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# Restoring Trust

## Recommendations for Action

Trust is the capacity to realize potential together. It is the social glue for creating common purpose and for enabling progress towards the common good.

Trust is the outcome of integrity—personal and organizational. It is earned through commitments that are fulfilled with consistency, constancy, and courage. As such, trust is an essentially ethical value. With trust, as with ethics, the question is not simply about “What are we to do?” but also, more importantly, about “Who are we to be and to become?” Trust is therefore a mark of character as well as capability, an achievement of conscience as well as of competence. Another way to state the question of ethics is this, “Ethics has to do with what ought to be done—by an individual or an organization.” Leadership happens in the space between “is” and “ought”—where a person or organization is, as compared to where it ought to go.

Trust is an animating factor in all three of the theological virtues: it is trust in God declared as faith; trust in salvation lived as hope; and trust in Eucharistic community shared as love. As Christians we recognize the presence of evil in the world and confess our own personal sinfulness. What makes healing and holiness possible within such dire acknowledgement is that we are at the same time trusting of God’s forgiveness, won for us through the mystery of Jesus Christ crucified. As St. Paul reminds us, it seems foolish to many, yet Christians trust in the Resurrection. This we claim as the aim of human life in God’s grace: to realize our full potential as created beings called to share in the inner togetherness of the Trinity.

1. **Be proactive.** Set an inspiring vision for trust that will help connect everyday standards for performance and problem-solving to long-term norms for credibility. In ethical terms, this means precisely defining the terms of operational integrity (what people can expect when they interact with Church members and leaders, lay and clerical), identifying principles (for individual and organizational conduct), and responsibilities and practices for earning trust.
2. **Be pastoral.** In situations of crisis extend unqualified care first and foremost to all those affected, attend to the immediate and on-going needs of their families, answer the questions of the community, and fully support the secular authorities and officials responsible for the public good.
3. **Define trust.** Use consultation and dialogue with those who are impacted by the actions of Church leaders and members to understand the behaviors, attitudes, language, and actions that lead people to judge the Church community or its leadership as either trustworthy or untrustworthy. Trust is a relational asset, so it must be understood from the point of view of those in relationship with the organization. These relationships can provide reference points for tracking current levels of trust and for evaluating progress in strengthening it.

4. **Take responsibility.** Embrace the problem and never evade it, accepting accountability both for what has gone wrong and for the solution to the situation. This is the obligation attending leadership – “taking control of a situation before it takes control of you.”
5. **Invite participation.** In the spirit of transparency and accountability, include all Church members and all those affected as partners in the process of disclosure, situation analysis, and creative problem-solving. Give voice to all stakeholders, especially those usually excluded. And invite the input of critics, whose points of view are often premised on important if uncomfortable truths.
6. **Act decisively and do what is right.** Stand on principle and exercise competence to do what is right (2 Cor 13:7-8). Principle serves as a compass. Competence provides the expertise for navigating the uncharted waters of crisis. This fusion of principle and competence is expressed as clear action plans to correct problems, detailed and cooperative implementation, and thorough follow-up, all done in love.
7. **Communicate honestly.** Initiate and maintain dialogue with impacted parties and other constituents, inviting questions, debate, and contributions for working towards solutions. While the term “transparency” may imply wholesale disclosure, the reality is that communication needs to be managed with considerable care to respect the different needs of different impacted groups or audiences. Appropriate disclosure involves balancing transparency, legal liability, and the privacy of those involved.
8. **Invest in and develop skills.** Provide coaching in crisis management at the diocesan and parish level. Develop managerial and leadership training for trust as part of seminary curricula and post-ordination advanced leadership education. This investment in individual skills accompanies the aforementioned need to invest in the right organizational behaviors. Trust rarely develops from telling people what to do. Rather, it grows as a public or exterior response to a personal or interior demonstration of confidence.
9. **Audit performance.** Consistently track, measure, and report on the on-the-ground impact of accountability and transparency reforms and trust-building measures. Ideally, this requires objective, third-party scrutiny. Not an end in itself, such auditing provides the raw material for additional learning, for setting new goals, and building momentum from successful initiatives. The challenging aspect is the development of such benchmarks or standards.
10. **Walk the extra mile.** Recognize that trust, as a form of capital, requires investment and surplus. As noted earlier, simply preventing future scandals does not restore trust. In the business ethics literature there is evidence that it requires six to eight experiences of excellence to overcome the dissatisfaction from one bad experience. The stakes - and therefore expectations - in relation to betrayal are exponentially that much higher. While we cannot know the arithmetic for rebuilding ecclesial trust, we do have the benefit of the Gospel, which teaches magnanimity as the everyday norm for discipleship (Matthew 5:39-41).

This summary is excerpted from the 2008 Leadership Roundtable working paper, “The Work of Hope: Renewing and Strengthening Trust in the Catholic Church in the United States”. All rights reserved.

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