



Pastoral Recommendations Project
By the baptized - For the baptized

Promoting Archdiocesan Healing

The People's Concern

Over three decades of leadership in our local church, the voice of the institution has overridden the voice of the faithful. The protection of the institution and the emphasis on the juridical power of the hierarchy took precedence over the exercise of servant leadership and pastoral care. This not only allowed more sexual abuse to happen, it also alienated large numbers of the faithful whose concerns were disregarded and discredited. Our pews are emptier – people have left the church in utter disgust. The archdiocese has much healing to do as it tries to move forward.

This archdiocese cannot be a community that brings gospel witness to the love of God if it does not openly and intentionally address the deep seated distrust that has been caused, particularly, by the misguided actions of past leadership. If ignored or only superficially addressed through standard PR techniques, the residual anger and distrust in the faithful will fester. The civilly mandated restorative justice sessions, while important, will be too limited. If the healing process does not reach out to the larger community, the engagement of the Catholic community with the mission of its own archdiocese will be restrained and hesitant.

The archdiocese needs to lance the boil. The Truth Commissions in Africa demonstrated the healing power of open communication between groups of the offended and the offenders. Simple listening sessions could have similar healing effectiveness in our archdiocese. By publically listening to the pained and angry voices with compassion and without defensiveness, the new archdiocesan leadership will vividly demonstrate their care for the community of the faithful over their care for the institution.

Recommendations

Although the healing process will realistically take an extended period of time, the first critical steps toward healing must begin immediately.

1. The faithful need an early opportunity to give voice to their experience of betrayal, preferably in this coming Fall of 2016;
2. The faithful need to hear Archbishop Hebda acknowledge their experiences and commit himself to acting differently in his supporting efforts to move forward;
3. The faithful need to be able to voice in their hopes for the future and their need to see specific actions addressing the effects of their voiced betrayal.

4. The archdiocese will need a 3-5 year sustained effort to address these effects

The first two steps will change the tone of the relationship between the faithful and their leadership, and will provide the foundation for the sustained effort. The second two steps will support the movement forward.

It's critical that all of these steps be accompanied by a transparent openness on the part of the archdiocesan leadership. Their actions will be more important than their words in building an environment of trust. Openness in sharing the comments from the listening sessions, openness about the results of the investigation into Archbishop Neinstedt and openness in dealing with the criminal indictment and the bankruptcy will help bring healing to and engender support from the broad archdiocesan community.

Step 1 – Giving voice to the experience of being betrayed

This archdiocese needs an open forum to begin the healing. The listening sessions that Archbishop Hebda held last Fall were well attended and showed the willingness of the local faithful to come out and ask to be heard. A set of similar listening sessions would be an effective way for the faithful to give voice to their experiences of betrayal from the sexual abuse issue and to other experiences of being disregarded and discredited.

The publicity for these listening sessions should specifically invite those who have left the community in frustration and disgust. This is not a "come back to church agenda", but a humble openness to acknowledge and address the harm done to their lives.

The questions for this initial set of sessions would be: "**What are some of the past actions or inactions by the Archdiocese that most trouble you?**", "**What feelings have these actions evoked in you?**" and "**What do you need to heal?**"

Step 2 – Response of Archbishop Hebda

The initial response can be delivered by Archbishop Hebda at the end of each of the listening sessions. It would entail a heartfelt apology and expression of the willingness of the new leadership to act differently in the future. As much as possible, his full leadership team should be attending with him so that they can be seen as participating in the apology and in the commitment to act differently in the future. Ideally, other bishops and other key leaders of the archdiocese will also attend these sessions.

Step 3 – Voicing Hopes and Offering Recommendations to Address the Effects

A second set of listening sessions should be held to give the community of the faithful an opportunity to voice their hopes for the future of the local church and to offer suggestions in how to address the effects of the past experiences of betrayal.

The two questions for this second set of sessions would be: "**Where do you see hope?**" and "**What are some specific ways the archdiocese can move forward?**"

It's important that these sessions about moving forward be separate from the previous sessions voicing the experience of betrayal. The separation emphasizes the fact that the new leadership sincerely wants to understand the sense of betrayal within the community before jumping to the discussion of next steps. It also gives the participants more time to digest what they heard in the first set of sessions.

Step 4 – An Ongoing Effort to Heal the Effects of the Betrayals

Based on the results of the listening sessions, Archbishop Hebda could form a leadership team from the broader Catholic community to carry out the sustained effort to address the effects of the past experiences of betrayal.

The sustained effort would likely be a 3 to 5-year effort to engage the deaneries and parishes in the process, and could involve a variety of programs and practices to help individuals address the effects of the betrayal in their personal lives and at the parish level. These could include follow-up sessions at parishes or deaneries; targeted training for pastors and key parish staff members on how to individually support those suffering from the betrayal, and group programs (like Uncommon Conversation) and small community meetings that help individuals come to terms with the betrayal's impact on their lives and allow the community to provide support to victim survivors.

Further Guidelines

To reach the broadest possible community, it would help to have extensive invitations to the listening sessions published in both the community press and the Catholic press. The outreach in these press releases, interviews and paid advertisements concerning the scheduled sessions would include an invitation to the folks who have left the church as well as current Catholics.

If these sessions are as well attended as the last sessions were, a lot of emotion, ideas and interaction will happen. The planning for these sessions may need to include plans for having professional therapists on hand or to have an early pilot session with about 50 invited members of the community to get a feel for how these will go.

Prepared by:
Mary Lou Caskey
dtcaskey@comcast.net
612-751-1816
Ed Walsh
walsh21@msn.com
612-247-0716