’s on-the-ground experience of serving “the least of these” serve as an authentic and powerful witness in public life.

Faithful Citizenship

A broad consensus emerged that faithful citizenship as a vocational calling should begin before people reach voting age and, consequentially, new attention should be given to forming the consciences of younger people, particularly of middle and high school ages. Since Catholic social teaching is the backbone of Faithful Citizenship, participants widely agreed that there is a great need to improve education regarding Catholic social teaching in religious formation, especially for seminarians, as they will become the pastors who pass on the faith to future generations.

If Catholic social teaching is seen as the church’s “best kept secret,” leaders need more collective efforts to create tools and resources that help us more effectively share these principles. Many Catholic universities and some parishes are already doing this, but we need more sustained and creative efforts to connect Catholic teaching to contemporary political and moral issues in ways that bring Catholics together in service of the common good.

One group asked “How do we train the trainers?” The group reflected upon how individuals who are responsible for passing on Catholic social teaching might receive better formation to empower them to train others. Some participants suggested launching workshops to offer high-level training for individuals in key positions. Given that Faithful Citizenship has traditionally received attention from Catholic leaders and those in the pews only during a presidential election year, some suggested that there be
a renewed commitment to promoting it as a vocational document for Catholics to use as a tool for discernment and action throughout the year, every year.

In that process, however, many participants noted that the Church must improve the manner in which it talks about political principles such that its approach does not come across as overly intellectual or elitist. Too often, some noted, terms like “solidarity” or “subsidiarity” are used by Catholic leaders without making the effort to share their meaning and relevance today.

Others noted that we should pay more attention to the changing makeup of the U.S. Catholic Church and the fact that voters are increasingly non-native English speakers. In aiming to promote Faithful Citizenship, all Church resources should be made available in multiple languages, with efforts made to reach a variety of audiences so as to accurately reflect the rich diversity of the Church.

While Catholics may find themselves divided over individual candidates and policies, Church leaders should harness the principles in Faithful Citizenship to build consensus and momentum and to provide opportunities for common effort among Catholics, working with others who share our principles.

Communications and Collaboration

Participants repeatedly emphasized the need for Catholic ministries and institutions to find more ways to work together on communication regarding overarching issues, with a focus on the poor and vulnerable. Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Relief Services, the Catholic Health Association, the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, Jesuit Refugee Services, and a host of other national Catholic agencies should find additional ways to come together on communications that can bolster their individual efforts. Beyond enhanced coordination, Catholic agencies should coordinate with lay and other movements on advocacy efforts. These efforts should involve communications and other professionals.

Catholic media often provides important context and substance when reporting on the Church’s efforts in public life, and participants agreed that it should be supported and encouraged in these critical roles. Participants also agreed that a responsible use of social media – one that resists ideological or ecclesial polarization and works for unity rather than division – will be essential for helping the Church. Diocesan and institutional communications officials should find ways to work to move from a defensive posture to proactive, coordinated, positive action, whenever possible. In public advocacy, it is helpful to point to what the Catholic community does, as well as what we believe.

Overcoming Polarization

Catholics need more forums where those who disagree about ideology or politics can come together in conversation and dialogue. Creating these opportunities is the collective work of Catholic parishes, universities, and other respected Catholic institutions with convening power. Whenever there are gatherings that bring people together across lines, we should always be asking: “Who is not at the table?”

At a time of deepening racial tensions and anti-immigrant sentiments stoked by political leaders who have used demagoguery and fear to divide, many felt that Catholics must
address racial inequality and an exclusionary nationalism directly. While parishes are sometimes divided by race and ethnicity, pastors who lead different congregations (urban/suburban, black/white/Latino) can play a constructive role by bringing communities together for worship and Masses and other gatherings.

Catholics in public life have a responsibility to help bridge divides as well, such as finding opportunities to talk and work with leaders from differing parties, positions, and perspectives. An “unusual suspects” commentary or op-ed co-authored by a Catholic perceived to be liberal and a Catholic perceived to be conservative, for example, is a powerful way of combating a culture of polarization. This act of showing common ground and civility, while seemingly a small gesture, can send a significant message in a time of national division.

Embrace Diversity

Participants agreed that embracing and respecting our differences and working to correct longstanding imbalances of power will help us to become the body of Christ with all our differing gifts and burdens. The divisions in our society require a Christian response that helps to overcome the polarization that separates us as a nation and in our politics. A new approach is required, an approach that values our spiritual gifts, moral principles, and unique perspectives as people with diverse experiences.

Many participants emphasized the need to move from talk to action in advancing diversity in our ministries, parishes, and other institutions. In their leadership roles as lay Catholics, they observed the need for institutional goals and a concrete plan to advance diversity. For example, some Catholic institutions have included questions about equity, inclusion, and mission alignment in their application and evaluation processes. Other institutions have created senior positions for equity and inclusion.

A number of participants were inspired by the idea of considering a more participatory synodal approach organized around Catholic social teaching in response to the clergy abuse crisis and the broader challenges facing our community of faith. Bishops, priests, and laity working together can explore how to resist a clerical culture and create a culture of candor and collaboration to renew and strengthen our mission in the world.

Together, lay leaders can promote a more unified vision that will then strengthen our individual efforts. On a practical level, lay leaders and institutions could more effectively coordinate communications efforts in order to unify our work in the public square. The “Share the Journey” campaign for migrants and refugees might serve as a model for this kind of effort.

At the same time, lay leaders must also work in partnership and co-responsibility with bishops. Together bishops, priests, and laity can resist a clerical culture and create a culture of candor and collaboration. We should be witnesses to God’s work among those who are poor or in any way marginalized, and our collective witness should inform public policy.
In his January 2019 Letter to the U.S. Bishops, Pope Francis reminded us that healing from the clergy sexual abuse crisis can only come through a “clear and decisive focus” on our Gospel mission, and that unity is critical to that mission. He emphasized that “credibility is born of trust, and trust is born of sincere, daily, humble and generous service to all, but especially to those dearest to the Lord’s heart.”

The lay leaders gathered at this National Convening on Lay Leadership for a Wounded Church and Divided Nation are committed to focusing on our Gospel mission, on building unity, and on service to those “dearest to the Lord’s heart.” In doing so, we stand together with the victim-survivors of clergy sexual abuse and humbly pledge to work together to help ensure institutional integrity and accountability and to find ways to repair, renew, and revitalize the Church’s mission in the world.
Convening Participants

Katherine Angulo, program director, Thriving in Ministry Initiative, McGrath Institute for Church Life, University of Notre Dame
Camille Biros, director, claims administrator, business manager, The Law Offices of Kenneth R. Feinberg
Sean Callahan, president and CEO, Catholic Relief Services
Joseph Capizzi, professor of moral theology, The Catholic University of America; executive director, Institute for Human Ecology
John Carr, director, Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life, Georgetown University
Tom Chabolla, president, Jesuit Volunteer Corps
Robert Christian, editor, Millennial
David Cloutier, associate professor of theology and religious studies, The Catholic University of America
Stephen Colecchi, former director, Office of International Justice and Peace, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Kim Daniels, associate director, Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life, Georgetown University
Kathleen Domingo, senior director, Office of Life, Justice, and Peace, Archdiocese of Los Angeles
Rev. Ray East, pastor, St. Teresa of Avila Parish
Greg Erlandson, director and editor-in-chief, Catholic News Service
Kenneth R. Feinberg, founder and managing partner, The Law Offices of Kenneth R. Feinberg
John Gehring, director, Catholic Program, Faith in Public Life
Roberto Goizueta, professor of theology, Boston College
Rev. Daniel Griffith, Wenger Family Fellow of Law, University of St. Thomas School of Law; Pastor, Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church
Sr. Mary Haddad, RSM, incoming president, Catholic Health Association
Thomas Healey, founder, Healey Family Foundation
Rev. Dennis Holtschneider, C.M., incoming president, Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities
Scott Hurd, vice president, Catholic Identity and Leadership Development, Catholic Charities USA
John Hurley, president, Canisius College; chair, Movement to Restore Trust, Buffalo, New York
Elise Italiano Ureneck, associate director, Church in the 21st Century Center, Boston College
Alexia Kelley, president, Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities
Mary Leary, professor of law, The Catholic University of America
Jeanné Lewis, board member, Faith in Public Life
Sr. Hilda Mateo, MGSpS, director of ongoing formation, Missionary Guadalupanas of the Holy Spirit
Kathleen McChesney, founder and associate, Kinsale Management Consulting
Ralph McCloud, director, Catholic Campaign for Human Development, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Alice McDermott, author and co-founder, 5 Theses
Rev. Gerald J. McGlone, S.J., senior research fellow, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, Georgetown University
Patricia McGuire, president, Trinity University
Terry McKiernan, founder, Bishop Accountability
Steven Millies, director, The Bernardin Center, Catholic Theological Union
Bernie Nojadera, executive director, Secretariat for Child and Youth Protection, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Mary Novak, associate director for Ignatian formation, Georgetown Law
Rev. Mark Padrez, O.P., executive director, Conference of Major Superiors of Men
Gloria Purvis, host, *Morning Glory*, Eternal Word Television Network
Jonathan Reyes, assistant general secretary for integral human development, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Susan Reynolds, assistant professor of Catholic studies, Candler School of Theology, Emory University
Kerry Robinson, global ambassador, Leadership Roundtable
Joan Rosenhauer, executive director, Jesuit Refugee Services
Steve Schneck, former director, Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies, The Catholic University of America
Sr. Katarina Schuth, OSF, Endowed Chair for Social Scientific Study of Religion, University of St. Thomas
Matthew Sitman, associate editor, *Commonweal*
Kim Smolik, CEO, Leadership Roundtable
Peter Steinfels, professor emeritus at Fordham University; former editor of *Commonweal* and religion writer for the *New York Times*
Julie Sullivan, president, University of St. Thomas
Karen Terry, professor, Department of Criminal Justice, John Jay College
Yunuen Trujillo, religious formation lead, Catholic Ministry with Lesbian and Gay Persons, Archdiocese of Los Angeles
Amelia Uelman, lecturer, Georgetown Law; senior research fellow, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, Georgetown University
Maggi Van Dorn, host, *Deliver Us Podcast*, America Media
Christopher White, national correspondent, *Crux*
Sr. Carol Zinn, SSJ, executive director, Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Endnotes


14 Ibid.


Initiative Gatherings on Clergy Sexual Abuse

Responding to a “Moral Catastrophe”

In addition to this National Leadership Convening, the Initiative has organized six other gatherings on the urgent need for lay leadership and the principles of Catholic social thought in assessing the crises, responding to them, and moving forward.

- **Crisis of Faith? Scandal, Pope Francis, the Synod, and Young People** on September 17, 2018 included Elizabeth Bruenig, a Pulitzer Prize nominee at the *Washington Post;* Jonathan Lewis of the Archdiocese of Washington and a participant in the Vatican Synod on Young People; Joshua McElwee, Vatican correspondent for *National Catholic Reporter;* and Eve Tushnet, an author and survivor of sexual abuse.

- **Confronting a Moral Catastrophe: Lay Leadership, Catholic Social Teaching, and the Sexual Abuse Crisis** on September 25, 2018 included Robert S. Bennett, an attorney and original member of the USCCB’s National Review Board; Kevin Byrnes, an attorney and a survivor of clergy sexual abuse; Dr. Dawn Eden Goldstein, a theologian and survivor of sexual abuse; and Karen Tumulty, a columnist for the *Washington Post.*

- **A Path Forward on the Clerical Sexual Abuse Crisis** on October 24, 2018 included Anne Burke of the Illinois Supreme Court; Rev. Gerald McGlone, S.J., a survivor of clergy sexual abuse and a psychiatrist; Erica Lizza (SFS ‘19), president of Catholic Women at Georgetown; and Kerry Robinson of the Leadership Roundtable.

- **Civil Dialogue in a Divided Nation, Lay Leadership in a Broken Church** on February 8, 2019 was a special dialogue for the Georgetown University Board of Regents meeting and included PBS commentator Mark Shields, *Atlantic* writer Emma Green, and Kim Daniels and John Carr of the Initiative.

- **A Path Forward: Conversation and Dialogue on Clerical Sexual Abuse** on March 24, 2019 with Fr. Hans Zollner, S.J., a key Vatican leader on clergy sexual abuse; Kathleen Coogan, a parish leader at Holy Trinity Catholic Church; and Michael Nugent, a survivor and member of the Archdiocese of Washington Child Protection Advisory Board.

- **How Law and Lawyers Help Hide and Uncover the Clergy Sexual Abuse Crisis: Lessons from the Past and Directions for the Future** on April 9, 2019 was the concluding public session of a day-long conference on the law and the clergy sexual abuse crisis co-sponsored with Georgetown Law. The evening dialogue included Margaret Graf, general counsel of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles; Tom Johnson, former Minnesota County Attorney; Peter Steinfels, reporter and author; and Barbara Thorp, a victims’ advocate formerly with the Archdiocese of Boston.

Watch videos from these events and read news coverage of them at catholicsocialthought.georgetown.edu/topics/clergy-sexual-abuse-crisis.