

Summary of Findings from The OMC Sex Abuse Forum Focus Group

Fourteen OMC parishioners representing a broad cross section of the parish participated in a focus group held Tuesday, December 11 in the Parish Hall. The purpose of the focus group was to discover the participants' perceptions and emotions regarding the current Church crisis triggered by the sex abuse scandal. The focus group was divided into three sections:

1. The causes and symptoms of the current Church crisis.
2. Assessment of Church leadership.
3. Action steps that could be taken.

Please note: The stinging focus group criticism of the Church hierarchy and clergy does not include parish governance and parish life at OMC. Everyone has the highest regard for Father Bob, Sister Christine and the Church staff. People feel that because OMC is an order parish, it is a special protected place that authentically serves the needs of the parishioners.

Causes and Symptoms

Participants were asked to rank the severity of the Church crisis on a scale of 1-10, with 10 representing extreme crisis comparable to or worse than the Reformation. They unanimously ranked it as a 10, with a few saying it was even worse than a 10.

When asked to make a list of the symptoms of crisis as distinct from the causes, the group compiled and agreed with the following list:

Symptoms:

- Sex abuse
- The cover-up
- Lack of transparency
- Monarchical and hierarchical structure
- More than a millennium of the same or similar structure
- Teachings about clerical authority
- Clericalism
- Money

Causes:

- Power relationship of clergy to laity
- Power relationship of hierarchy to laity
- Bishops afraid of the Curia
- Vow of diocesan priests' loyalty to their bishop
- Money

Church Leadership

It was clear in the discussion that the group unanimously perceives the American bishops, as a collective body, to be incompetent and often corrupt. There was much dissatisfaction with the Philadelphia Archbishop and how the Archdiocese is run. Most people had a sympathetic view of Pope Francis and think, “ He inherited a mess.” Another participant said, “He is inspirational but he is incomplete as a leader,” and this was the gist of comments made during that discussion.

OMC Action Steps

In considering action steps for the parish, the focus group consensus centered on two major points: 1.) The fundamental cause of the current Church crisis is the power relationship of the clergy and bishops to the laity; 2.) The OMC Sex Abuse Committee should broaden its scope but stay focused on programs and initiatives within the OMC parish rather than linking with other reformist organizations.

The suggested actions steps included the following:

- To create a forum in which parishioners can share their outrage and their hurt and travel together to personal and Church renewal.
- To help parishioners from falling away from the Church.
- To identify ways to keep more of parishioner contributions in the parish and less (or none) going to the archdiocese.
- To create a strategy for communicating the wants and needs of the laity to those who will influence the choice of successor archbishop.
- To educate the parish on what it means for each parishioner to be a renewal change agent. There is a broad understanding that the bishops have severely damaged the Church in many ways and now is the moment for the laity to chart a path to renewal.