Chapter Eight

What restores and redeems: new paths in a communal vocation

1. Introduction

One of the tensions that runs throughout this report is between the desire and the moral imperative to recognise fully the harm done by abuse and the failures in compassion and justice that followed, and the instinct of faith to believe and hope that we can do better. When we listen to survivors or reflect on what we have learned about the abuse crisis in our own local church, the desire to do whatever would help or heal or put things right is deepened. But listening itself is complex, particularly for institutions, and the temptation is often to try to 'fix' others rather than examine ourselves.

There is also a particular absence in England and Wales of a full independent review commissioned by the Church itself of the scale of child sexual abuse in Catholic institutions and the failures in response. The IICSA process and its reports served a part of this purpose, but in a limited way and its recommendations dealt only with safeguarding and canon law. Even though there have been individual apologies from several bishops and a collective expression of sorrow and shame from the Bishops' Conference in response to the IICSA report, there has been little detailed explanation in formal public texts or processes of how such failures have happened.[138] Nor is there much communication about redress for victims or about change in wider dimensions such as those discussed in this report. Most importantly, there has been no visible forum within the Church in which the voices of victims and survivors have been heard and the institution and its office-holders have been seen to listen. Despite the series of expert reviews establishing and improving safeguarding practice commissioned by the bishops, many survivors still doubt whether the Church has really understood and changed.

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At the same time, as narrated in Chapter Four, there are signs that we are changing, that office-holders are visibly listening, that survivors' activism is creating new spaces and communities are also finding their voice and asking for greater transparency and justice. There are indications in this research of how much compassion, grief and desire for change is found in people's response when they are enabled to know and talk about abuse and its impact. There is anger too at perceived failures in leadership; but the anger is itself a constructive signal of the need for different ways of working and reparative action.

This part of our common life is continually moving between these poles. There are still people who have not yet disclosed their abuse to anyone or found the support they need. Others live with the impact of trauma affecting their lives or with anger or a sense of deep betrayal. Priests still feel vulnerable; communities still feel wounded; processes are still sometimes inadequate. But at the same time, a bishop recently invited survivors of abuse to speak about their experience during his installation, putting them at the centre of his ministry.[139] The LOUDfence project has been taken up by several dioceses. The Pope met and asked for forgiveness from a group of survivors from these countries who had long campaigned for acknowledgement of their abuse in a junior seminary run by a religious order, and brought them into dialogue with the current

LOUDfence

LOUDfence is a project started in the UK in 2020 by an activist, Antonia Sobocki. In a LOUDfence event, ribbons are tied to a fence or other structure, inside or outside a building, as a visible display of solidarity with those affected by abuse. The ribbons represent the voices of victims and survivors and of those who wish to speak out in their support and defence. It breaks the silence so often associated with this experience and communicates a message to victims and survivors that they are believed. The LOUDFence charter found on its website emphasises that a LOUDfence will always 'seek to aid healing, repair and reconstruction'. When a LOUDfence takes place in a cathedral or a church, it makes a visible institutional commitment and witness. So far, a LOUDfence event has taken place in the Catholic Cathedrals in Birmingham, Cardiff and Plymouth. Others are planned and the idea is spreading across other Christian churches and internationally. Antonia Sobocki has presented the project to the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors in Rome, and it has received the blessing of Pope Francis.

See **LOUDfence**
https://loudfence.com/

leaders of that order, from whom the men received a long-awaited apology.[140] Most of the reports prepared in English and Welsh dioceses for the global Synod on synodality spoke about people's concern and distress about the abuse crisis.[141]

Three pathways

We hope and believe that this tension is a place in which the Spirit moves, calling us towards what restores and heals and ultimately what is redemptive. There are three central areas or pathways in which we have imagined what action and change might be possible and which we propose for wider discussion. These are based on what we have heard from participants in this research. We also draw insights from experience elsewhere of different approaches to the issues raised by listening in this way.

The first pathway recognises that there is more work to be done to make visible and effective an institutional and communal commitment to listen to victims and survivors in this Catholic community in England and Wales and take responsibility for what has happened to them. We explore restorative approaches which have been pioneered elsewhere.

The second pathway concerns parish communities, whether directly or indirectly affected. They also carry wounds of different kinds: to their trust in leaders; to their faith in the Church and in priests; to their sense of identity as communities committed to live according to certain moral values, however imperfectly. We explore how to create spaces for conversation, for learning, and for the expression of grief and lament.

The third pathway opens up how we can address the cultural habits and systemic issues that contributed to making the abuse crisis possible and which are implicated in its mishandling. We explore in particular the ways that we could leave behind the habits and practices associated with clericalism; and how a culture and practice of accountability might be strengthened in our communities and structures. We point to the need for theological work, for ***'new languages of faith'***.

Each of these pathways is potentially restorative. They may also be redemptive if we enter them with open hearts and prayerful discernment. If the path ahead is truly one of conversion, of recognising what has gone wrong and accepting the need to change, seeking a closer following of Christ, it will not happen only through new policies or even excellent standards in safeguarding practice, essential as these are. Rather, it will come from our hearts and from our life of prayer and the courage with which we listen to the Spirit in humility and sorrow. It will take different shapes in varied contexts, parishes, dioceses or other Catholic communities. It will embrace both discomfort and creativity. It will be marked by compassion and a sense of what justice means.

2. The first pathway: an option for survivors through restorative approaches

The first pathway starts from our conviction that the Church in these countries has not yet adequately listened to victims and survivors, reflected on what can be learned from their experience and acknowledged failures and harm. This is a task that must involve office-holders, particularly bishops, because they speak for and symbolise the institution. It asks for communal acceptance of responsibility, even though some may feel they had no direct part in the failures which have happened. It is a task that includes finding meaningful steps of repair and redress. This could be described as making an option for survivors, a willingness to see the Church and all its structures through their eyes and their experience.

This research indicates that such work is underway but it often happens in private conversations and personal initiatives. It is somewhat piecemeal and unseen, even if meaningful for those involved. These individual encounters and smaller initiatives are vital sources of learning and transformation. We describe in a separate panel one which took place during this research. But something larger and more public could and should be done which communicates to victims and survivors in a more powerful way that the whole Church has acknowledged our communal and particular failures and our need to change and that we wish to find a place of deeper solidarity with survivors. There is potential here to change the narrative and to provide the moral and pastoral leadership that both survivors and communities long for.

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Our experience in a closed symposium

During the latter stages of the research, we planned a closed meeting bringing together a representative group of participants. Those who took part were survivors, laypeople, safeguarding staff, priests, bishops and religious. We met for two days. Our purpose was to share with the group some of the themes emerging in the research, and we engaged experienced and sensitive professional facilitators. We also made sure that a trained counsellor was present to offer support to anyone who needed it. We followed an inductive process; that is, we described in advance the headline themes emerging from our data and then asked the participants, in groups, to tell us what they would like to explore.

Although we gained helpful feedback on the research themes, what we learned from the experience about how to work together was even more valuable. The most significant part of the meeting happened in the small groups in which people encountered each other in a deeply human and respectful way. For many, this was transformative. Some of the survivors present felt accepted and heard by a Church which they felt had rejected them or which they had rejected. Others affirmed that the meeting 'stood on holy ground' and had created a community in a way that some thought would be impossible. It was costly: for the survivors, to explain their pain; for bishops, to hear again harsh criticisms of how Catholic systems work; for religious and priests, who discovered that even the clothes they wear may renew the pain of survivors of abuse. It was important that it extended over two days, so that relationships could be built, and a journey taken.

The invitation to participants to leave aside clothing or symbols that denote their role, ministry or state of life in the Church was not a questioning of their vocations. Rather, it was an act of solidarity and recognition of what was needed to make encounter possible. One priest participant commented afterwards that by foregoing the 'Father' and the collar, he felt he was fulfilling his priesthood more faithfully in this situation than had he not done so.

We learned a great deal from this experience. The role of skilled facilitators is vital. They create a safe space for everyone and guide the process so that it is purposeful but still flexible and attentive. Such meetings need commitments to confidentiality and pastoral support and an expectation that people are open to meet each other utterly as equals, with no titles or deference. It is helpful to find a neutral venue.

A conversation of this kind asks a great deal of all participants. Most of all, it asks survivors yet again to explain their pain, to bear that cost for a purpose we hope, but cannot know, will contribute to a larger healing. It is emotionally demanding for all those involved; but also an immense reciprocal gift and privilege.

It will rarely be possible to replicate such a conversation because of the resources required. But it is important to know that it is possible, when it happens with the right people and at the right place and time. A kind of reconciliation can tentatively be gathered, through people's discomfort and pain but also their generosity and courage.

Restorative approaches

We suggest that the most significant potential to change the narrative on communal and institutional response to victims and survivors of abuse may lie in exploring how ideas from restorative justice can be adapted and used.

- Those working in the field of criminal justice have become familiar with the concept of restorative justice, a process in which victims and the offenders who have committed a crime against them are supported by trained facilitators to meet and have a conversation in which victims can ask the questions to which they need answers, and offenders listen to the impact their actions have had and acknowledge what they have done. Restorative justice processes happen in many countries. They are always voluntary, that is, they only happen if both victim and offender consent; and they are collaborative, in that both parties share ownership of what happens.
- Healing or restorative circles are also based on the same idea. They work with an affected group, people who have experienced similar harm or trauma. They provide a safe space in which people can gather, talk about what has happened to them and discuss what is needed to make things right. They have a structured approach to conversation, often using a 'talking piece'. They happen in many different settings including prisons and schools.
- There are other models of alternative paths to a wider form of justice and healing when great harm has happened. Truth Commissions or Truth and Reconciliation Processes have happened in a number of countries where populations have suffered violence and oppression. They aim to enable the truth to come out about the harms and crimes committed, to assist victims and the whole of society to come to terms with the trauma and sometimes to consider reparations. They respond to a deep need of victims, the need to have the truth of their experience validated.

The Truth Project which accompanied the work of IICSA was an example of how this idea makes sense in relation to victims of child abuse. The Truth Project listened to over 6000 victims and survivors and made an important contribution to the Inquiry's work.[144] Victims and survivors of abuse in Catholic settings spoke to the Truth Project, but there has been no equivalent space within the Church.

Restorative Circles

Janine Geske is an American judge and practicing Catholic who now works in the field of restorative justice. She described a 'restorative circle' to which she invited different categories of people affected by abuse.[142] 'The process is quite simple', she says, describing listening to each other explore the harm done and how it can be repaired, using a 'talking piece', which is passed from person to person, 'allowing each individual to speak from his or her heart'. 'It is an incredibly spiritual and moving experience to participate in such a process', she comments. She quotes one of the participants, who spoke in tears; 'It's amazing. When we share stories of pain, there's healing in it'.[143]

Each of these models is based on principles which resonate deeply with themes from this research. Victims and survivors need their voices to be heard and believed; they need truthful answers to their questions; silences need to be broken; accountability needs to be accepted, and reparative support and redress need to be offered. When these happen in a visible public process, a counter-narrative to the experience of mishandling failures is available. The way in which restorative approaches could work in practice in the context of the Catholic community's response to abuse victims and survivors will not be the same as in prisons or other settings. But the principles work here too, not least because they align with Catholic theological and ethical understanding.

Barbara Walshe and Catherine O'Connell are restorative justice practitioners who worked with survivors of abuse in Jesuit schools and with the Irish Jesuits in a project described below. They explained what underlies their approach:

- It recognises the dignity and uniqueness of each person.
- It recognises that people are expert in their own lives.
- People want to make sense and meaning out of what happened to them.
- People can then explore what matters most to them.[147]

Walshe and O'Connell stress that restorative work is not therapy, although its outcomes may be therapeutic. It is a work of repair in which the harm does not dissolve or disappear, but its impact is acknowledged and accountability is accepted. Above all, it is victim-led and trauma-informed, which means it is sensitive to how trauma affects people's physical, psychological and emotional health and recognises their need for welcoming and safe places.

Restorative processes work on a different logic from normal criminal justice or legal procedures. As Daniel Philpot points out, rather than using an adversarial legal paradigm, they work on a reconciliation paradigm, an idea that Christians hold dear and which lies at the heart of Pope Francis' teaching in *Fratelli Tutti.*[148]

We would go further than Philpot and suggest restorative processes also hold redemptive meaning and potential. They are not an easy option. If done with care, honesty and commitment, they will challenge assumptions and habits built into Catholic cultures. We describe the Irish process at length below to indicate how much is asked of those who take part. But perhaps they are commensurate with the scale of the harm done, in the abuse and in the communal failures of response. They also create a new kind of space, a space which makes sense theologically for the Church. It is a space that is different from what happens in safeguarding practice but complementary to its purpose.

In looking at the potential of restorative approaches for our own context in England and Wales we are not suggesting replication of the process used in criminal justice settings whereby victims and those who have committed crimes against them meet for a structured conversation. Where the crime involved is a sexual offence, such processes should be facilitated by people with specific and expert training in this area. Some

A Catholic truth and reconciliation process?

In a recent article, Kate Jackson-Meyer, a Catholic ethicist, outlined a proposal for a global Catholic Truth and Reconciliation process for clergy abuse.[145] She argues that a global approach would unify what is currently a diverse range of responses and practices in different countries. Such a process, she suggests, responds to the vocation of the Church to be a healing and reconciling community, called to make relationships right 'through unearthing the truth, upholding justice and fostering forgiveness'. (p.238) Jackson-Meyer draws on St Thomas Aquinas to argue that truth-telling is required by a sense of justice towards survivors. She then outlines some practical considerations including the need for a joint clerical-lay leadership team, public hearings and gathering of testimonies in 'regional chapters' which in turn guide local churches, and adaptation to local cultural practices and traditions. She also suggests a 'consistent global reparations program that supports the physical, psychological and spiritual needs of survivors'.[146](p.243)

may think that restorative justice cannot even be considered in relation to sexual offences. But some survivors of abuse in the Church do want to meet their abusers, and a few have sought them out on their own initiative. For many others, their abusers are no longer alive or able to engage.

Rather, our interest is in the potential of restorative processes for whatever healing may be possible in the relationships between victims and survivors and the community and institution of the Catholic Church. They may also be helpful and offer healing for other 'secondary victims': for communities wounded by their knowledge of a case or of failures in response, for example. They may also work for priests who have suffered from a false allegation or who feel their life and ministry has been disvalued by the actions of those who have abused, or for priests who feel burdened and judged by the damage done to priestly ministry by the actions of those who have abused.

Restorative processes have the potential to embody some of the dynamics which this research has explored. They can empower people and give everyone an equal voice, acting as a corrective to clericalism and to habits of silence and passivity. They give priority to people rather than hierarchical structure. They ask participants to reconsider habits that operate without conscious choice, and they invite participants to be intentional about change. They must also be voluntary, which means that they can only happen if those who have been harmed are willing to take part. Their participation will depend on whether they are able to trust the process proposed and trust those who will facilitate it. When survivors are willing to take part, it could express a movement from retributive justice to restorative justice.

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A Restorative Response to the Abuse of Children Perpetrated by Joseph Marmion SJ
Report by Barbara Walshe and Catherine O'Connell

In March 2021, prompted by a former pupil, the Irish province of the Jesuits issued a statement admitting that Joseph Marmion SJ had abused boys in Jesuit schools sexually, emotionally and physically from 1962 to 1978 when he was removed from teaching. This led to many other former pupils coming forward to share their experience of abuse by Marmion. The Order's safeguarding staff together with its provincial leaders discerned that the victims' needs might best be met by a restorative process, which would include 'authentic vulnerable engagement' by Jesuits themselves.

The Order commissioned two independent restorative practitioners to take this forward. The practitioners listened to sixty-two past pupils who were harmed and assisted them to engage with each other. They also facilitated conversations between past pupils and Jesuits for those who wished and eighteen such meetings took place. This led to a 'Past Pupils Agenda' emerging in September 2021 detailing the needs of survivors to understand and make sense of what had happened, be confident that change had taken place, and be acknowledged and offered some redress. The Irish Jesuits also investigated their own records on how Marmion's life and career had been handled and made public their findings.

The practitioners also spoke to twenty-seven Jesuits about their experiences of Marmion as a colleague, community member and teacher. A Jesuit steering group was formed to respond to the Past Pupils' Agenda. The practitioners facilitated meetings with both the past pupils group and the Jesuit steering group, separately and jointly. They then met with fifty-one Jesuits in a three day gathering for reflection on the Jesuit response and the testimonies of past pupils and discussion of what the Irish province now needed to do to respond to the harm done.

The report describes each stage of this process, quoting frequently from the voices of both survivors and Jesuits. The experience of abuse is fully laid out and the long lasting impact is powerfully described, detailing powerlessness, silence, shame and trauma. The narratives resonate closely with what we heard from survivors in this research, as does the desire to be heard and believed and the need for accountability and some form of closure. The accounts from Jesuits are also illuminating, a rare example of courageous transparency by male religious and provincial leaders about a brother priest and community member. Their testimonies echoed themes from this research about silence, bystanding, complicity and poor formation in religious community life. They also expressed humility, humiliation and a desire to do whatever they could to help those who were hurt. The Jesuits drew on resources from their Ignatian spirituality to understand how to respond and made specific practical commitments.

The final chapters narrate the difference that the restorative process has made, first to the past pupils who took part and then to Jesuits. For many of the former, it broke a silence of forty years. Most 'valued the support, the ability to be heard and to have their needs noted and the effort made to meet these'. (p.181) The facilitators reported that the process had enabled a level of healing for participants and for Jesuits, but there was also anger that it had taken so long. For the Jesuit Province, there was recognition that younger generations now 'carry the can' for abuse that happened before their time, and appreciation of the open dialogue that had taken place and admiration for the leadership shown by the Provincial.

There are several aspects of the Irish process that are striking. The first is that a past pupil who had been abused called the Jesuits to account and they heard the call and responded by setting up the process. It started from the cry for justice of survivors. The past pupils abused by Marmion were willing to expose their pain, a willingness that can never be taken for granted. In the words of O'Connell and Walshe, the Jesuits then 'listened to ***hear*** (our emphasis) rather than defend or explain'[149]. They also investigated their own records and made public how they had failed to stop the abuse and protect pupils. And they were willing to examine intimate aspects of their community life and culture and admit the weaknesses they saw. They made practical commitments to providing therapeutic support and financial restitution and to further change as a result of the conversations with past pupils. The leadership shown by the Provincial was crucial.

All these elements would help victims and survivors in a restorative process here in England and Wales or anywhere. Transparency about diocesan or religious community failures to recognise and remove or report abusers has often been lacking.

What would a restorative process look like in the local Church in England and Wales?

The Irish process began from the needs of those who had been abused or suffered harm. Any imagining of what is possible here needs a similar starting point. It should draw on and learn from those who have skill, wisdom and experience in this field and an empathetic understanding of the Catholic context. And it would need careful independent facilitation and the availability of pastoral support for participants.

A diocese could commission such a process, either when a parish community has been directly affected or when failures in response come to light, or because there are survivors of earlier abuse cases in the diocese who still feel unheard. It would need willingness from diocesan office-holders to give time to listening and to engage in an authentic and personal way. It would also need a willingness to provide the financial resources needed. One of the commitments involved is that some of us, whether office-holders or ordinary members of the baptised, need to be willing to listen on behalf of the whole institution and acknowledge harm and trauma, even though we were not personally responsible and had no direct knowledge of the situations involved.

Part of the value of such a process is that it is made public that it is happening, with appropriate ways to anonymise voices as needed, and an account of what has been learned is published. It should signal strongly that the whole Church desires to listen. It may enable other victims and survivors to come forward, feeling confident that they will be heard and listened to. It also creates a space in which failures in process and relationships, and in culture and systems, can be acknowledged, a space that is different from a legal process that frequently becomes adversarial.

Such a process could be both healing and generative. Truth-telling releases some pain. Listening to *hear* rather than to defend or explain allows us to accept and live with vulnerability. In a restorative process,

Pope Francis' vision of social peace

In *Fratelli tutti,* Pope Francis sets out a vision of social peace, which needs 'paths of renewed encounter' as well as truth-telling: 'Truth, in fact, is an indispensable companion of justice and mercy. All three together are essential to building peace.' (para 227) He cautions against silences which keep conflicts hidden or buried and argues that truth involves recognising the pain of victims of violence. He also suggests that 'We cannot move forward without remembering the past; we do not progress without an honest and unclouded memory.' (para. 249) Although he is addressing wounds, violence and conflict in wider society, his teaching is relevant in relation to how the Church as a whole come to terms with the abuse crisis. Restorative processes contain many of the elements Pope Fran`cis identifies as essential in building social peace.

power is re-arranged as the victims, who have felt powerless, regain some sense of power and agency through speaking and being heard. A restorative process can also lead to practical outcomes which complement the work of safeguarding. In the Irish process, for example, a commitment was made to explore confession as a place of 'situational risk', that is, a situation that carries an inbuilt risk which needs to be acknowledged and mitigated.[150] It is also possible to explore redress in a setting which is less confrontational. In the Irish process, lawyers were also involved and redress was made, but they worked collaboratively to resolve matters alongside the restorative process.

There are other ways that a visible public restorative process could be imagined and enacted. The Bishops' Conference could commission an independent agency to plan and lead a project. This could allow for a process that was open to survivors across all the dioceses. It could also be entrusted to an appointed new group with relevant experience, perhaps working with an existing group such as the Isaiah Journey.[151] A parish or group of parishes could imagine and pioneer a local model, finding relevant expertise and using resources such as the Isaiah Journey's excellent *Guide to Listening*.

Restorative processes are not the only way to seek repair of relationships and make a visible commitment to a better response to survivors. Other possibilities are emerging, visible signs and actions that recognise the experience of victims and survivors and support healing. We have already mentioned the LOUDfence initiative, for example. A related project involves the creation of a healing garden in Northampton Diocese, a place of sanctuary and rest.[152]

It is beyond the scope of this report to propose a single model. But we suggest that work could be done to learn from relevant experiences elsewhere and develop models that could be tried, including consideration of a restorative process at national level. The specific purpose and parameters of each restorative process would need to be identified, taking into account any legal or criminal justice processes underway. Restorative and truth-telling circles and processes could sit alongside or come after legal processes if these are happening. Such work would need to involve survivors as well as those with practical expertise.

3. The second pathway: conversation and listening in parish communities

At one level, the practical imperative which emerges from this research in relation to parish communities is simple. We need to break silences; we need to learn to talk about the impacts of all the dimensions of the abuse crisis; and we need to listen to each other and see where and how we are moved to act in response. And within these conversations and processes, we need to lament, in the biblical sense, to grieve and repent, and find hope.

By 'parish communities', we mean parishes that have been directly affected and those that have not experienced any direct case but where people are painfully aware of the wider picture in their diocese or across the whole Catholic Church. We also include here priests and deacons and others in parish leadership roles. As explained in Chapter Three, they carry heavier burdens as a result of the abuse crisis. They too need to be able to talk, and listen, perhaps in spaces of their own, but also crucially with the people and communities to whom they minister. Religious also belong to parishes, as well as having their own community life to repair.

At first glance, this path seems straightforward, especially as we are learning synodal ways of being and working (discussed more below and on p. 134) but it is not. A parish community is a complex mix of needs, capacities and vulnerabilities. As we have already explored, some people don not want to think or talk about this issue. Sunday Mass congregations bring together 'everyone': children and frail elderly people, some with limited English, some with deep fears or other wounds, as well as those who long for change and the rich array of those who minister and lead in various ways. Unless a local or national event has prompted a direct impact, it is hard to imagine a way to engage a parish community as a whole in careful and compassionate reflection on this particular issue. Yet somehow we need to invite deeper understanding in the entire body of the baptised because the whole body is wounded. Part of this awareness already exists in the safeguarding practices that take place, and another part is growing in the observance of the Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors, but there is a missing dimension. This is the opportunity to talk, listen, reflect and see how this crisis asks us to grow in faithfulness, and to bring to expression the instincts of faith of the baptised. It need not involve everyone; but it should be open to and offered to all.

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Two practical steps are needed.

The first step is the need to pay better pastoral attention to directly affected communities and their leaders. When a parish, or a group of parishes or a whole diocese, has felt the grief, anger, loss, betrayal or other emotions associated with a direct impact, there should be examples of good practice, tools that can be used, and resources of people and skills available. As we saw when listening to one parish where the immediate impact was handled with care and compassion (see p.93-96), it is possible to enable a faith-filled response which deepens the life of the Church, if the right things are done. It is important that this is considered as a long-term process. The impact does not cease when the events disappear from the news. Each parish has a history and a unique journey in its own place, and each community needs to travel its own path of grief, remembering and reconciliation.

Parishes could learn much from each other's experience and from shared reflection across different dioceses and situations. Gathering insights and ideas about good practice would then benefit others and contribute to a maturing in pastoral response. It is not clear who has responsibility for this area in how diocesan structures and agencies commonly work. Neither does there seem to be any directly relevant resources or models, other than the Isaiah Journey Listening Guide already mentioned. This is a gap that could and should be filled.

The second step returns to the theme of synodality and is relevant to any parish, since it is likely that all parishes are indirectly affected. Throughout this research, the synergy between what is needed to break silences and repair ecclesial relationships, the talking and listening described above, and the exploration of a synodal style of being the Church, was striking. A synodal method of conversation, sometimes called 'spiritual conversation', was outlined in the preparatory resources for the 2023 Synod in Rome. It was practiced in many parishes and other groups taking part in the synodal consultation and seems particularly appropriate for exploring the issues raised by the abuse crisis. The synodal method is characterised by deep listening; it encourages an open mind and heart; it invites people to speak with courage and 'parrhesia' or boldness; it is suffused with prayer; and it is oriented towards discernment, gathering what we can glimpse of how the Holy Spirit is guiding us.

In some parishes or communities, a process of conversation in a synodal style focused on the issues raised in this report could be both healing and generative. The method described above draws on the deep faith of the whole body of Christ, the baptised people, and allows space for people to discern and imagine their own restorative or healing paths.

In practice, this could either be part of a larger synodal process which a parish is following in order to consider other questions and challenges, or within a diocesan process, or it could stand alone. Many of the parish and diocesan reports prepared for the national synod report speak of how valuable participants found the

Extract from the Synod on Synodality *Vade Mecum*

This extract from the official Synod handbook describes the method proposed for synodal conversation. It assumes that some material for prayer and questions for reflection have been circulated in advance. In the global Synod process, the questions were broad. If the intention is to heal the wounds caused and deepened by the abuse crisis, the questions would need to be carefully prepared for each particular context.

A suitable method for group dialogue which resonates with the principles of synodality can be used. For instance, the Spiritual Conversation method promotes active participation, attentive listening, reflective speaking, and spiritual discernment.

Participants form small groups of about six or seven persons from diverse backgrounds. This method takes about at least an hour and comprises three rounds.

In the first round, everyone takes equal turns to share the fruit of his or her prayer, in relation to the reflection questions circulated beforehand. There is no discussion in this round and all participants simply listen deeply to each person and attend to how the Holy Spirit is moving within oneself, within the person speaking, and in the group as a whole. This is followed by a time of silence to note one's interior movements.

In the second round, participants share what struck them most in the first round and what moved them during the time of silence. Some dialogue can also occur, and the same spiritual attentiveness is maintained. Once again this is followed by a time of silence.

Finally in the third round participants reflect on what seems to be resonating in the conversation and what moved them most deeply. New insights and even unresolved questions are also noted. Spontaneous prayers of gratitude can conclude the conversation. Usually each small group will have a facilitator and note-taker.[153]

process and how they desired to continue synodal conversations for their local parish life, not just to respond to the global process. In the national synthesis, the synodal experience was described as a ***'revelation'***, of people feeling they could speak freely for the first time and be listened to.[154] As the Liverpool Archdiocese report says about the people who took part there, 'it is clear that they want their voice heard. No longer is it possible to expect people to be silent.'[155]

We found, in this research, that people entered conversations about the impact of the abuse crisis with deep seriousness, honesty and a searching of heart and mind. They valued taking part. Many said afterwards that they had been glad of the opportunity to consider issues which they knew were important but they had never been asked to think about within their faith and Catholic belonging. People may be fearful of this issue; but when we create a safe place and a structured and prayerfully prepared method of conversation, and work with synodal values and principles, then it becomes possible to listen to what the Spirit is saying to us about the wounded body to which we belong.

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There are already imaginative resources for prayer and liturgy on these themes available in the Isaiah Journey web pages already mentioned several times. All the resources prepared for the annual Day of Prayer for Victims and Survivors can be used at other times, as the Isaiah Journey group suggests. The questions that could be addressed in the synodal listening will differ depending on whether the parish or community has been directly or indirectly affected.

In planning a synodal conversation which will explore these issues, it is crucial to consider how the voice and experience of victims and survivors can be heard. We have already commented on the problem that directly affected communities often have no way of hearing from the victims of an abuse case or allegation which has touched their parish life. The protection of the privacy and rights of victims is clearly the priority here, but there will also be other factors such as legal processes which make this difficult or impossible. There is also the dilemma discussed earlier: why should survivors have to describe their pain, again, so that others can learn? Yet without hearing victims or survivors speak about their experience, a vital part of compassionate understanding may be impeded. Sometimes it may be possible to find a route to invite survivors to take part and speak for themselves, if this is done with respect for their freedom and well-being. For some survivors, it is a mission they take up despite the cost to themselves, because they see that the Church needs their help for its own healing. The Isaiah Group resource already mentioned, *Listening with Love*, could also be used, and some survivors have written memoirs which are valuable sources to help others understand. Diocesan safeguarding staff may be able to suggest other ways forward.

There is one further aspect of using a synodal conversation style to explore these issues which needs particular care. It is possible or even likely that victims and survivors of abuse in other settings or in the Church may be present. Whoever plans and leads such conversations needs to ensure that there are people available to accompany or provide support if and when anyone becomes distressed or seems at risk. This may be a trained counsellor or someone who has other relevant pastoral

experience and skills and knows the resources available to provide more help. We recommend again the Listening Guide, and the churches' sponsored agency, Safe Spaces, and the survivor-led group, Survivors Voices.[156]

Space for lament: 'grief needs to be attended to'.

From this research, we have noticed the desire for another form of response which can be imagined at the level of parishes or dioceses. People expressed grief and sadness about all that has happened in the abuse crisis. Some explicitly described the need to lament, an unusual idea, but one that is deeply rooted in scripture. Lament is found throughout the psalms and the prophetic books of the Bible. It is an appeal to God to listen to suffering and pain; 'Give ear to my words, O Lord.' (Ps 5).

We noted in Chapter Six how Catholics tend to feel we should not complain or criticise, and how this can lead to a kind of collusion with clericalism. But there are forms of complaining that are valid and necessary. Some anger is rightful and linked to virtue, for example. The idea of lament helps us explore how to express these difficult feelings in a safe and constructive way. Lament is first of all addressed to God. It is a way in which we can express the pain of communal failure to live up to our communal vocation, our ethics and values. It is an opportunity to struggle with the reality of distorted relationships, fearful silences and other failures in which we see our own brokenness and that of others and of the systems we create and tolerate. Lamenting names what is happening or has happened. It builds common ground and creates a space for reflection and contemplation.[157] It helps us come to terms with realities.

Lamenting is also a way we express grief. As one research participant said, 'grief needs to be attended to'. When painful feelings are expressed and heard, it can lessen the pain and create space for people to move on. Catholic liturgy is rich in rituals and rites which enable us to express various forms of grief and sorrow: in a requiem; in a service of reconciliation; in the Good Friday liturgy where we reverence the cross; in anointing those who are sick. Catholic practice recognises that rituals involve people physically as well as spiritually and emotionally, which is why they are important in healing, especially in relation to trauma. Could there be a ritual through which we express grief over the particular failings, harm and trauma of abuse? The LOUDfence project is a start, creatively showing what is possible when we start from what is deeply felt. There is work to do here about how we can use familiar and new symbols and rituals to express what we need to say. Bradford Hinze's proposal that lament energises hope and nourishes the desire for a better way forward gives this added potential. Rituals of lament could play a part in the conversion of hearts which we seek.

Prophetic Obedience:
Ecclesiology for a Dialogical Church by Bradford Hinze

Bradford Hinze explores lament in both the Old and New Testament and suggests that we can understand lament as 'an expression of the indwelling agency of the Spirit in a suffering church and world'[158] Lament, he suggests, generates energy. Listening to authentic lament is 'a work of prophetic obedience to the voice of the Spirit in the church and the world'. (p.89) Drawing on biblical scholars' work, he points to how lament is part of prophetic criticism; it pierces numbness, challenges acceptance of 'the way things are', and energises hope. (pp.128-9) He also suggests that what often lies within lament is a desire for things to be better, particularly when there are 'frictions, frustrations and failures present in the church'. (p.87) These may reveal deeper aspirations and hopes. He then draws on the Ignatian idea of discernment to suggest that criteria are needed to help us 'heed, differentiate and learn from laments that arise in the Church'. (p.88)

4. The third pathway: different choices in building our common life

This pathway is much broader and longer. It concerns all the changes in habits and attitudes that will gradually help us grow into more mature and faithful relationships and practices. It is a pathway in which new understandings of teaching and theology can help us to imagine and bring about change. It is a path along which anyone can tread, built in part by countless small individual choices, but which also calls for communal awareness and larger commitments.

Changing habits and attitudes is slow patient work, but it is also work that can happen within many existing strands of local church life and relationships. In this report we have examined how a fresh interpretation and re-balancing of some elements of Catholic teaching and theology could nourish this work and locate it as a path towards greater faithfulness. We can intentionally look for and create new habits which signal different ways of building our common life.

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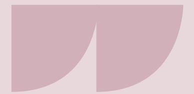


In Chapters Six and Seven, we have described the unhealthy dimensions of our culture which have come to light through the abuse crisis and explored the theological resources which will help us unpick knots and retrieve principles that offer possible ways to grow and change. A range of themes are covered, but the two which stand at the centre of many concerns arising in this research and which also feature in most of the synodal reports are about clericalism and about the lack of practical accountability structures. The echoes and resonances between what people desire in their active belonging to the Church, as expressed in synodal conversations, and what might help to repair the damage done to the whole body by the abuse crisis are insistent.

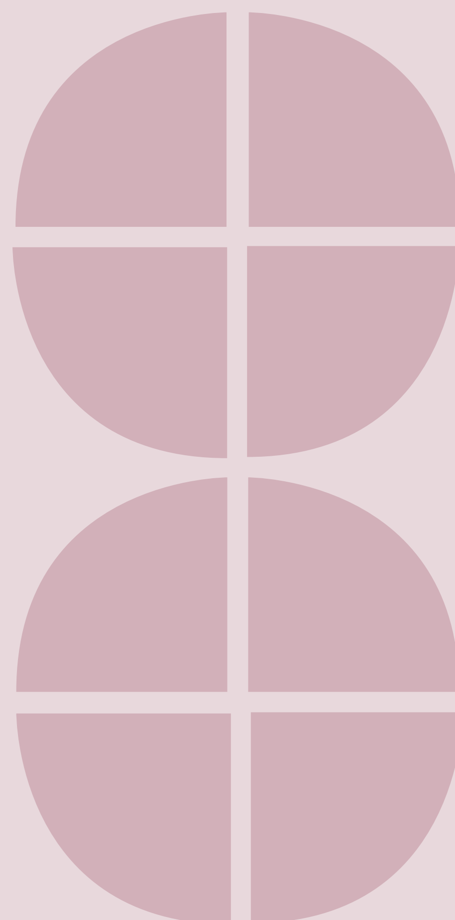
Growing out of clericalism

There is no single answer or plan or strategy that will eradicate clericalism. Nor is it possible to do so in a 'top down' way, although leadership that models and invites change is vital. Rather, it is a task for everyone, in multiple aspects of our shared life, in our conversations, attitudes, assumptions and relationships. It is not only in response to the abuse crisis that this change is needed. It is an imperative arising from what it means for the whole Church, the whole body of the baptised, to be as deeply alive and faithful as we could be. In earlier chapters we have suggested some of the directions which could be followed:

- Breaking silences and resisting passivity: choosing to talk about what seem to be 'no go' areas, such as celibacy and sexuality in relation to priesthood; communicating transparently and fully the detail of what has gone wrong when victims of abuse experience mishandling; exploring the kind of leadership we would like from our bishops.
- Consciously adjusting attitudes and habits related to how we speak about priests and priesthood and about the baptised: avoiding talking in ways that assume that the holy or the sacred is only found

in the ordained; avoiding deference; building relationships in which feedback is reciprocal, disagreements are possible and decisions are explained and can be challenged; providing formation to help people understand more fully their baptismal priesthood and their own holiness.

- Thinking together about some of the habits which many see as supporting clericalism; could we more often drop titles, for example? What are the implications for clerical dress and when is it needed? Can we learn to avoid 'special treatment' for priests or bishops at social or other events?
- Thinking together about how best to manage responsibility for all that happens within parish life, so that we move beyond the idea that the priest is responsible for everything and his permission is constantly needed. This is already happening in places where parish mergers and new clusters or families of parishes are requiring new structures and new arrangements so that there is a real sense of shared responsibility and collaboration. There is also new interest in a revived and less bureaucratic way of forming parish councils to work in a synodal way.[159]
- Actively committing to greater transparency at all levels from the parish to the Bishops' Conference; moving from a default of secrecy and non-explanation to an assumption that everything possible should be explained or accessible. This is composed of many smaller actions which could include: publishing the agenda of Bishops' Conference meetings and some of the papers unless they specifically require confidentiality; creating spaces in which people can ask questions and receive explanations about diocesan decision-making; asking people what they want to know. It could also include such practices as bishops and priests being willing to talk about where and how they find support and accountability.
- Considering how to achieve greater transparency and involvement of the baptised in the appointment of bishops. Although the formal process is handled by the Nuncio and in Rome, there could be ways to ensure more voices are heard in composing an account of what is needed in each local church, an account that can be fed into the formal process. There should also be more transparency about the stages and timing of the process. This is a task on which the Bishops' Conference here can engage with the Nuncio and relevant authorities in Rome.



None of these are particularly new. Each will already be happening in some places. They may also seem somewhat distant from the implications and shattering impact of abuse. There will also be resistance, from both people and priests. They are still important. There is still a long way to go and much to learn and explore.

A powerful sign

There is one practical step which mostly does not happen and which is often a source of pain in parishes. This is the problem, already mentioned in earlier chapters, of what happens when a priest leaves a parish and a new priest arrives to minister there. There is rarely any discernible process of handover or any sense of how induction should happen and how the parish community and its leaders might arrange and be involved in this. There is usually no opportunity for any dialogue between the bishop and the parish community about what is needed. The message this gives about ownership and responsibility for parish life and mission may be correct in relation to canon law, but it undermines any sense of shared responsibility and mature collaboration. Sometimes it leads to great loss as incoming priests drop structures, change practices and introduce their own preferences in ways that distress and dishearten people who have been lifelong active members of a parish.

It is hard to understand why this is so neglected. Why can we not find an appropriate and careful way of managing a change of priests in ways that respect and affirm the capacities of a parish community to shape its own life? It is not just that consultation about what is needed in a role vacancy, and handover and induction, are commonplace in so many other sectors and other Christian churches. It is profoundly about our belief that the Spirit works through the gifts and voices of all the baptised, and the principle in Catholic teaching reviewed earlier about the interdependence of the two forms of priesthood. To be the priest that a parish community needs, it makes sense to have a structured ordinary expectation of good handover and induction.

This does not mean that a parish vets or selects who is appointed. The task of making appointments gets increasingly difficult as there are fewer priests available. But it could enable the bishop to have conversations with priests about appointments that take into account what the relevant parish community has said about its own life and its needs. This should help priests too. It provides a starting point for the priest's ministry when he arrives in a new parish.

Synodal approaches can help here too. In an ecclesial way of arranging handover, which may learn from professional models elsewhere in some regards but which most of all needs to be rooted in what it means to be the body of Christ, listening and discernment will be vital.

New practices in this area would be a powerful sign of a church which is not burdened with clericalism. This is a matter of pastoral processes; it need not require change in canon law. It would be helpful too to examine the texts used in the rite of installing a parish priest, to see what messages are conveyed and ensure a balance between recognising the proper canonical responsibilities taken on by a parish priest and the primary importance of the theological vision of shared baptismal responsibility for a common life of discipleship and mission, led and served by the ordained.

It is hard to understand why this is so neglected. Why can we not find an appropriate and careful way of managing a change of priests in ways that respect and affirm the capacities of a parish community to shape its own life?

The potential of self-binding

There is one other idea which could be useful here, one which relates to new priests coming to a parish, including particularly a parish that has been directly affected by an abuse case or by mishandling at some level. It is also relevant to new bishops coming to a diocese or to how either bishops or priests might offer a different kind of leadership in the aftermath of an abuse case.

This is the idea of self-binding or pledging, of a bishop or priest choosing to commit to certain courses of action or to new practices of collaboration and listening, whether or not they are covered by canon law.[160] It might include a commitment to follow through the decisions made by a diocesan Synod before these decisions are known, an act of visible trust in the Holy Spirit active in the Church. At parish level, it might mean a new parish priest making a public commitment to change as little as possible for the first three months and then to listen and dialogue about what might be done differently. It might mean a defined commitment to transparency in the aftermath of a failure related to abuse cases or mishandling. Such acts call for courage; they also invite mature and faithful response.

Self-binding is not an alien concept for Christians. Baptismal commitment is a form of self-binding and so too is marriage or ordination or the profession of vows in religious life. We commit to accept to live in a certain way and to rule out other ways of living. In a positive way, it has resonances with the idea of covenant, recalling God's covenant with his people. Self-binding is a commitment to do something or to give up something for the sake of a larger flourishing of self in relation with others and with God. In the structures of Catholic life, it also represents giving away some of the power which the ordained ministries have accumulated, a process which some will fear, but which could be freeing and restorative, and even redemptive.

Self-binding commitments are also a way into practices of accountability, the other major theme which we believe needs to be addressed in practical terms.

Practices of accountability

It is striking how often the theological literature about the abuse crisis discusses the need for accountability, and how little is teased out about what this looks like in practice. In earlier chapters, we have explored the different elements associated with accountability and the kinds of accountability which need fuller practical expression; between bishops and diocesan communities, and bishops and priests; and between priests and the communities they serve. We have also noted the kinds of accountability which already operate in our UK context through wider legal and financial instruments and now through the independent work of the CSSA. We took account of the code of conduct for the ordained, Caring Safely for Others, which is promoted by the Bishops' Conference and is an essential tool in building practices of accountability. We also sketched some theological horizons which frame accountability from the basis of Catholic faith and teaching.

The American Bishops' Pledge

In 2002, following a series of painful and shocking revelations of the scale of child abuse in the Catholic Church in America, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.[161] They added a further text, A Statement of Episcopal Commitment. In this, they said 'We pledge that we bishops will respond to the demands of the Charter in a way that manifests our accountability to God, to God's people and to one another.' They pledged to assist each other across their provinces to interpret and implement the Charter correctly and agreed to be bound by it if accused of abuse themselves. They reaffirmed this commitment in 2018.

The earlier sections of this chapter have significance in relation to increasing practical accountability.

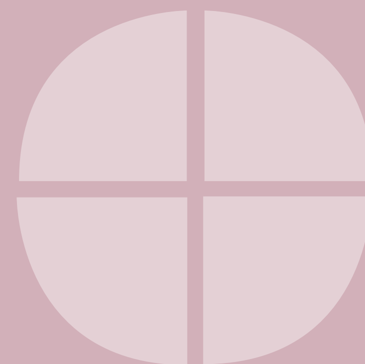
- Restorative approaches and processes include a dimension of accountability, for example. They provide a safe and structured space in which answers can be sought and failure can be admitted. They enable a response of the heart, with whatever steps of redress then emerge, including compensation if that is what is needed, but based on a paradigm of relationship and repair rather than a legal calculus or adversarial legal process.
- Synodal processes also build relationships in which a culture of mutual accountability can flourish. Myriam Wijlens is a professor of canon law and an expert advisor to the Synod of Bishops. She has written about how the current synodal journey 'has begun to give shape to the theological understanding that synodality implies accountability and that realizing accountability requires acting as a synodal Church'.[162] She draws on the vision of Cardinal Grech, who leads the Synod Office in Rome, speaking about the 'circularity' of the Synodal process, as the people of God discern together and offer their wisdom to the bishops, who in turn exercise their teaching role, prompting further 'prophecy and discernment' and so the process continues. Wiljens applies this to the decision-making of leadership too. 'This is what accountability is about; listening deeply to each other, checking what was heard, then making a decision.'

These practices work from a deeply Catholic relational and theological framework. They are also formative and possibly transformative. They engage the whole Church rather than a single layer of hierarchy, expressing our communal responsibilities to each other.

What else can be done?

Some parishes or dioceses, or individual priests, may wish to explore practices that are now standard in many fields of professional life, testing and adapting them so that they fit in the light of a Catholic theological understanding of ministry and accountability. Annual appraisal, for example, is intended to help a person flourish and be effective in the work for which they are responsible. There is no incompatibility with the ecclesial vision of accountability outlined here and in the documents quoted. Appraisal is commonplace in Catholic schools and in many Catholic agencies. Pastoral supervision as described earlier on p.117 is also a valuable option alongside appraisal, or the model of pastoral accompaniment which is being developed by the JPII Network.

There is space here for both leadership and imagination. There is also an opportunity to make visible and public a new level of commitment to accountability. There may be many elements of accountability which already operate below parish and diocesan awareness; but if the community of faith, and survivors of abuse in particular, do not see these or know about them, it is hard to build trust in how we can change in the light of the abuse crisis.



Accountability practices in dioceses elsewhere

In the Australian Diocese of Maitland and Newcastle, a process of three year review is in place for parish priests, accompanied by a range of other resources for professional development including a Clergy Supervision Programme.[164] The three year review process is a 360 degree process, that is, key people in the parish such as those who chair the parish council or pastoral team, and the finance committee, and 'at least six parishioners' are invited to respond to a questionnaire giving feedback.

In the Archdiocese of Vancouver, a 2019 report on sexual abuse by priests proposed that 'All clerics... should undergo an annual formal performance review', carried out by a group of people including lay men and women. The Archbishop agreed to put such a process in place, starting in 2022.[165]

There is more work to be done here than this report can imagine or propose. There is a heartfelt desire to be a church in which accountability, understood and re-imagined in the context of Catholic faith, happens in practical and visible ways.

5. New languages of faith

Within each pathway, theological work can make a vital contribution. This research has explored how limited or distorted theological understanding lies within some of the attitudes, habits and culture of our common life. We have talked about these as knots that need to be untied, or in some cases, strands that need to be better connected. In the extract from the Synod document at the beginning of Chapter Seven, there is affirmation that 'new languages of faith' can flourish 'in the furrows dug by the sufferings of every kind endured by the human family and by the People of God'.

Theologians have a vital role here, as do bishops as teachers of the faith. But so too do all the baptised, as we too have instincts of faith and capacities to discern what is true and what gives life to our common discipleship. The theology we need, in the light of this crisis, emerges from deep listening and dialogue between bishops in their teaching ministry, theologians in their vocations and other members of the baptised, from the experience of living Catholic faith. All of us together can seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit and hope to receive it more fully.

Some of the theological work needed arises directly from the themes explored in this report. We could explore more deeply what the vulnerability of the Church and of the baptised means, for example. We should work at theological re-balancing of the way in which the priesthood of the baptised and the ordained priesthood relate to each other and re-consider how ordained priesthood is explained and understood in teaching and practice. Our understandings of sinfulness in the Church and of forgiveness are also implicated and our penitential liturgies could be expanded. Our understanding of how the Holy Spirit works in the Church for its health and wholeness could be explored more fully.

We also need to go further in building a theological foundation for practices which the abuse crisis has taught us are necessary. Practices of accountability and safeguarding can learn much from wider professional expertise, but to be truly rooted in our ecclesial life, they must draw from and deepen our theological understanding of ourselves and our mission. So too the development of restorative approaches to those harmed by abuse must be underpinned by a clear theological rationale. The principles of Catholic social teaching and the explorations of those principles found in the wider field of Catholic social thought have much to offer here. Theological understanding of synodality in the life and mission of the Church is expanding rapidly, but it does not yet reach many parish communities and synodal processes raise questions which still need to be addressed.

There are also areas in which there has rarely been open dialogue and where such dialogue could contribute much to the conversion of hearts for which the Pope calls. The way in which bishops exercise their role of leadership and teaching, for example, affects our life together as a Church and emerges as a concern from the abuse crisis. In this area, as in others, it is important to understand the theological principles and the formal teaching which govern their reality, and to listen to their experience. But the work of theologians and the instincts of the faithful are also valid and needed. All these together can point towards revised theological understandings and new practices. The call to conversion of hearts and practical action involves the bishops too.

Other theological horizons may be opened up when people read this report and respond with new questions. There is always more to be found in the faith of the baptised when they are invited into prayerful reflection on what happens around us and within us.

> It is the task of the whole people of God, especially pastors and theologians, to listen critically, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to contemporary utterances, to interpret them, and to evaluate them in the light of the divine word.
>
> *Gaudium et Spes* para. 44

6. Conclusion

The theme running throughout this chapter is one of trusting that the Holy Spirit is active in the body of all the faithful and will open up for us the paths to take, if we are courageous, patient and prayerful as a body and willing to listen to and learn from all the voices through whom the Spirit speaks. But it comes with a caution: we have to turn our repentance, grief, hope and desires into practical steps, as Pope Francis insists.

We pondered during our writing whether the report should conclude with recommendations. We have not taken this path, although this final chapter has tried to imagine some of the possibilities. Our intention in exploring these possible futures is to invite others also to imagine, to find the right local solutions, whether in a parish or diocese or religious community, or in the Bishops' Conference. If our response to the abuse crisis comes from our hearts, if it is truly conversion, it will have its own motivation, character and shape, rather than being compelled by any recommendation here. If it is truly guided by the Spirit, it will lead us to a deeper living of the Gospel, to a church of greater compassion, humility and justice.

We affirm again in closing this text, that the Church's response to the abuse crisis is unfinished. We have more work to do. Much of it is work we have been needing to do for some time and for many other reasons. The utter pain of abuse happening and our failures in response make this work more urgent and reveal the scale of what is needed. How can our promises and willingness to change, and our practical action, be commensurate with the damage done, most of all to victims, survivors and their families, but also to the whole body? How can we, as the whole Church, together seek redemption and greater faithfulness? What does it mean in practice to be servants of this task?