

“What’s Next? Dialogue on a Church in Crisis” Conversation Guide



This conversation guide consists of both questions for discussion and a list of resources referred to by the panelists. Facilitators may wish to make use of these other resources as a part of their presentation and discussion of the materials. In utilizing this guide, we recommend facilitators choose those questions most helpful to the purpose of their group.

Since this lecture covers a five-person panel, we recommend pausing the video after 1-2 presenters in order to provide space for answering the questions below and engaging in conversation. You may wish to start with Dr. Cossen, who presents a historical overview of the crisis, before moving to Dr. Reynolds’ theological discussion. You may also be interested in listening to the conversation that emerged amongst those present at the event, starting at 55:50.

View this lecture here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wh54GUGPjWs>

Dr. Susan Reynolds (5:15-14:05)

- Dr. Reynolds defines clericalism as idolatry, specifically “a distorted vision of the relationship of power among lay and ordained persons in which those who are ordained are regarded and come to regard themselves, often subconsciously, as above and apart – holier, purer, ontologically superior, closer to God, indeed somehow godlike themselves.”

Have you ever thought about or experienced idolatry in relationship to the Church? If so, how? How have you thought about or experienced clericalism either with regard to bishops, priests, fellow lay persons, or yourself?

- How have you been taught to think about holiness? If you thought of holiness as a relationship to God through self and community, how would that affect your understanding of the roles of priests and lay people in the community of the baptized?

Dr. William Cossen (14:10-23:03)

- Are you familiar with both the Dallas Charter and the John Jay Report referenced by Dr. Cossen? This is a good moment to discuss those two documents with your group facilitator and clarify important measures for protecting children and young people (including the importance of VIRTUS training).
- Dr. Cossen lists a number of factors in Church and society since Vatican II that affect how we understand the abuse crisis now. Take some time to note these, and ask yourself how you think these factors affect both Catholics' reaction to the abuse crisis and that of the wider society. Are there other factors you would add to the list?

Dr. Andy Lichtenwalner (23:08-31:15)

- Are you familiar with the National Review Board and National Advisory Council discussed by Dr. Lichtenwalner? If not, how do you think the Church could increase education and transparency not only to improve lay involvement, but also to make lay people aware of the pathways for leadership that already exist?
- Have you ever thought of being a lay person as a vocation? What gifts and responsibilities do you think are included in this vocation?

Marie Breitenbeck, O.P., J.C.D. (31:35-42:45)

- Sr. Marie quotes the final canon from the 1983 Code of Canon Law for the Latin Church, which states that canon law is "for the salvation of souls, which must always be the supreme law of the Church." (Can. 1752) Marie speaks of this final code as reaffirming the universal call to holiness.

How do you see the institutional structures of the Church aiding or failing this universal call to holiness, which can set our souls free from fear and sin, and lead us towards salvation?

- What is synodality? What are some of the challenges to synodality that emerge from Sr. Marie's discussion of the recent Vatican sexual abuse summit in February 2019?

Fr. Desmond Drummer (42:50-54:45)

- Fr. Desmond discusses some of the painful realities of trying to address the abuse crisis in our Church – including the way that some Catholics view with suspicion those who talk about the crisis, as if they might wish to do harm to the Church by speaking about the crisis. How do you think we as parish communities can better provide space for discussion, reflection, and healing? What are some of the challenges of trying to do this work?
- Despite the darkness and evil in our churches, societies, and the world, Fr. Desmond reminds us that we do not need to be afraid because Christ is risen. Where do you find hope in your life as a person of faith?

Resources:

Survivor Support

If you have been the victim of abuse in the Catholic Church, please reach out to someone. Below are contact points that can help.

RAINN National Sexual Assault Hotline	800-656-HOPE (4673) or online chat
Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests	Assistance Line: 1-877-SNAP-HEALS (877-762-7432)
Victim Assistance Coordinators	Click here to contact a victim assistance coordinator in your diocese.

- For reports and documents on the abuse crisis, educational information, and steps on how to take action, visit <http://catholiclayresponse.com/>.

- Dr. Cossen discusses **Christine Kenneally's investigative reporting** on the abuse carried out by nuns in Catholic orphanages. That article can be accessed here: <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/christinekenneally/orphanage-death-catholic-abuse-nuns-st-josephs>
- **Peter Steinfels**, professor emeritus of Fordham University and former editor of *Commonweal* wrote a detailed response to the Pennsylvania Grand-Jury Report for *Commonweal*, which can be accessed here: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/pa-grand-jury-report-not-what-it-seems>
- Several of the panelists refer to the **Dallas Charter**, more formally titled the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, established by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in June 2002 for addressing allegations of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy. That document can be found here: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/charter.cfm>
- **The John Jay Report**, formally titled the *The Nature and Scope of the Problem of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States*, is a 2004 report by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, commissioned by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. The report is based on surveys completed by the dioceses of the United States. It can be found here: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/upload/The-Nature-and-Scope-of-Sexual-Abuse-of-Minors-by-Catholic-Priests-and-Deacons-in-the-United-States-1950-2002.pdf>
- Dr. Lichtenwalner discusses the **National Advisory Council (NAC)** as an example of lay leadership in which an appointed group of mostly lay men and women advise the bishops' administrative committee, which forms agendas for general meetings of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Find out more about the NAC here: <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-usa/2018/06/13/advisory-council-has-represented-u-s-catholic-concerns-for-50-years/>
- Another example of lay leadership on the national level is the **National Review Board (NRB)**, an independent lay advisory board which assists the USCCB Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People. Information on the NRB can be found here: <http://www.usccb.org/about/child-and-youth-protection/the-national-review-board.cfm>
- Another resource to consider is Bishop Barron's **Letter to a Suffering Church**, details of which can be found here: <https://www.sufferingchurchbook.com/>