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Catholic leaders make recommendations to address the Church's financial crisis and advance a new culture of co-responsible governance

The Catholic Church in the United States is facing a financial crisis, exacerbated by COVID-19, that affects its ability to minister and serve local communities. A [recent survey](#) shows that since the pandemic began, nearly 50% of Catholic dioceses have eliminated or considered eliminating diocesan programs, as well as elementary and secondary schools. Additionally, 17% have furloughed or laid off diocesan staff.

“Whether you look at the more than [20 dioceses](#) that have filed for bankruptcy, or the recent stories of financial malfeasance perpetrated by [certain diocesan leaders](#), many Catholics are deeply concerned about the future of the Church,” says Geno Fernandez, Leadership Roundtable board co-chair. “The Church needs national standards for financial management and co-responsible governance where professionally competent and mission-driven lay people work hand-in-hand with clergy. This partnership will create a healthy culture of leadership and ensure our ability to minister to and serve local communities across the country.”

“These reforms and best practices are long overdue,” notes Elizabeth McCaul, Leadership Roundtable’s board co-chair. “While the pandemic has accelerated the financial crisis in the Catholic Church, the underlying problems were already there.”

“We believe that the recommendations from Leadership Roundtable’s 2020 Catholic Partnership Summit report will provide Catholic leaders with actionable reforms related to governance and financial management to sustain a more viable future for our Church,” McCaul adds.

The report published this week, *We are the Body of Christ: Creating a Culture of Co-Responsible Leadership*, contains bold recommendations from participants at Leadership Roundtable’s Catholic Partnership Summit. Leadership Roundtable, known for its leadership convenings, brought together some 260 Catholic leaders for the Summit. Participants gathered to advance a national conversation about how to create a new culture of co-responsible leadership to help the Church address its multiple crises. Attendees included both bishops from the Vatican and the United States, theologians, leaders of national Catholic nonprofits, canon lawyers, philanthropists, young adult leaders, and more.

The report’s recommendations include:

- Create a governance reform working group, similar to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, to produce a plan for reforming Church governance structures

- Urge the Vatican to hold a synod of presidents of bishops' conferences on the subject of ethical financial management practices and to promulgate a *motu proprio* that would serve as a "Vos Estis Lux Mundi" for financial management
- Develop national standards for financial management, established as particular law for the United States, together with an annual, publicly-shared audit process that would become a "Dallas Charter and Norms" for financial policies and practices

"Catholic leaders have set strong policies and accountability measures for addressing sexual abuse and cover-up and they should be commended. The same care now needs to be taken to ensure prudent financial stewardship," remarks Fernandez. "Addressing financial malfeasance through strong and independent oversight must also be addressed in a significant way in each parish, diocese, national conference, and the global level of the Church."

"Co-responsible governance, in the view of Leadership Roundtable, describes a way of working where both lay and ordained Catholics make decisions together. Decision-making is delegated to the most competent professional, respecting both the principle of subsidiarity and the hierarchical constitution of the Church. This co-responsibility is elemental to resolving the looming financial crisis facing our Church and ensuring a vibrant future," adds Fernandez.

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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.

For more information about Leadership Roundtable, visit www.leadershiproundtable.org