September 9, 2018

Dear Cardinal O’Malley,

Parishioners at Saint Susanna have expressed a variety of thoughts and emotions over the last several months regarding the sex abuse scandal and cover up in the Catholic Church. As the news unfolded, the intensity of these thoughts and emotions increased. One of the most powerful reactions has been that parishioners conclude that they are essentially voiceless within the Church.

Traditionally, parishioners believed their only recourse was to withhold donations to diocesan organizations. With the recent approach to “mandatory donations” of the Tithe and Catholic Appeal, parishioners are angry that their voice is gone. By continuing to call this an “appeal” when it in fact has become a “demand” - payable on receipt - is not only misleading but unjust. It adds insult to injury.

In this light, on Sept 9, 2018 the Saint Susanna Pax Christi Committee and Parish Council conducted a Listening Session in response to requests by many members of our community. The anger, sorrow and outrage of the parishioners are in response to the recent events in Pennsylvania, New York and the Vatican as well as the general history of the church. Guided by the word found in Lumen Gentium\(^1\), the session was solely to listen to those concerns and document what was said.\(^2\) The time allotted for this session was one hour. Fifty-one people attended.

We understand that other Listening Sessions have been held in the Boston Archdiocese and around the country. Surely this indicates a deep anger and dissatisfaction with an ecclesial structure that fails to attend to the “sensus fidelium” in the matter of the pedophilia scandal. From the remarks attached, it will be obvious, that this is a watershed moment for our parishioners. With the problems inside the Church growing deeper, the people feel more remote and removed than ever. Membership is no longer the given it has always been. Because of this, St. Susanna Parish plans to initiate further group discussions with hopes of formulating Spirit-guided ideas for change that arise from the hearts and minds of faithful lovers of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Regards,

Saint Susanna Parish
Listening Session
Saint Susanna Parish – Dedham MA

1Quote from “Lumens Gentium” - Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, addressing the role of the laity:
“By reason of the knowledge, competence or outstanding ability which they may enjoy, they are permitted and sometimes even obliged to express their concerns on those things which concern the good of the Church.”

2Parishioner Concerns:

Sally
It’s shocking, disappointing and sad. We don’t agree that church decisions have to come from the top down.

Mike
Cardinals, bishops and others in the hierarchy are trying to seize the moment to reverse progress that has been within the church to make it more accepting and affirming to all.

Sean
After the 2002 sexual abuse crisis in Boston there was a sense of rage. The absence of progress in the abuse crisis leads us to believe that our voice has not been heard. I can vote in civil matters, but I have no voice with the church hierarchy.

Jean
I left after the last crisis but rejoined due to the local clergy. It’s frustrating that more parishioners have not come to action.

Joanne
I wrote the cardinal a letter to express my concerns. The lies have been ongoing for years and have not subsided. Reported priests were moved around for years. The administration of all church diocese needs involvement and management from the laity.

Matt
How can we leverage social media to reach younger people? There is no contrition among the hierarchy. We need to spread the word to all Catholics that there must be no complacency.
Dan

“What would Jesus do?” is something that we ask our children and adult members frequently. It seems that the hierarchy are acting like Pharisees. We need to use our (lack of) checks and write letters to speak to the hierarchy. It seems that lack of money is the only thing that can capture their attention. We need the equivalent of Freedom of the Press as it relates to the hierarchy.

Ann

This is a great local parish. However the future of the church is uncertain for her three children. Now that the New York suit is underway, what new developments will happen in the Church? We are still at the tip of the iceberg.

Donna

I am half in and half out of the church. I studied theology. There are lots of stories regarding hurt and broken people. I shouldn't have to justify myself as a woman who wants to contribute to pastoral works, but I’m not afforded these opportunities by the hierarchy. The power differential must change.

Domenic

I have a background in counseling. There is much hypocrisy in our catholic schooling. We’ve been brainwashed. Abused children were often named “daddy’s boys”, a term I heard frequently in my childhood. How do we speak to each other before we address the church hierarchy?

Maryann

This is the one parish where clergy “got it”. We need to change the culture of the clerical and abandon the male-only structure. This parish is the reason I stay in the church. When large corporations must convince town residents to adopt a given project they’re coached to “Find a town with a high Catholic population because they don’t question authority”. This has to change NOW. It’s our responsibility to rise up.

Peggy

Is our safety (adults and children) even considered by the church hierarchy? I’m asked by the Doctor if I feel safe at home. Why isn’t the church asking us how we feel about or safety or “How are we doing?” Even a restaurant will ask that question. I agree with Matt that we need to use social media to reach our members and we need to make every aspect of diocesan administration public.
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Joe

Occurrences and cover up make it difficult to defend our membership in the church. The hierarchy must admit full responsibility and change their structure. Also, I agree with Dan.

Ellen

My son and daughter attend this parish. We’re a special parish because we are concerned and involved. All parishes (notably my own) need to listen. I was employed by the archdiocese. Churches need to admit our sins.

Toby

When the commission on sexual abuse was established, it included Marie Collins. When she resigned from the commission, Cardinal O’Malley just passed it off. This is sad.

Ford

The first thing we must do is to write to our legislature to remove the statute of limitations. We are US citizens and the perpetrators as well as those who cover up their sins need to be removed and prosecuted by civil laws. I was Catholic school educated. Football helmet injuries used to be ignored, but that changed. The church hierarchy must change as well.

Geoff

I have been here since 2012. I am frequently justifying my church membership to my family and friends. This structure needs to change so that we can be proud to be Catholic again. The church should follow the example of the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa. Also we need strong roles for women and lay people.

Paul

I’ve been a member of this parish for 25 years. Prior to my tenure at this parish, the term Altar Boys was changed to Altar Servers but no girls were allowed. The pastor at my previous church was presented with a letter protesting the non-inclusion of girls. The pastor crumpled up that letter and said “you’re not in charge”. That attitude has persisted through the years, and that attitude is precisely what needs to be changed. I note that many companies feel that it is damaging to be co-branded with the Catholic Church. We need a laity-led council to address the abuse issues and manage the diocese in general.