



Ten Steps Towards Reforming the Catholic Church

Proposed by Voice of the Faithful

The clergy sexual abuse scandal has swept around the world, and the Vatican finally has recognized it as a global crisis—one reaching the very top of the Catholic Church. It took too long. We cannot wait longer for the hierarchy to take steps needed to prevent similar outrages. We must insist on accountability that exposes and penalizes those who enabled the ongoing abuses and cover-ups. Then we must begin the process of restoring our Church. Following is a list of 10 reforms proposed by Voice of the Faithful that would help heal our Church.

- 1. Protect children:** Adopt the U.S. norms for reporting abuse and the safe environment standards currently in place in some U.S. dioceses on a global scale, in every diocese of the Church and with independent auditing of compliance.
- 2. Support survivors of abuse:** Stop fighting lawsuits; create independent national commissions staffed by the Catholic laity to arbitrate future claims; issue personal apologies from each bishop to individual survivors in each diocese; cease all lobbying efforts by the Church and its agents against statute of limitations reform in the U.S. and all other jurisdictions.
- 3. Identify abusers:** Identify all known abusers through national registries, while ensuring due process for any clergy and religious who are accused of abuse.
- 4. Hold accountable all who facilitated abuse:** All religious authorities who transferred abusers without adequate supervision and separation from children should resign.
- 5. Conduct independent investigations of abuse:** Commission independent professional studies to determine the presence and depth of the crisis in all countries.
- 6. Inquire into the causes of the crisis:** Investigate the culture of clerical, male-dominated leadership that excludes the laity and women from positions of authority. Determine to what extent mandatory celibacy and other factors contributed to the moral failures of those in authority as well as of those who sometimes ignored obvious signs of abuse.
- 7. Empower the laity:** Educate clergy and laity as to lay rights and responsibilities in the parish, in the diocese, and in the global governance of the Church, and codify those rights where they are not explicitly cited in canon law.

8. Develop inclusive governance structures: Give the laity a meaningful role in the selection of bishops; restore the requirement that bishops must come from the diocese they serve; refine the role of the “sense of the faithful” (sensus fidelium) and representative procedures; strengthen the independence of and lay participation in national episcopal conferences.

9. Require financial transparency: Conduct annual independent audits of financial practices and financial statements at parish and diocesan levels; hold independent elections for parish pastoral councils and finance councils; apply unified reporting standards for all parishes and dioceses.

10. Host a representative global council of the Church: Establish a global Catholic Council of the entire People of God, with lay and ordained voting representatives, to be held within the decade, to adopt necessary reforms.

Visit www.voff.org for ideas about how to carry out these steps of renewal.