

Let the Light of Christ Shine

A white paper to address the dual crisis facing
the Catholic Church in the United States

October 2018, subject to continuing review and revision

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Leadership Roundtable promotes best practices and accountability in the management, finances, communications, and human resources development of the Catholic Church in the U.S., including greater incorporation of the expertise of the laity.

In Matthew 5:15 Jesus said, “No one lights a lamp to put it under a basket.” Unfortunately, the sexual abuse crisis and the set of leadership and management practices that permitted and then covered up the abuse has done just that. These twin and inter-related crises are a basket hiding the light of Christ. Church leaders—lay and ordained together—can lift that basket through acknowledging the sin, repenting, and taking action to become the community of faith that God has called us to be. This is the opportunity within the crises we face.

Neither crisis is a loss of faith in God or the tenets of Christ’s teaching. Rather, both reflect a basic questioning of the accountability and performance of human leadership and management practices of the institutions of the Church. The twin crises have already eroded the Church’s moral authority, damaged morale of both laity and clergy, driven a generation and a half from the pews, and jeopardized the very financial well-being of the Church. Lifting that basket will be hard, humbling work, but it is necessary work. Any hint of “business as usual” will only further erode trust, for trust in the competence of Church leadership is at stake. Time is not on our side. Restoring Catholics’ trust requires cultural change in both ordained and lay leadership. Other institutions have lost and then regained the trust of their constituencies. The Catholic Church in the United States can do the same, but it will take a long-term transformational journey with immediate first steps.

Hard does not mean impossible. The Church must resolve the sexual abuse crisis as completely and unambiguously as possible, and do so in such a way that provides justice to the harmed including meaningful ongoing psychological and temporal support for the victims. Simultaneously, Church leaders must commit themselves to creating a new culture of leadership and healthy management that is transparent, accountable, competent, and grounded in justice in order to restore trust and safeguard the essential mission and future of the Catholic Church. The two solutions are hand-in-glove. In whatever solutions emerge, action and image are both important: the Church must do the right thing (action) and be seen as doing the right thing (image).

The twin crises demand a multidimensional and multilayered strategic and tactical plan that starts with a brutally honest recognition and acceptance that there are two fundamental and interrelated problems. The necessary elements of a plan that deals both with the sexual abuse crisis and the crisis in confidence in leadership are these:

1. A governance structure that is transparent with layered checks, balances, and oversight throughout.
2. A long-term leadership and management program that includes up-to-date management and leadership education and training for lay and ordained leaders.

3. A human resource system in the broadest and deepest sense—one that includes effective selection, training, assignment, evaluation, compensation, and continuing education and that gives voice to and protects the healthy clergy, religious, and laity involved in the programmatic mission of the Church.
4. A broad, deep, and transparent financial management and accounting system.
5. Effective communications, including the use of modern media technologies and distributive learning and leading methodologies.

Leadership Roundtable, a national network of senior executives from all walks of life, formed in reaction to the scandals rocking the Church in 2002. We began with a conversation between senior Catholic lay executives and Church leaders over what to do. Since then we have been laser focused on being a trusted partner helping Church leaders first discover then apply best practices in leadership and management properly aligned with ecclesiology and canon law. The practices and methods we have found together work. They improve accountability and transparency and provide a solid foundation upon which trust may be restored.

Lifting the basket now covering the light of Christ, in our experience as executive leaders, requires two Vatican-mandated commissions: one focused on the sexual abuse crisis and a second on the crisis of leadership and management. Both should report directly to the Holy Father or his delegate. These commissions must be external to the U.S. Catholic Bishops so that all can see “we are not investigating ourselves.” Both should conduct their work across diocesan boundaries, for the twin problems themselves cross diocesan lines. Both should be co-led by an American lay man and woman of significant credentials. These co-chairs should be given a charter in writing that provides them independence and authority to call together a diverse group of leaders, lay, religious, and ordained from across the ideological spectrum, who have the right set of experiences and expertise to oversee the necessary sub-committee working groups. The independence, authority, experience, and expertise must—in itself—show all Catholics that the Church is serious about resolving both of the crises it faces.

The Commission on Sexual Abuse should be tasked—in writing in its charter—with exposing all secret files, bringing full transparency to the extent of the problem in the United States, and recommending permanent, long-term solutions for accountability, victim and survivor justice, and prevention within dioceses and across diocesan lines if necessary. Otherwise the Catholic Church in the United States is likely to suffer “death from a thousand cuts” as one state after another sees itself forced to act as Pennsylvania did. Already eight states have begun, announced, or are considering grand-jury style investigations. The Catholic Church simply must get ahead of this process and do so in a way that is seen as not business as usual. Some of the policies that the

Church put in place after the 2002 sexual abuse crisis will provide a good guide, but much more will be required if the commission's work is to be seen as part of the way the Church intends to restore trust and confidence in its leadership.

The sexual abuse crisis has been decades in the making. It is a product of a way of "doing business," that is, the product of a set long-held leadership and management practices. Those practices must be re-envisioned and re-structured—all consistent with proper ecclesiology and canon law.

The Commission on Regaining Trust in Leadership should be tasked—again in writing in its charter—with analyzing all aspects of governance; human resource and financial management; leadership formation, training, and development; communications; and mechanisms for checks, balances, and oversight. This analysis should be conducted from the perspective of identifying those policies, processes, and practices that enhance trust so that these best practices can be promulgated. The commission should answer the Pope's call to purge the system of the "spirit of clericalism," for this spirit is a causal factor leading to hypocritical behavior. The commission should also identify those policies, processes, and practices that inhibit trust so that these can be changed or eliminated. The analysis should result in comprehensive recommendations concerning the steps necessary to restore trust in Church leadership, again consistent with ecclesiology and canon law. The recommendations that flow from this Commission should be adopted at the parish, diocesan, and national Catholic organizational levels.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops should request the Commissions on Sexual Abuse and Regaining Trust in Leadership as soon as possible. While these Commissions will be focused on the Catholic Church in the United States, what they find and recommend can act as learning platforms for possible actions in the global Church.

Leadership Roundtable, acting as the trusted partner it has proven to be over the past decade and a half, believes that the two Commissions actualize Cardinal DiNardo's vision of enacting "practical changes to avoid repeating the sins and failures of the past" and answer Pope Francis' call to "create a culture able to prevent such situations from happening" again.

Leadership Roundtable believes that these commissions can be the conduit to resolve the sexual abuse crisis and begin the process of restoring trust in Church leadership because the commissions and the resultant recommendations will have:

- convened Catholic Leaders from all walks of life willing to lend their talents in service to the Church—expanding a best practice now resident in multiple dioceses: the use of

independent lay experts in investigations, review boards, and other leadership and management positions.

- committed and invested publicly in creating a new culture of leadership and management that is transparent and accountable—a path that a number of dioceses have already begun,
- begun implementing leadership and management models that are based on best practices and skills drawn from the secular world properly adopted to ecclesiology and canon law and adding them to those currently created by and effective within the Church;
- invested in leadership and management training in seminary education and ongoing formation programs for lay ecclesial ministers, diocesan staff, deacons, priests, pastors and bishops—a practice emerging in several dioceses already; and
- accelerated authentic and measurable change in the leadership and management culture that some parishes, dioceses, and national Catholic organizations already manifest.

Leadership Roundtable sees the twin crises that the Catholic Church in the United States now faces as a call to all the faithful, a call to serve as St. Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 12: 4-7, “There are many different gifts, but it is always the same Spirit; there are many different ways of serving, but it is always the same Lord. There are many different forms of activity, but in everybody it is the same God who is at work in them all. The particular manifestations of the Spirit granted to each one is to be used for the general good.” Leadership Roundtable stands ready to do all we can to help face the two, interwoven crises the Church in the United States faces now—just as we have stood since our inception.

The Catholic Church has been a force of good in America for many, many years—and still is. That good, however, that light of Christ, has been hidden under the basket of sexual abuse and the leadership and management practices that permitted and then covered up the abuse. We must not abandon our Church in its time of need. Church leaders—lay and ordained working together, combining our gifts in service to Christ’s Church—can lift the basket and restore trust and confidence in the Catholic Church. This is the opportunity within the crises we face. The only question remaining is this: will we be courageous and humble enough to seize that opportunity?

This is a working document. Thanks to the feedback we have received thus far from bishops and experts who have shared their input with us to create this revised document.