

Vatican bishops' summit on clergy abuse has ended. Now we wait.



Ever since Catholic clergy crimes of sexual abuse became widely known, the Catholic faithful have waited for accountability and healing, so has Voice of the Faithful. This time we are waiting for the hierarchy to take concrete action following a Vatican summit of world-wide bishops to address clergy abuse. The summit was called, “The Protection of Minors in the Church,” Feb. 21-24, 2019.

A general conclusion about the summit is that awareness of the seriousness of clergy abuse has now been raised as high among the hierarchy in the rest of the world as in the United States—and in other countries that have long been dealing with the abuse and its cover-up. However, based on the Pope’s concluding speech, the hierarchy has yet to shift its thinking about clergy abuse from sin and forgiveness to crime and punishment. The message from the hierarchy continues to be, “this is intolerable, but ...”

Summit participants talked a good deal about transparency, responsibility, and accountability. We would like to see at least one concrete move to address the clerical culture at the core of the scandal that is equal to the summit’s rhetoric—one concrete move that would overcome what summit presenter Sister Veronica Openibo, S.H.C.J., called the hierarchy’s “mediocrity, hypocrisy, complacency.” Of Sister Openi-

bo’s presentation, VOTF trustee Margaret Roylance said, “The bishops had to sit there silent and listen to her—no denials, explanations, or blaming others.”

Prior to the summit, there were expectations that the Church might at last achieve true transparency, responsibility, and accountability. Then the backpedaling began: expectations were too high; the summit was just the first step in a global response; the summit’s aim was to educate those who still believed this was an American problem, or a gay priest problem, or all in the past, rather than produce immediate corrections.

From one point of view, the summit attempted transparency. The Vatican live-streamed all the main presentations; the Vatican invited survivors to speak first; bishops listened to frank, unadorned descriptions of abuse and misuse of power. In addition, German Cardinal Reinhard Marx admitted that the Church had destroyed documents about abuse cases. Also, a Vatican spokesperson told the media that the Church does have secret protocols for priests who father children. Perhaps most surprising for some bishops was to hear testimony in a worldwide forum from survivors of abuse that priests had ordered survivors to have abortions—a claim long whispered within the Church but never openly acknowledged.

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We wait.

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Despite these efforts, at the conclusion of the summit, we heard little about steps that would address the crimes of abuse and cover-up. Primary results thus far seem to be a promise that the Vatican will distribute a rulebook to bishops worldwide explaining their juridical and pastoral duties and responsibilities with regard to protecting children. Also promised was a meeting among Vatican summit organizers and Vatican curia to discuss, “What next.” We suggest starting instead with removing all bishops who participated in cover-ups or molested others.

The Pope, in his concluding remarks, cited two issues as being at the root of the problem. One was “evil” and the other the “plague of clericalism, fertile ground for all of these disgraces.” “However, the issue seems still to be *recognizing* the evil and *doing* something about clericalism,” said Mary Pat Fox, Voice of the Faithful president.

“We all want to believe people we know and trust are good, but that is not always the case, and the Church and the Pope need to get better at recognizing and battling the evil in front of them—that evil being bishops who have protected abusive priests. Yes, the priests who perpetrated these crimes are sick and must face justice, but the criminals who made the crisis bigger are bishops who exposed children to credibly accused priests.”

The Church must take concrete action against crimes of abuse and the clericalism at its core if it hopes to rebuild trust and begin healing wounds inflicted on victims and the global faith community. Much more will be required, but that is the obvious and immediate need.

Anyone who would like to know more about “The Protection of Minors in the Church” can visit the Vatican’s website on the meeting, www.pbc2019.org.

VOTF releases 2018 financial transparency study 2019 study begins this June

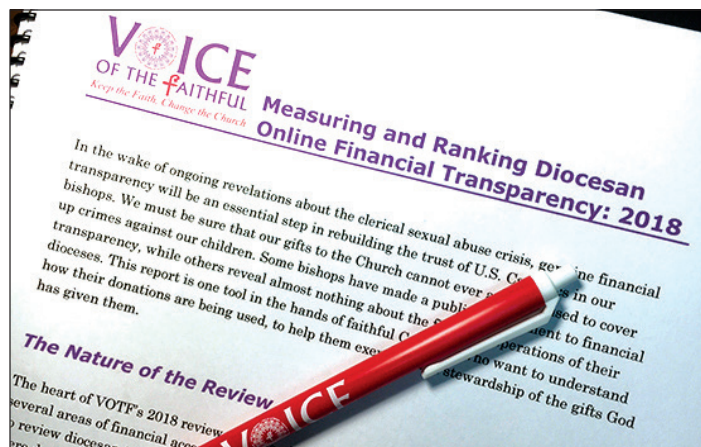
Voice of the Faithful released in October 2018 its second annual study of U.S. Catholic dioceses’ online financial transparency. The study shows the average score for dioceses rising only marginally. Such a marginal increase in trans-

parency calls to mind Voice of the Faithful’s long-held view that lack of transparency in Church finances is linked to secrecy surrounding clergy sexual abuse.

The average overall score achieved by all 177 dioceses comprising the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in Voice of the Faithful’s “Measuring and Ranking Diocesan Online Financial Transparency: 2018” was 39.7 out of 60, or 66 percent, which represents a 5 percent increase over the 2017 average score. Thirty-nine percent of dioceses still have not posted audited financial statements on their websites, and 25 percent do not post a financial report of any kind.

Margaret Roylance, Ph.D., a VOTF trustee and chair of the Finance Working Group, pointed out the link between lack of financial transparency and secrecy

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Save the Date—Oct. 19—for Voice of the Faithful’s 2019 Conference



Mark your calendars for **Saturday, Oct. 19, 2019, for Voice of the Faithful’s 2019 Conference**. We will be at the Boston Marriott Newton, a suburban location with all of the amenities of a downtown Boston hotel.

Our special return guest speaker will be the **Honorable Anne M. Burke**, Illinois Supreme Court Justice, who spoke to us at our 10th Anniversary Conference in 2012. She served as the second chair of the USCCB’s National Review Board. Much has happened in the clergy abuse scandal since then, and she is now involved with a group advocating accountability for bishops who have covered up abuse.

Our 2019 Conference committee is working hard to line up additional speakers and flesh out our agenda. So, set aside Saturday, Oct. 19, 2019, or **register now at votf.org**, and stay tuned for updates!

Vatican must sanction Cardinal Pell immediately

Cardinal George Pell (below, second from right) is the highest ranking Catholic Church official known to be convicted of child sexual abuse. Pope Francis has prohibited him from public ministry. VOTF suggests the Pope immediately take away his red hat and his position as prefect of the Secretariat for the Economy.



Pell, on leave from his Vatican post in order to face charges in Australia, was convicted in December 2018, but a judicial gag order prevented reporting on the trial and conviction because Pell was awaiting a second trial, now canceled. He faces sentencing for five charges related to sexual abuse of two boys in 1996. Each count carries a maximum penalty of 10 years, so Pell potentially could face a 50-year sentence.

The Vatican, reports said, will wait for Pell's appeal before taking further action. Voice of the Faithful expects more, especially in an atmosphere of zero tolerance and after the Vatican summit on clergy abuse where bishops talked about "transparency, responsibility and accountability" and the Pope called for an "all-out battle against the abuse of minors."

Financial transparency study

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surrounding clergy abuse. "Carrying out a widespread coverup of criminal acts without access to large amounts of untraceable money is impossible," Roylance said.

"In the wake of ongoing revelations about clerical sexual abuse," she continued, "every Catholic who loves the Church is justly angry and asking serious questions about Church leadership. This financial transparency report is one tool for faithful Catholics who want to know what each of us can do. Genuine financial transparency is essential to rebuilding U.S. Catholic's trust in their bishops."

Roylance pointed out that:

- If your diocese does not post its audited financial statement or, worse, not even an unaudited financial report, your diocesan leadership is being less than forthright about its finances.
- If your diocese does not mandate safe collection procedures, it is failing in its duty to protect the resources you have provided it.
- If the names and backgrounds of your Diocesan Finance Council members cannot be found on your diocesan website, you have no way of knowing if they are truly "expert in financial affairs and civil law, outstanding in integrity," as Canon Law requires.

"We must let bishops know when their failures of financial transparency keep us from fulfilling our obligations as good stewards of our gifts from God," she said.

Although the transparency scores of 21 dioceses in the 2018 study dropped from 2017, more than 70 dioceses had higher scores and some achieved very significant increases.

The Archdiocese of Omaha's score went from a dismal 26 to a respectable score of 56, and the Diocese of Orlando from 26 to a perfect score of 60, which tied with the Diocese of Burlington. However, Burlington received a qualified opinion from outside auditors, whereas Orlando received an unqualified (good) opinion on its audit.

The Diocese of Santa Rosa was the only diocese out of the 177 to post highlights of their Finance Council meetings—another significant factor in diocesan financial transparency.

The highest scoring dioceses in VOTF's 2018 study are:

- Orlando, Florida, and Burlington, Vermont, tied at 60
- Atlanta, Georgia; Baltimore, Maryland; and Sacramento, California, tied at 59
- Bismarck, North Dakota; Bridgeport, Connecticut; Buffalo, New York; Des Moines, Iowa; Ft. Wayne-South Bend, Indiana; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Omaha, Nebraska; and San Diego, California, tied at 56

The lowest scoring dioceses in VOTF's 2018 study are:

- Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Orange, California; and Santa Fe, New Mexico, tied at 19
- Salina, Kansas, 18
- Brownsville, Texas; Knoxville, Tennessee; Lubbock, Texas; Portland, Oregon; and Tulsa, Oklahoma, tied at 15
- Grand Isle, Nebraska, 13
- St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, 12

VOICE
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Keep the Faith, Change the Church

Tips for responding to sexual abuse / cover-up crisis

By Susan Vogt



What a pretentious title! Certainly VOTF has 16-plus years of responding in substantive ways to this scandal, and I have been part of much of it. **But**, the crisis continues, and so do I. Last Fall, prompted by the Pennsylvania grand jury probe, my pastor declared that, as a priest, his voice was compromised, and he was passing the ball of leadership to the people in the pews. Impelled by this challenge, several lay people took the ball and have run with it. As part of this team, I offer the following insights.

Process:

1. *Listen* – We organized several guided Listening Sessions where people could express their anger, hurt, fears, confusion, hopes. Our ground rules included time for anyone to speak once for up to two minutes. There would be no audience response such as clapping, sighs, etc.
2. *Learn* – Additional sessions were then scheduled to educate ourselves about the facts and what preventive measures had already been done, such as Virtus training. As inexcusable as sexual abuse is, it has greatly diminished because of the Dallas Charter. The **Cover-Up**, however, continues unabated and is demoralizing.
3. *Discern Root Causes* – In order to choose the best actions to take, we realized that we needed to understand the root causes of both clerical sexual abuse and the cover-ups. Research shows that although there is a higher percentage of homosexuality among priests than the general population, homosexuality is **not** the root cause of sexual abuse. Pedophilia, a disordered form of sexual attraction, is different from homosexuality. We identified the primary root causes as:
 - Infidelity to the promise of celibacy, which implies chastity; and
 - Clericalism (an undue sense of privilege which can lead to the abuse of power).
4. *Act* – By subdividing into work groups around specific actions and periodic reporting to the large group.

Solutions:

1. *Increase Lay Responsibility in the Church* – Priests and religious orders are partners with us but not the only definitive voices. Effective leadership is a collaboration in which lay voices count. We must have a seat at the local, national, and global ecclesial decision-making table. This means laity must deepen our own spirituality because “clericalism” can afflict anyone in a position of privilege.
2. *Individual actions* – Continue to become informed (VOTF, National Catholic Reporter, and other reputable sources). Pray. Join prayer with personal acts of penance. Write letters, sign petitions, speak up.
3. *Corporate actions* – Become a model parish in which parish leadership is a collaborative partnership between the people in the pews and clergy. This means:

Susan joined VOTF in 2002, served in leadership positions for seven years, and has been a vowed Lay Marianist for almost 50 years.

- Serving on pastoral councils, personnel committees, review boards and other decision-making groups;
- Being a transparent parish in regard to finances and all important decisions (and insisting that the diocese do the same);
- Continue to honor prevention programs and learn from the voices of survivors; and
- As a Church (local and global), continue to listen to the voices of survivors, suffer in solidarity with them by acts of penance, offer opportunities for healing, and support justice by not hiding our mistakes or shielding perpetrators.

The truth is always friendly! **We must Act, Act Soon, and Act Big** to heal not only the survivors of sexual abuse but also our bleeding Church. I hope it is not too late.

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Voice of the Faithful® is a worldwide organization of Roman Catholics working to provide a prayerful voice, attentive to the Spirit, through which the faithful can participate actively in the governance and guidance of the Catholic Church. We support survivors of clergy sexual abuse, support priests of integrity, and work to help shape structural change in the Church.

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