

# Next Steps: Options for Truth-Seeking & Reconciliation

This paper provides the background against which a VOTF-sponsored truth and reconciliation project may be assessed. It includes an overview of requirements for successful projects; an assessment of the feasibility for proposed models; and questions about parameters and project focus for VOTF members to consider. The final choice for any VOTF-sponsored initiative, if pursued, will be one proposed first to the members for comment.

## ***Guiding Principle***

If your brother sins [against you], go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that ‘every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church ...” [Matthew 18: 15-17]

*Or in the case of clergy sex abuse in the Roman Catholic Church ... tell the world when the institution itself fails for so long to properly address the wrongs.*

Given the plethora of needs, desires, perspectives, and emotions involved in a truth and reconciliation project, it is imperative that when we examine the options for such a project, we adopt a guiding principle and use it as both an objective and as a “corrective” if conflicting options or goals arise.

This Scriptural passage is one example of how the expression of the principle can be centered within our Christian duties, proposed as a reasonable stage of a process already pursued (in this case for at least 10 years), and pressed forward as our responsibility.

From this basis we can emphasize that the ultimate purpose is healing—not revenge or destruction but an essential component of the processes that may heal the Church. “We have no choice” if we aim to follow Christ, should be our mantra.

## ***Forms of Truth-Seeking***

Truth commissions, truth and reconciliation efforts, and restorative justice projects are all names for what is collectively labeled “truth seeking.” Each approach seeks to expose past abuses or crimes and, in general, prevent future occurrences. Each seeks to create long-lasting public or community impact. All require considerable time and resources.

The example that most often comes to mind when people consider truth and reconciliation efforts is the model applied in South Africa: a Truth Commission. But it is highly unlikely that Voice of the Faithful or any other lay-led group, even in conjunction with other reform groups and a host of willing volunteers, could mount a Commission of this sort to address the breakdowns resulting from the clergy sex-abuse scandals. Truth commissions typically require government support and mandates, and legal accommodations that we could not effect and which, when applied to the Church in the United States, may not be legally enforceable.

Perhaps closer to a model that would be appropriate for us are processes based on the principles of restorative justice. Unlike judicial proceedings, which define the state as a principal (criminal cases) or identify named adversaries (civil suits), restorative justice focuses on harm or crimes as a community wound. From this perspective, violations rupture relationships within a community, and the ruptures create obligations that, in pursuit of justice, must involve victims, offenders and the community itself to set right.

This focus on making amends or setting things right does not preclude legal actions or require forgiveness or reconciliation between the victim and the offender. The process may produce a climate in which both actions are possible, but these are potential byproducts and not the primary focus of restorative justice. The primary purpose is “making amends or ‘putting right’ ... making amends for wrongdoing is an obligation.”<sup>1</sup>

Restorative justice also uses collaborative and inclusive processes that would appear to be more suited to our needs “as Church.” Offenders must be held accountable, but the process of making amends involves all those with stakes in the results: the one who was abused, friends and family, the abuser, and members in the wider community who also experience relationship disruptions resulting from the crime.

In reviewing the design options available for a truth and reconciliation project, we considered both a formal type of truth commission and a less-legalistic restorative justice approach. These are not the only options available for a truth-telling project. The final shape of an initiative probably would be a modification of the many available models.

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<sup>1</sup> Howard Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice* (Intercourse PA: Good Books, 2002), 20.

## ***Design Factors for a Truth Commission***

Resources for truth commission efforts have been organized by a collaboration of the Program on Negotiation at the Harvard Law School, the Search for Common Ground, and the European Commission for Common Ground. This Harvard/Common Ground project (HCG) assessed five commissions, from Argentina, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, and South Africa. Their results are posted on the Internet and include a summary of design factors to guide those seeking to set up truth commissions.<sup>2</sup>

Although a VOTF effort would not be government sponsored, as are the five commissions examined by the HCG project, the design factors they use can help illuminate choices when considering a truth and reconciliation project within the Church. The HCG project calls these *strategic choices* and they identify nine: political context, sponsorship, mandate, composition, resources, proceedings, amnesty, dissemination, and continuation.

### **Political Context**

Of the nine design factors, political context is central. Political context (the particular history, political culture, and institutional structure of a country) creates both “enabling and constraining forces” that give designers little room for choice, according to the HCG researchers. It sets the environment for the other eight design parameters.

The HCG effort considers political context in terms of nations and governments rather than an institution that resides within many countries and transcends national boundaries. Although ours is a “church problem,” we are well aware that it at heart addresses a structural issue and the abuse of power within a hierarchy that *governs the Church*. Inasmuch as we are addressing a governance issue, we also are addressing political context. Even limiting our assessment to the context of “People of God” and “pastors,” we still have a setting analogous to the strategic political context addressed in the HCG design factors, because in the Roman Catholic Church the governing function adheres almost entirely to those who are labeled “pastors” in the Church’s ecclesiology.

To demonstrate the similarities, read this passage from the HCG Design Factors and think of the current Church environment in the references to power:

Types of human rights abuse will shape the kind of investigation that is necessary. The political transition process will determine the extent to which former perpetrators remain in power. The greater, in turn, the power of former perpetrators, the more limited the investigative power of a commission will be.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.truthcommission.org/> ; “We have combined our resources and interests to identify the best research that has been done to date on five key Truth Commissions, and to present it in a format that will be usable by decision-makers in designing future Commissions.”

The HCG researchers further identify five aspects of the political context which they deem relevant to designing a truth commission: the nature of the violence to be investigated, the nature of the political transition or change that makes the investigation possible, the dominance and power held by the perpetrators after the political transition, whether the prevailing focus in the society is on healing or on justice, and the public support for a truth commission.

Because our church context is only analogous to, and not exactly consonant with, the national context addressed in the HCG project, some aspects of political context will not apply. The Church has not, for example, waged an actual war on abuse victims; it has instead fostered a climate where abusers were sheltered from prosecution and permitted to continue abuse while the victims were disbelieved, ignored, or assumed to be at fault themselves. Nor has there been (or is likely to be) a successful political transition via military victory or a handing over of power either voluntarily or in elections.

However, “political” factors related to the extent of dominance and the continuing power of the perpetrators do affect our choices, as do both the balance between healing and justice and the question of public support.

Consider first the issue of dominance and continuing power:

- There is no question that in terms of church governance, the bishops who initiated cover-ups remain in power, and that the People of God have limited options for reducing the extent of this power within the Church.
- The actual perpetrators of “violence” (sex abuse) can be brought to justice in criminal courts, and some limited access to records about the abuse can be obtained through those trials and through civil lawsuits. But the majority of records about the abuse remain hidden in the files of the bishops and the Vatican.
- The stories of the abuse, however, remain embedded in the minds of those who were abused, in written records they may prepare, in civil and criminal actions that reveal their stories. The bishops do not control these stories; they belong to the people, to the survivors of clergy sex abuse.

Thus, in terms of continued power, most of *the options for calling into account* those who led the cover-ups remain under the control of the hierarchy that perpetrated them; the options for *calling to account the abusers* who committed the crimes lie in the hands of the civil authorities<sup>3</sup>; and only *the outlets for telling the stories* are within the full control of the abused and their supporters.

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<sup>3</sup> We will cite later in this paper the forms of truth commissions that already have been enacted in some part by U.S. authorities and more comprehensively by Ireland and other European authorities.

Absent the means by which to force Church officials and abusers to submit to judgment about their accountability, a truth commission—unless instituted by a state or federal government—must find alternatives to forced appearances at formal hearings about the abuse. However, the dichotomy between who owns the stories and who owns the records could offer an alternative pathway that would overcome the inability to compel appearances.

The question of priorities also is key. Does the larger society place a higher priority on justice or on healing? More specifically, do we, as an organization, and the Church, as a community, place a **higher priority on obtaining justice or on pursuing healing**? The answers we give will help us identify outcomes we consider “success” if we apply the truth commission option.

Equally important are some related questions: Can we achieve both justice and healing? Are the two mutually exclusive? Is there perhaps an alternative that would permit “courtroom justice,” which inevitably focuses on the offenders and the crimes, while also promoting the healing and accountability that focus on the victim(s) both specific and indirect? These are key questions VOTF members should ponder as the organization considers the best approach to truth and reconciliation.

Finally, **public support** helps determine how comprehensive a commission’s mandate can be. Limited support reduces the effectiveness of any commission and may curtail its actions. The efforts of the bishops, as a group, to resist full disclosure and ignore the transgressions of bishops who covered up for sex abusers has led to worldwide outrage. But the resistance also has had the effect of slowly wearing out the general outrage. It has allowed the bishops’ publicists to claim that sex abuse is an “old story” even while they continue to resist accountability and reform. Considerable groundwork may be needed among those not already personally touched by the scandal to re-ignite strong public support.

The best approach may be one that enlists public support by involving more of the community. Those involved in a process are, by definition, the ones most supportive of it. Restorative justice, with an approach that involves all those affected by the crimes of child sex abuse could have an advantage over an approach that centers entirely on the abuser and his or her victim(s)—as do civil or criminal trials or a truth commission that uses adversarial-type hearings.

## **Sponsorship, Mandates, and Resources**

While political context is the background for truth commission design, there are three factors that will determine the effectiveness of a project once launched, according to the HCG assessment:

- Sponsorship determines a commission’s legitimacy, access to official files, and even its position within a nation’s political life. In most cases, it’s the executive arm of the government that establishes the commission, assigns it authority and range, and grants it access. International and non-government organizations also have been organizers.

- The mandate under which the commission operates will determine its purposes, its power, and its limitations. Again, this mandate or authority derives from the sponsor.
- The resources available to the commission will affect the length, depth, and breadth of its investigation.

To apply these factors to the particular case we are considering—clergy sex abuse and the attendant scandal in the Catholic Church—we must examine its structures.

For example, is the governing structure within the Church likely to sponsor full exposure of sex abuse records in order to establish a transparent record of the truth? Sadly, this seems highly unlikely, given that from the Vatican down to the individual chanceries, none to date have opened records willingly.

However, where a nation’s civil government and its churches are not as completely segregated as in the U.S., it is possible for the national government to establish a commission with authority to open Church files, compel testimony, and reveal records. One such example is Belgium where police had the authority to raid offices where bishops met and to seize the files desired for their investigations. Another example is Ireland’s extensive investigations of sex abuse in its Church dioceses—an excellent example for any effort to pry secret records out of chancery offices.

The work in Belgium and Ireland—and in several other nations—served as a form of truth commission by identifying the abusers and naming the bishops who helped hide decades-long records of abuse. But this type of authority is not available in all countries, including the U.S.

In the U.S., where constitutional separation of church and state impedes—as it should—insertion of federal and state decisions in the ongoing operations of a church, opportunities for shielding records of predator priests unfortunately stand alongside all the legitimate rejections of state interference. Only when overwhelming evidence of criminal activities arises have the civil authorities held, or exercised, any power to examine church files.

Thus in the U.S., the closest approximations to “truth commissions” are investigations launched by state grand juries and attorneys general when evidence of clergy sex abuse becomes obvious in a particular diocese. Some of these state actions are more successful than others at opening and making public secret files held in the chanceries.<sup>4</sup>

The investigations mounted by the state (or by national governments outside the U.S.) do throw open many windows, but they seldom find everything. More critically, these investigations, reports, and recommendations apparently cannot ensure lasting change within the Church culture that fostered the abuse.

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<sup>4</sup> Academic and government reports resulting from these investigations are available on the VOTF web site at <http://www.votf.org/page/reports-clergy-sex-abuse/17820>.

As the recent relapse in Philadelphia demonstrates, despite investigations by a grand jury, promulgation of the Charter for Protection of Children and Young People by the U.S.C.C.B. in 2002, promises by Philadelphia's bishop to follow the recommendations of the first grand jury, and "audits" that more than once certified Philadelphia as in compliance with U.S.C.C.B. safety guidelines, an investigation by a second grand jury found accused priests still serving as ministers and a nearly complete failure of the monitoring protocols aimed at removing credibly accused priests from parish life. The second grand jury not only indicted additional priests for sex abuse, its findings also led to the conviction of Msgr. William Lynn, the former supervisor of priest assignments, for endangering children.

Similar failures have occurred in Kansas City and elsewhere.

One diocesan bishop (Lincoln NE) simply refuses to abide by the U.S.C.C.B. charter without penalty or censure by the bishops who wrote it.

In considering a truth commission type concept, could VOTF anticipate any greater success than the currently constituted civic-authority results? Or hope to inspire an effort by all bishops to adhere to the U.S.C.C.B. Charter provisions?

This also is a point at which we must decide whether retribution and justice alone are our goals, or whether we aim to reform the Church practices and structures that created a climate where abuse could flourish. In other words, do we care about healing as well as naming abusers and the bishops who shielded them?

The hurdles to successful completion in terms of sponsorship, mandates and resources might be lower if our model followed a restorative justice approach instead of a truth commission with its formal hearings and recognized authorities. As noted previously, while the records lying within chanceries and in personnel folders remain under the control of bishops, the stories of the abuse itself belong to those who were abused. These are our stories for the telling, not the bishops. Those stories perhaps can emerge more easily in a restorative justice model than in the more-formal settings of hearings and testimony.

The people also "own" other stories that are important to hear if we, as Church, hope to rebuild communities that follow the path of Jesus rather than the precautions of attorneys: stories about the impact of clergy sex abuse on the family and friends of the abused, stories about parishes where years of secret payouts and secret reassignments disrupted parish work, stories about the questions and fears that haunt priests as well as parishioners who no longer share implicit trust.

These stories cannot be addressed in the judicial system. But they are the content that animates a restorative justice effort. Story-telling also allows us to pursue a modular approach towards truth and reconciliation. Using our own resources, or those available from National Public Radio's StoryCorps project, for example, VOTF could capture the stories while developing a final proposal for a truth and reconciliation initiative.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <http://storycorps.org/> is the host site for the StoryCorps project, which both records and archives the stories.

## Other Design Factors for Truth Commissions

The assessment of context, sponsorship, mandates and resources yields a balance that tilts heavily towards resource demands. That is, absent a “government” (hierarchical) sponsor and a Church-authorized mandate, VOTF (or any consortium of reform groups) would require a huge investment in the resources that might overcome such absence. The remaining elements in the design of a truth commission depend on the type of model employed for the effort but pose equally demanding requirements:

- Absent official sanction by the Church hierarchy and the powers of the secular legal system, amnesty for offenses could not be offered, so some sort of alternative may be needed to encourage full disclosure.
- Commission composition, resources, staff size, and the resources for them to perform the work must be decided.
- The commission must produce its findings, make them available to the larger public, and distribute its reports.

Restorative justice also has resource demands that must be met. Some are similar to those needed for a truth commission effort: recordkeeping, venues for hearings or meetings, financial support, engagement of professionals for certain functions. Others are specific to restorative justice. Some training for facilitators will be needed, for example, along with outreach to abusers and to some community members who may not wish to participate. Survivors of abuse may themselves not wish to participate. Enlisting offenders—including bishops who have, as a group, resisted all attempts to hold accountable their fellow bishops—to participate will require considerable thought and preparation.

It is probable that for either model, a truth commission or restorative justice, will require a modular approach to avoid excessive resource and financial burdens at the start and to meet the more demanding elements of the initiative.

## ***A Closer Look at Restorative Justice***

Restorative justice emerged in the 1970s as a way to address limitations in Western criminal justice systems, particularly a failure to care for the needs of the victims: "... the legal definition of crime ... does not include victims. Crime is defined as against the state, so the state takes the place of the victims."<sup>6</sup> In contrast, restorative justice focuses on the harm done, on the victim's needs, on the obligations created by the harm, and on justice that involves all those with a stake in repairing the harm.

Howard Zehr, one of the early practitioners of restorative justice, says the differences are in both views and questions:

### **Criminal Justice Views**

- Crime is a violation of the law and the state.
- Violations create guilt.
- State-administered justice decides on blame and imposes punishment.

### **Criminal Justice Questions**

- What laws were broken?
- Who broke the laws?
- What do they deserve?

### **Restorative Justice Views**

- Crime is a violation of people and relationships.
- Violations create obligations.
- Justice involves victims, offenders, and community members in efforts to make things right.

### **Restorative Justice Questions**

- Who has been hurt?
- What are their needs?
- Who has obligations to meet the needs?

Overall, Zehr says, restorative justice "prefers processes that are collaborative and inclusive and, to the extent possible, outcomes that are mutually agreed upon rather than imposed."

The application of restorative justice to redress clergy sex abuse addresses some of the special dimensions related to abuse within a faith community. The booklet "Another Choice: Restorative Justice Council on Sexual Misconduct in Faith Communities"<sup>7</sup> describes some of these: Ministers of faith are expected to practice what they preach and obey God's law both in public and in private ... Clergy abusers "are known to their victims as offenders but are typically seen by the congregation as persons who are trustworthy and admirable" ... Survivors may "want to report what happened [but] feel pressure not to take action from their faith values" ... "Imitation of Jesus' self-sacrifice can [sometimes] inspire victims to be passive in their suffering ..."

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<sup>6</sup> Howard Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice* (Intercourse PA: Good Books, 2002), 14, 20-21.

<sup>7</sup> Eloise M. Rosenblatt; Restorative Justice Council on Sexual Misconduct in Faith Communities. The booklet chapters can be downloaded from the web page [http://www.rjcouncil.org/library/library\\_another\\_choice.html](http://www.rjcouncil.org/library/library_another_choice.html)

Further, if the abused make a report, they then face problems associated with the reporting itself:

- Church administrators, especially in the past, may react with disbelief, blame the victim, and seek to protect the church image rather than support the victim.
- Even if fears of lawsuits lead to quick monetary settlements, the victims often are deprived of opportunities to tell their full stories or confront the abuser.
- Silence often is a requirement of the settlement, and silence does not heal trauma.
- The after-effects of abuse experienced by the victim's family, friends, or faith community are never addressed.

Restorative justice, with an approach that centers on the victim rather than on how to handle the offender, provides a pathway that could perhaps yield greater healing and a wider, more lasting reconciliation and healing.

## **Focusing on Harm, Obligations, and Engagement**

We have become so accustomed to courtroom dramas that we perhaps do not realize how fully the attention, in either a criminal case or a civil lawsuit, is on the abuser. Attorneys, judges, and juries focus almost entirely on what the abuser did and the evidence proving that harm occurred. With sex abuse cases, the abused person, in a sense, becomes “evidence.” The harm resulting from the abuse (except as a measure to calibrate monetary settlements) and the ways to repair that harm are not a part of the proceedings.

Restorative justice has a different focus. In defining the harm committed, restorative justice considers more than the physical act. It looks also at the needs that follow the abuse—needs for information, for ways to tell the story of the abuse, for empowerment to replace feelings of lost control, for acknowledgment of the harm done, for some type of restitution.

It can consider the psychological and spiritual harm visited upon the abused, not just the physical act of abuse that can be punished in court. It can address the harm left behind when the abuser has died and the abused cannot confront or bring to justice the one who caused the harm. It can address harm caused by omissions, such as failure to restrain or remove the abuser, failure to adequately investigate charges, or failure to act at all in response to a report.

Restorative justice also involves the abuser—although in some settings it may be preferable to use a proxy or stand-in for the offender. Harm creates obligations and among these is the obligation of the abuser to understand the consequences of their behavior. “Real accountability involves facing up to what one has done. It means encouraging offenders to understand the

impact of their behavior—the harms they have done—and urging them to take steps to put things right ...”<sup>8</sup>

These are not steps taken easily or alone. Just as the wider community should be involved in supporting the abused and helping meet their needs, so too should the community be involved in helping the offender accept responsibility and change behavior.

In restorative justice, the community may be a neighborhood or a place where crime occurred, it may be an extended family, or in the case of clergy sex abuse it may be the faith community. The goal is to engage all those with an interest in the outcome, to gain participation by all the “stakeholders” in the process of putting right the wrongs.

Community involvement also can address the impacts felt by those not directly involved in the acts of abuse. Within a faith community, for example, many who only hear of the abuse cases feel betrayed by those they once respected, or wonder what other secrets may be held back, or become cynical about those whose function is to lend spiritual guidance. Priests who once freely communicated with parishioners may fear that every word could be wrongly interpreted, or feel guilty for not reporting their own suspicions about another priest. Chancery officials with no knowledge of abuse cases may feel victimized by legitimate attempts to obtain information.

When the Church fails to protect children from clergy sex abuse, the impacts of those failures multiply far beyond the child who suffered the abuse. Worse, unless addressed, the wider impacts may turn focus away from the central fact of the abuse and from the victims of that abuse. Restorative justice can provide a way to address all the impacts while reducing the adversarial components that can sidestep concern for the victims and impede full accounting.

But restorative justice is not a panacea. It includes numerous models, some of which may be unsuitable as tools for bringing accountability and promoting healing. Other models may be impractical or not fit the needs of the abused. For example, some practitioners say restorative justice should begin its work only after other agents have established accountability of the abuser and of his/her religious community for the offense. But many survivors do not seek court judgments and some who do fail to obtain it. Other survivors are unable to locate their abuser, or have no desire to engage the abuser in an encounter. Still others yearn for healing but fear going public.

Nevertheless, as an alternative to or a parallel action with the more traditional forms of justice via the U.S. legal system, restorative justice may hold more potential for fostering healing and reform than a truth commission that holds hearings and assigns blame.

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<sup>8</sup> Zehr, 16.

## Flexible Models

Models proposed by the Restorative Justice Council on Sexual Misconduct in Faith Communities shortly after the abuse scandal emerged in Boston included restorative mediation, conferencing among all those touched by the abuse, “circles” for communities with shared core values, the use of surrogates for situations where the survivor could not or did not wish to meet face-to-face with the abuser, and community-based education that also involved healing.<sup>9</sup>

Restorative justice practitioners often categorize the various models according to the number and type of participants and method of facilitation—victim/offender conferences, family group conferences, and circles.<sup>10</sup> Some see restorative justice as a companion process to the legal system, some offer models as an alternative to standard crime-and-punishment justice, while still others dispute its value as an alternative and insist that it can only be applied after traditional forms of justice are completed.

Whatever model is employed, the basic principles of focusing on the harm done and the victim’s needs, on the obligations generated by the harm, and on involving all parties in repairing the harm remain essential.

Put another way, a successful project requires (1) commitment by all involved to be constructive and respectful; (2) acknowledgment by everyone involved that harm and injustice have occurred; (3) agreements that will restore equity (repair the harm); and (4) follow-up to ensure agreements are being met.<sup>11</sup>

Against this backdrop, and understanding also that a final model will depend on resources and options that have yet to be decided, we may consider the circumstances under which restorative justice is appropriate in clergy sex abuse cases: when the abused person does not wish to file a lawsuit or finds that the statute of limitations has expired, for example, or when further healing is needed following a lawsuit, or when additional harm beyond the act of abuse itself has affected family, friends, and communities.<sup>12</sup>

Conversely, the process should not be used to:

- Determine whether an allegation is valid
- Require participation by parties to the abuse
- Keep the abuse a secret
- Enable the parties to make agreements they do not intend to keep

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<sup>9</sup> Linda Harvey, handout from Restorative Justice Council on Sexual Misconduct in Faith Communities.

<sup>10</sup> Zehr, 47-51.

<sup>11</sup> Ron Claassen, “Two Useful Models for Implementing Restorative Justice, *ACRESOLUTION*, Summer 2004; 34.

<sup>12</sup> Restorative Justice Council on Sexual Misconduct in Faith Communities handout.

## ***Which Option Provides the Proper Tool?***

Ultimately, the question that underlies an assessment of design factors is whether the truth and reconciliation option selected could accomplish what we seek—even if we limit or curtail overall expectations.

Would the investment of people, money, time, and effort ultimately yield an outcome consistent with the reforms and healing desired?

- Would there be clear evidence at the end that all possible files have finally been exposed?
- Would Church officials involved in the cover-ups acknowledge wrongdoing and help bring to light the records once hidden?
- Would the exposure of all secrets lead to the hoped-for healing and the measure of reconciliation (small or large, if at all) desired by those who were wronged?
- Would the related wounds of the People of God be recognized, named and healed—and would those causing the wounds take responsibility for their actions?

We pose these questions not as a definitive list, but as an opening to considering which path offers more promise for a truth and reconciliation initiative.

## ***Next Steps***

The VOTF 10<sup>th</sup> Year Conference gives us an opportunity to open the discussion with members over the potential for truth and reconciliation. As noted throughout this paper, there are questions we must answer as an organization before shaping an initiative. There are questions to ask, and resources to build, once we embark on a project.

Two of those questions, because of their impact on overall design, should be considered now.

One is a practical, “toe in the waters” type question: Should we initiate efforts to capture the recollections of those affected by the abuse (community impacts) and those who were abused (those who were harmed), and perhaps even—if feasible—the stories of those guilty of clergy sex abuse or of shielding the abusers?

Story-telling would allow us to begin the process with short-term, historically important output that could stand alone as a result even should we find it impossible to pursue a fully developed truth and reconciliation effort.

Commitment to story-telling would be less costly than commitment to a full-fledged truth and reconciliation effort, but still would be costly—using StoryCorps (National Public Radio) as the project venue, for example, would cost \$46,500 for just 18 segments or stories running 5 minutes each.<sup>13</sup> Less-costly alternatives are available, but generally would involve additional staff and funding if VOTF also plans to continue its many other projects under way.

Thus, if we answer “yes” to a story-telling effort, we then must answer the related questions about fundraising and venues within a short time.

The second question is a philosophical issue that determines the shape of the truth and reconciliation options we consider. It is a question highlighted earlier: Do we, as an organization, and as Church, place a higher priority on obtaining justice, on pursuing healing, or do we see both as necessary for the project’s outcomes?

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<sup>13</sup> <http://storycorps.org/bring-storycorps-to-your-organization/> is the main page for organizational use.