

**St. Peter the Apostle Catholic Church
202 W. Kronkosky Street
Boerne, Texas 78006**

November 9, 2018

Archbishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller, MSPS
Archdiocese of San Antonio
2718 W. Woodlawn Avenue
San Antonio, Texas 78006

Dear Archbishop Gustavo,

As pastor of St. Peter the Apostle Church in Boerne, I have been working collaboratively with our staff to assist our parishioners in negotiating in a healthy and constructive way the scandal caused by the clergy sexual abuse issue in the Church. On October 23rd we held a **Town Hall Listening Session** open to all parishioners to discuss these three questions that were adapted from our clergy session:

1. How has the ongoing clergy sexual abuse scandal affected you personally and what questions has it raised for you about your faith and the Catholic Church?
2. How has this ongoing scandal about clergy sexual abuse affected your family, friends and coworkers (Catholics and non-Catholics)? What in these interactions and dialogues has been the most difficult for you personally?
3. **What advice and solutions would you offer to Archbishop Gustavo and all the U.S. bishops about how to solve the sin, crime and crisis of clergy sexual abuse?**

I promised parishioners that I would send a summary of their responses to Question No. 3 above so that you may use the information as an example of how laity are trying to be of assistance to you in your considerations of this issue of clergy sexual abuse in the church and in your proceedings with the other bishops of the United States this coming week in Baltimore. Below is a summary of their responses.

The bullet points below are a composite summary of responses from approximately ninety (90) parishioners. This information reflects their understanding, thoughts, insights, opinions and suggestions on the issue.

**Summary of St. Peter's Parishioner Responses
Regarding their Advice and Solutions
for the
Clergy Sexual Abuse Crisis and Scandal:**

*Church officials must finally take this issue seriously and act expediently to stop the crime of clergy sexual abuse. The church must take action and find solutions in a responsible and efficient manner. We are at a "crossroads" and need to act now to save the integrity and membership of the Church. The Church must do everything possible to fix this problem systemically and structurally, legally, and spiritually with love and prayer. The bishops must develop a comprehensive and enforceable plan of

action to remedy this issue that goes beyond the Dallas Charter. The Church needs a consistent and cohesive response for all dioceses, parishes and church institutions and organizations.

*Priests should be made to understand that, with any sexual abuse in the Church, bishops will take a firm stance and immediate action, including:

- *Clear and immediate enforcement of the Church's zero-tolerance policy regarding clergy sexual abuse.
- *Clergy sexual abuse will be treated as a crime, not just a personality defect, moral disorder, sin, etc.
- *Police will be called, and the abusing priest will be possibly arrested and prosecuted.
- *The diocese will be called. Clergy will be removed from active ministry on the spot if a credible accusation is made against them.
- *The priest will be responsible for cost for their own attorneys.
- *The abusive priest will have to help pay for any medical and psychological expenses for the victim's treatment and recovery.
- *All benefits will be removed from abusive priests and the proceeds given to the victims for their reparation, healing and recovery.
- *The abusive priest will be laicized and possibly excommunicated.

*The *John Jay Study of Clergy Sexual Abuse* in 2002 found that 81% of clergy sexual abuse was with adolescent males (with post-pubescent, but minor males). The John Jay study indicated that there are other associated psychological problems that make one more susceptible to act out homosexually with adults or minors. The bishops need to have further independent scientific research done to determine how, if at all, homosexuality within the priesthood is part of the problem in the church leading to clerical sexual abuse and what other factors may be involved.

*Priests must be held accountable for living a healthy and wholesome celibate lifestyle with integrity. Homosexual activity within the priesthood is not acceptable behavior and should not be condoned. Establish if there is any truth to the stories that there is an established network of predatory priests in the church called the "Lavender Mafia" (cardinals and bishops who abuse seminarians and priests and later appoint them to higher positions leading to cycles of abuse).

*The majority of priests are good, honest and healthy. As laity and the Church hierarchy, we need to support them in every way to continue being good shepherds with their bishops.

*A culture of accountability must be established within the Church and priesthood. For example, there should be a "peer review" system or "professional review board" within the priesthood in each diocese to hold priests accountable for their actions, weed out sexual predators, and monitor priests continuing personal and professional growth and development.

*This problem is psychological. Attention needs to be paid to the seminary where it all starts. An all-male environment in seminaries is problematic. Seminarians and priests need to be trained to relate with and deal with women. Delve into the psychology of the seminarian in the admission process through psychological testing. Have a screening and vetting process for seminarians by a third-party. Identify potential students who have family abuse histories and would be high-risk seminarians. There should be room inspections in seminary and curfew. If seminary candidates profess to be homosexual, there should be practices/guidelines about admitting them to the seminary. Provide seminarians with sexual abuse education and safety training. FBI background checks should also be done. Already as

seminarians they must understand their obligation to report sexual abuse so they are not co-conspirators in denying or covering-up abuse.

*People who have been sexually abused by clergy and those who know about cases of abuse are afraid to speak-up and are intimidated. This needs to change in order to make reporting easier. Laity need to have assurances that they will be heard, taken seriously, and treated compassionately by church officials.

*When a credible accusation has been made, report it immediately to the proper authorities (police, district attorney's office, bishop's office, etc.). Fix the "broken" reporting system. Have civil authorities investigate independently. Victims and others reporting abuse need to know there is a consistent policy, plan, and procedure in place to guide them in the process of reporting and follow-up.

*Remove priests and bishops who have credible and documented accusations of sexual abuse. We must "clean house" of abusive clergy and "purify" the church even if that means a significant decrease of active priests. The "Old Boys Network" that everyone covers for in the church needs to be broken-up and abolished.

*There needs to be justice for the victims as in punishment and prison time for offenders and those who cover-up the crimes. Priests or bishops who cover-up clergy sexual abuse they are aware of should be charged with child endangerment and prosecuted.

*The cover-up of clergy sexual abuse is ten times worse than the abuse itself. The church must be transparent about these cases and give constant updates on these crimes at all levels. Church leadership needs help communicating with the laity and general public about these cases. They need professional public relations expertise and consultation. The pope and bishops need to speak-out clearly, definitively, and forcefully about this matter in the local and universal Church---laity do not see that being done well enough now. The pope, for example, should not speak with ambiguity like his statement about the issue: "Who am I to judge?"

*Discipline and/or remove priests and Church personnel who are part of, supportive of, and promoting the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender movement (LGBT) which is contrary to our faith and biblical teachings.

*The church must continue to educate priests, parishioners, and Church employees in an ongoing way updating them on knowledge of sexual abuse, its prevention and reporting procedures. Provide periodic training sessions and distribute handbooks on this issue. Make sure that all parishioners know the policies and standards that are in place (OVASE, etc.). Specifically publicize criteria that identifies a sexual predator.

*Provide a whistleblower number for all clergy and parishioners to use, monitored by a third-party for full accountability. This would be used in cases where someone is trying to report clergy sexual abuse through the normal reporting structure/system but it does not produce results.

*The Church hierarchy needs to stop hiding behind the "statute of limitations" and stop fighting legally to prevent abolishment of the statute or stop the shortening of the statute of limitations.

*There needs to be transparency in church management and governance. The laity specifically want transparency from their pastors and bishops to assure that their donations to the Church are not being used to settle lawsuits against the Church for clergy sexual abuse.

*Celibacy is a problem. To demand celibacy affects one's humanity. It should be taken under advisement and possibly eliminated.

*A combination of a celibate and married clergy would make the priesthood healthier and be a type of check-and-balance system within the Church. Giving this option would attract more men with healthy attitudes about sex and will strengthen the priestly brotherhood. The church must address with seminarians and priests the challenges of living an authentic celibate lifestyle.

*Clergy, especially Church leadership, is too distant from the laity. Clergy often do not act as servant-leaders, but act as though they are "above the rules. . .above the law." This is unhealthy and the church needs more accountability. The laity need to stand-up and speak-out. The laity need to be involved in every diocese and within the Vatican to hold the Church hierarchy accountable. Specifically, there is a lack of women in church leadership, in authority and decision-making and planning roles in the Church to form a solution to the issue of clergy sexual abuse. Have lay-oversight committees on the diocesan level monitoring abuse reports and follow-up. It is up to the laity to be brave, courageous and make sure laws are being enforced in church ministry, leadership and service.

*The laity need to continue educating themselves on the issue of clergy sexual abuse by reading documents such as the 2002 *John Jay College of Criminal Justice study* on sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy requested by the USCCB, the *Linarce Quarterly* (a peer reviewed official journal of Catholic Medical Association publication) particularly the article "Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Clergy," by Richard Fitzgibbons, M.D. and Dale O'Leary, pg. 252. The authors give their opinion on the findings of the John Jay study on sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy. The laity should consistently access information posted on their diocesan websites and the USCCB's website.

*Deacons have a strong partnership with priests and should be accountable regarding this issue with one another.

*We need theological diversity in the Church and among priests for a healthy presbyterate and ecclesial environment.

*Review the hierarchical structures of the Catholic Church to determine how those structures may contribute to the ongoing problem of the clergy sexual abuse scandal.

*In studying this issue of clergy sexual abuse, church officials need to learn "best practices" from other institutions which are addressing this same issue, like the different branches of the U.S. Military, Boy Scouts of America, the medical community, Catholic Universities like St. Mary's University in San Antonio, and various U.S. corporations. Accountability and outcomes are at issue in these organizations. Assess the present church model against these organization's models.

*There should be an option of face-to-face confession or confession with a barrier between the priest and penitent.

*The issue of clergy sexual abuse is a complex issue. The Bishops of the United States need to initiate and fund independent professional scientific studies to determine the causation and prevention of this scourge in the church.

*The bishops need to advise the laity in parishes on how to address the negative impact the clergy sexual abuse scandal is having on retention of Catholics and in evangelization of new members to the Catholic Church.

Archbishop, thank you for taking time to review this information. It is meant to be helpful for you to have a “pulse” of a sampling of parishioners in their deep love and care for the Church. Our prayers and blessings go with you as you depart to Baltimore for the week.

Sincerely,

Fr. Norman A. Ermis
Pastor

cc: Bishop Michael Boulette