



Good afternoon, friends:

Thank you for your invitation to join you this afternoon. Before the Blessed Sacrament, I stand before you as a friend in the Lord, to share some thoughts that might aid you in your discernment and reflection today. In that spirit, I would like to begin in prayer:

Loving God,

We begin this time with the words of Saint Paul from his letter to the Romans.

In the same way, the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings. And the one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit, because it intercedes for the holy ones according to God's will.

Loving God, you know our hearts. Guide this reflection with your Spirit and help us to be mindful of your presence among us. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our healer.
Amen.

Over the past several months since this crisis erupted, I have spent hours in daily prayer, had conversations with many different people and lay leaders across the nation, and simply listened. So, I stand before you not as Christina, who works for the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, but as a lay person who loves her faith, loves her church, and loves working for and with the young church—and who brings with her the voices of many others like me. I am grateful for the opportunity to share with you how the laity has been impacted by the current crisis, our needs, and our hopes, and to name what we are seeking from our bishops.

During the inaugural Mass for the recent Synod in Rome, Pope Francis called the bishops to "broaden [their] horizons, expand [their] hearts and transform those frames of mind that today paralyze, separate and alienate us from young people [and the laity as a whole], leaving them exposed to stormy seas, orphans without a faith community that should sustain them, orphans devoid of a sense of direction and meaning in life." He went on to say that young people and others felt the church was detached from their problems and an unattractive institution following numerous corruption and abuse scandals. And the only way to help the young is to look into their eyes, acknowledge their situations, and to make an effort to curtail uncertainty, exclusion, and violence to which they are repeatedly exposed. I believe these words are fitting for today. I firmly believe that the Lord wants to renew all of us, his church, and move us from "we've always done it that way" to something new.

I pray the next few minutes offers insight that will carry over into the next couple of days, and will ultimately lead to immediate action that will give the laity a clear indication that business as normal will not continue, that we as one body (a body of bishops with the laity) have entered into a new era, so we can begin to move as church from where we are to a new place of hope. I come to you as a single mother raising a beautiful child with the desire for her to encounter Christ and to develop a profound

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love for the church. I hope that in ten or twenty years from today, she has the foundation and strength to rely on a faith that is nurtured and sustained by the sacraments and a community that can guide her. Some of my most profound and transformative moments in my life have come from my own child—those words that make you stop in your tracks and think, what am I doing and what kind of example am I giving? There is no doubt the Spirit is present with me and will work through me, around me and even without me, but am I living a life that my child can see Christ in me through my actions? I am a sinner (no doubt about that) and I make mistakes—but does my daughter hear me say “I am sorry”? Does she witness me correct my behavior? Do I authentically listen to her and understand her feelings? Do I include her in my decision-making process as a young, but vital member of my family? When I tell her about the love of Christ and what Christ wants to do in her life, does it stir her heart? In all these things, I say yes.

My role as a mother is not any different than what the laity need from the bishops as spiritual fathers to both the priests and the laity. Our family is hurting. We want our bishops to rediscover their role as spiritual fathers to us all—fathers who make amends, validate the feelings of all the family members, from pain to frustration to embarrassment and so on. Yes, we need policies, but first we need spiritual fathers who will protect, take responsibility, and recognize their faults. We want spiritual fathers who will say “I am sorry,” and take bold steps to provide a better future.

Before I continue, I invite you to do a quick exercise with me. Perhaps it will be a little out of your comfort zone, but everything we are discussing today is a little out of our comfort zone, so please join me. I invite you to close your eyes and think back to the moment you knew in your heart that God was calling you to serve. We all have had that pivotal moment—a person, an experience, an action wherein we knew God was calling us. Go back to that moment and recall the feeling. (PAUSE) Recall with whom you shared the news when you were going to enter the seminary. (PAUSE) Recall the feeling of saying yes to the Lord. (PAUSE) Recall your first Mass. (PAUSE) Recall the endless number of people Christ has left an imprint on because of your work and your genuine desire to follow Christ, (PAUSE) and what your journey has been thus far. (PAUSE) Now if you could describe your pivotal moment in one word, what would it be? (PAUSE) Open your eyes and turn to the person sitting next to you and share that word. (PAUSE FOR A FEW MOMENTS)

Thank you. My word would be holiness. An understanding that the ultimate vocation is the baptismal call to holiness, and that all those who answer God’s call to holiness, regardless of their state of life or engagement with the church, are part of that community. In reflecting on that, what came to mind were these words of Saint Oscar Romero that might also be helpful for you, too: “How beautiful will be the day when all the baptized understand that their work, their job, is a priestly work, that just as I celebrate Mass at this altar, so each carpenter celebrates Mass at his workbench, and each metalworker, each professional, each doctor with the scalpel, the market woman at her stand, is performing a priestly office! How may cabdrivers, I know, listen to this message there in their cabs, you are a priest at the wheel, my friend, if you work with honesty, consecrating that taxi of yours to God, bearing a message of peace and love to the passengers who ride in your cab.”

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I do not believe that any person sitting in this room, as you recalled your pivotal moment and brought to mind the countless faces of people you have ministered to and with over the years, signed up to face the clergy sex abuse scandal and continue to live it sixteen years later. I believe your yes was rooted in Christ to serve a community and to infuse the world with the Gospel. This is the time to regain the spirituality of your role as a pastor, shepherd, and servant leader.

The reading of St. Gregory of Nazianzus serves as a great reminder of the spiritual value of a bishop. It speaks of the importance of the care of souls, how a bishop seeks not his own interest, but those of his spiritual children, how he imitates Christ, and lives not for himself, but for Christ and his preaching. Yet, here we are.

For us to move into a new era, a new place of healing and hope, we must begin by naming (as uncomfortable as it may be) the root of the problem. A number of priests misused power to prey on the vulnerable and some bishops purposely and consciously moved predators around and kept it behind closed doors. The focus was on protecting the institution and taking care of the clergy at the expense of the laity. Whether this was intentional or not or how decisions were made or not made, the reality is this is the worst form of clericalism, and it is how we as the faithful and society have perceived the situation.

This is what we are hearing... Following an examination of thousands of court records, media reports, and interviews with church officials, victims, and attorneys, the Boston Globe and the Philadelphia Inquirer reported last week that more than 130 bishops have been accused during their careers of failing to adequately respond to sexual misconduct in their dioceses. That is almost one third of all living bishops! It was also reported that claims against more than fifty bishops involve incidents that happened after the 2002 Dallas Charter. This has led to an outcry of feelings, emotions, and reactions from the laity for an immediate response of accountability and transparency. The laity is frustrated with the double standards. It is important to note that the Dallas Charter is working and effective, but it needs to be applied evenly for all people. The charter excluded bishops, and the burden to enforce the charter has been carried by the laity. Do you know that I can't walk into my child's classroom without first being fingerprinted and VIRTUS trained? I do not object because it keeps my daughter and the rest of the children safe. But, does the same apply to you? We can't hold anyone to a higher standard due to their role. I know people who have been "red flagged" for years and who are not allowed back into the church and no clear path has been set to welcome them back. I have listened to many lay leaders working in or for the church share their fears of losing their jobs, expressing feelings of embarrassment, and being disillusioned, having to defend their vocational choice to work with and in the church to their own spouses, families, and friends. At the same time, these lay leaders are not completely trusted by the very people who are protecting abusers.

We are hurting (the church is bleeding) and a band aid will not heal the wound.

I invite you to join me in reading the signs of our times and our prayer for you is that you will consider the following specific needs that the laity are seeking from their bishops.

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1. **From you, our bishops, we need transparency and accountability.** No more secrets. Secrets hold power. We need bishops who will share the oversight of sexual conduct and the management of abuse cases with lay leadership, with proper reporting and collaboration with civil authorities.
2. **From you, our bishops, we need more listening to the laity.** We seek the continuing practice of listening sessions—not just once, but ongoing and to encourage your priests to do the same. We need to create a culture of honest dialogue in the church. To acknowledge the failures (the sins), to communicate a path with concrete steps moving forward, validate all feelings, and make it clear that we will not face this crisis again because we value the dignity of each person.
3. **From you, our bishops, we need genuine care about the pastoral aspects of the church,** not just policy, administration, and legal and financial matters. We need bishops who care about the laity, and in particular, the lay people who serve in the church alongside them, and to continue to care for the sexual abuse victims and their families.
4. **From you, our bishops, we need investment rooted in the love of people.** We need bishops to acknowledge the costs that have been borne because of the abuse. In many cases, young people have been hurt twice. First, when they were abused and secondly when those ministries designed to serve them were eliminated to pay for abuse settlements. We hope history will not be repeated due to budget cuts as a result of this crisis. We need bishops to care through their investments: to allocate (or re-allocate) financial resources into the church's outreach and pastoral care, in particular the disaffiliated and those hurt by the church.
5. **From you, our bishops, we need prophets of hope and engagement in respectful dialogue with one another and with the laity,** even those who disagree with them or challenge them. We need models of unity, openness, prayerful patience, discernment, collegiality, and humility from our spiritual fathers. This means avoiding polarized in-fighting, entrenching in one's ecclesial or political position, or cutting one another down, even in passive aggressive ways.
6. **From you, our bishops, we need words of compassion when speaking about those disconnected from or hurt by the church,** to view them as sisters and brothers, not prize objects that we are seeking to re-populate the pews. We need bishops to stop seeing conspiracy and malice in those who disagree with or who have disengaged from us. Instead, we look for our bishops, and those who work with them, to assume the good in every person, regardless of their point of view.
7. **From you, our bishops, we need to address the root of the problem**—the abuse of power. We need church leaders who can do some real soul searching about clericalism and its roots, so that the church can make a clean break with all abuses of power. We look to be co-workers in

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the vineyard of the Lord with you. We ask that you walk with us, rather than ignore us. You are not just the spiritual fathers of the clergy. You are our spiritual fathers, too.

Over the past few months, we have experienced glimmers of hope. Many sitting in this room have opened the doors for files to be reviewed. Many have established review boards to advise your work. Many have hosted listening sessions in their dioceses. People are still expressing a desire to serve in the church, to engage with their parish communities, and to go through RCIA. Youth and young adults are still connecting with the church through the work of your dioceses' and parishes' pastoral efforts. I personally trained fourteen young children to serve as altar servers last month. Hope is present. Also, as a result of the implementation of the Dallas Charter, we now see the horrendous and horrible acts of violence from the last century finally uncovered. New generations are now told to not keep secrets, and that no person is above question or above the law. Thanks to your child and youth protection efforts, we now receive tools to effectively report the abuse of minors, and less people are in a position to harm because for the most part, our pastoral leaders are keeping the vulnerable protected. This shows that despite darkness, hope is still present.

Over the next couple of days, you will be discussing documents, standards of conduct for bishops, policies of retired bishops, and a new way forward presented by the National Review Board. This in and of itself gives me hope. The fact that you are devoting time to look at the problem and address what you need to do to get back to the foundations of ministry provides much needed hope. The fact that I am here present, addressing you, gives me hope and assurance that we are on the precipice of a holy moment. I pray that time spent in prayer and discernment today and days to come will lead you toward a much-needed renewal.

As you continue to discern your next steps, remember the laity want to work with you. Trust us. Trust the experience and expertise of the laity, in particular your lay staff and ministry leaders. We can handle bad news. We are already doing some of the heavy lifting. We want to be seen and heard by you as our spiritual fathers, and to know that we too have a voice in God's kingdom. As was stated in the final document of the recent Synod, the laity want to participate and share in the solution, to ensure we do not face this issue again.

Let us also not forget that no sin is too great for God's mercy and love. Healing is possible when it is authentically and humbly asked for in prayer. So, armed with God's unfailing love and mercy, let us move together in re-consecrating ourselves to holiness and human dignity and enter a new era, a new place of hope to authentically live the Gospel. We are grateful for you and gifts that you were given by God to serve the church. We are praying with you and for you. I have the powerful image in my mind of the young people at the National V Encuentro in Grapevine who lovingly expressed their desire to pray with and for you and to serve with you.

In closing, I leave you with an image of a God who loves to link people together—who brings the saints together. Take for example, Saint Francis and Saint Clare. Here are two people who, together, entered into a new era to rebuild the church, a new place of hope. Like Francis and Clare, the bishops

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and the laity are being linked to work together, so that we can enter into a new era, a new place of hope for this generation and generations to come, to rebuild the church.

Everything in God is possible, even the seemingly impossible. I trust that God is at work in you at this very moment. So, will you take my hand, along with the hand of the religious sisters, and priests, the laity, the victims of abuse and their families, and the young church, and promise to journey with me (the laity), to make room at the table for our presence, our voice, our love and gifts, so that together, we can rebuild the church, bring about a new era, and make our church a place of hope for all? If so, I look forward to walking that road with you.

Thank You,

Christina Lamas
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