

THE MOVEMENT TO RESTORE TRUST

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - MRT PROCESS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Mission and Goals of The Movement to Restore Trust

The Movement to Restore Trust (MRT) was formed in October 2018 by a group of independent, concerned and committed Catholics to address the Diocese of Buffalo's handling of sex abuse cases involving clergy, seek justice for survivors of sexual abuse and help the Church in Buffalo look forward, implement meaningful reforms, and restore the faithful's trust and confidence. See Movement to Restore Trust mission statement, [Our Mission](#).

The foundation of the MRT is based in its commitment to justice for victims of sexual abuse and to the Vatican II ideal that the Church is not simply the clergy, it is not simply the hierarchy, and it is not just the Vatican or the Chancery; the Church is the people of God. (See Movement to Restore Trust website, [Our Mission](#)).

Our goal is to be a conduit for the voice of the laity to lead the Church in Buffalo to a new place, a state of **trust** that has been restored and is marked by:

- A commitment to **justice** for the victims of sex abuse;
- A commitment to **Co-Responsibility**: the creation of a Church in which lay Catholics work hand in hand with ordained Catholics, in an equal partnership;
- Complete **transparency** about past and current instances of sex abuse and a process for dealing with those cases that will inspire trust and confidence;
- New transparent structures for bishop **accountability**;
- Openness and transparency; a way of addressing leadership failure and replacing outdated and secretive management practices based on a respect for the **competency** of the laity.¹

The Movement to Restore Trust Process

The MRT Process commenced with a public symposium at the Montante Cultural Center at Canisius College on Wednesday, November 28, 2018. There were approximately 400 people in attendance with another 1100 estimated to be watching or listening on line. It was followed by a workshop on Saturday, December 8, 2018 at Science Hall at Canisius College, where several hundred people attended a plenary session and work group meetings devoted to six specific areas of inquiry, which we had developed in consultation with Leadership Roundtable:

¹ These basic principles were apparent in the common themes that emerged in the Workgroups and are also well aligned to what was shared and discussed at the Leadership Roundtable Catholic Partnership Summit held February 1-2 in Washington DC and reported [here](#). Over 200 lay and ordained Catholics attended, including several Cardinals and Bishops and demonstrated what co-responsibility and a commitment to the ideals of Vatican II looks like.

1. Transparency around the nature and scale of abuse in the Diocese and financial and spiritual reparation for the victims;
2. Transparency about all diocesan operations;
3. Accountability for bishops;
4. Lay involvement in selecting and monitoring bishops;
5. Greater involvement by women/laity in the Church; and
6. Improvements in formation of priests and priestly life

Following the December 8th workshop, nearly 150 grassroots individuals, lay and clerical, volunteered to participate in the work of the six groups. We estimate that they are backed by approximately 500 other Catholics in the Diocese who have expressed interest in and support for our work. They have been driven by their love for the Church but also by their anger and disappointment at how the sex abuse crisis has been handled. Many Workgroups had participants who were themselves survivors of sex abuse. These were courageous in their contributions and the sharing of their experiences and their contributions are reflected in this executive summary. We also heard from many priests in the Diocese who for various reasons could not participate in our work but who support the goals of the MRT and the work of the laity. We sense a keen interest by the priests of the Diocese in our analysis and recommendations.

Workgroup members traveled from all over WNY and joined virtually from across the country and worked to research best practices and develop recommendations. Each of the six Workgroups met in-person an average of 5-6 times between December 8 and February 6, 2019. They consulted subject matter experts, studied foundational Catholic documents, and looked at best practices from across the United States. Some Workgroups consulted canon lawyers as part of their work; in other cases, we recognize that recommendations may go beyond what canon law currently provides. The work of the MRT Workgroups, while certainly not exhaustive, is nonetheless impressive in its scope and its passion, especially given the short time frame within which they worked. In all, the six workgroups produced over 50 pages of reports and draft recommendations.

Common Themes: Trust, Culture Change, Clericalism & Reviving the Spirit of Vatican II

Some common themes emerged from our work and are the basis for many of our recommendations. There is enormous anger in the Diocese over the sex abuse crisis. The wounds that priestly sex abuse has wrought are many: the broken lives of victims; indifference to their suffering on the part of fellow members of the church; a dearth of accountability for priests and bishops involved or complicit in abuse; a failure to reveal the full truth about abuses; and a deficit of genuine apology, penance and reparation.² The result has been a significant **erosion of trust** in the Catholic Church at large and in the Church in the Diocese of Buffalo and the laity have a lack of confidence in the institutional Church and its leaders. This has led to laity feeling disillusioned, frustrated and alienated. Throughout our meetings, we heard again and again about the need for the Bishop to be committed to rebuilding trust. People

² Daniel Philpott, "Why the Catholic Church needs a Eucharistic response to the sex abuse scandals," *America*, 2/20/19; at <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2019/02/20/why-catholic-church-needs-eucharistic-response-sex-abuse-scandals>

believe that trust can only exist where there is honesty, openness, transparency and a commitment to authentic listening.

The MRT also believes that the process of restoring trust will require a metanoia of sorts when it comes to the culture of the Church in Buffalo. The need for **transformational culture change** is part of every workgroup's recommendations. We recognize that the Bishop is not solely responsible for the culture that exists; culture has developed over the decades and centuries and our hierarchy in Buffalo is a product of that culture. But we also believe that the Bishop must be a leader in starting the process of culture change.

But, being a leader of the process of change does not mean that the Bishop alone decides when and how to move forward. We have determined that **clericalism** is at the root of many of the issues involving the culture of the Church. At its root, clericalism is opposed to the teaching of the Church that the spiritual shepherds of the Church are called to recognize and promote the dignity and responsibility of the laity in the Church. *Lumen Gentium, Chapter 4*. **Thus, central to our recommendations is our conclusion that trust will only be restored when the Bishop demonstrates that he is committed to working in active partnership with the laity on the matters identified in this report.** The embrace and implementation of the recommendations in our report will be an important step in breaking old habits driven by clericalism.

Finally, and perhaps the most fundamental of our observations, the Diocese seems to have lost its way in promoting the essential principles of Vatican II, especially as it relates to the role of laity in the Church. We recommend **a recommitment to Vatican II** as an essential foundation of trust in the Diocese.

MRT Workgroup Foundational Recommendations

FOUNDATIONAL THEMES - CUTTING ACROSS WORKGROUPS:

1. Commit to a Partnership with the Laity to Restore Trust
2. Embrace the Opportunity to Act Voluntarily Now
3. Address the Needs of Survivors for Support & Healing
4. Provide Complete Transparency into the Scale of the Abuse in Both Human and Financial Terms
5. Ensure the Faithful Are Central within the Organizational Structures of the Church
6. Voluntarily Delegate Greater Authority to the Consultative Bodies in the Diocese
7. Establish Accountability with Periodic Review of Implementation
8. Engage the Leadership Roundtable
9. Revive the Spirit of Vatican II

1. ***Commit to a Partnership with the Laity to Restore Trust.*** We think it is essential for the Bishop to announce that he is committed to working in a genuine partnership with the laity and the clergy to undertake the types of things identified in this report. This must be a new type of partnership, one in which the laity is not merely represented but is consulted, heard and engaged as part of an ongoing partnership. This, we believe, is the essence of Co-Responsibility. The MRT stands ready to serve as one part of that partnership, but we also recognize that our lay movement remains at a nascent stage. We need to work to expand this movement into every willing corner of the Diocese.

2. ***Embrace the Opportunity to Act Voluntarily Now.*** The situation in the Diocese is such that the Bishop should not wait for action by the Vatican or the USCCB. He should begin to act now, with us, and to do things voluntarily. Bishops in other dioceses are reporting good results from doing things that canon law permits them to do, even if it is not required. By starting now on these recommendations, the Bishop is showing sincerity in addressing areas the MRT is advancing. In tandem, if the Bishop were to address the spiritual component that would support the restoration of trust, the Bishop can also serve as our shepherd.
3. ***Address the Needs of Survivors for Support and Healing.*** Focusing on a comprehensive and integrated response to the wounds that priestly sex abuse has wrought through, among other actions, true solidarity with victims and healing, reflects three specific Workgroup recommendations: (1) that the Bishop provide for multiple avenues for victims to be heard through listening sessions both in one on one sessions and in groups (see e.g., [Archbishop Hebda December 2018 letter on survivor outreach](#)); (2) that the DOB increase the care and support provided to victims through pastoral care and a full spectrum of independent, trauma-informed counseling services, treatments and therapies; and (3) through more sensitive and responsive victim intake.
4. ***Transparency.*** All Workgroups noted that the lack of transparency by the Diocese in the process of addressing child and vulnerable adult sexual abuse has significantly eroded trust in the Diocese. The Workgroups recommend complete ***financial transparency***, consistent with recognized best practices, of all relevant financial components of the current sexual abuse scandal, and disclosure of the ***depth and scale of the abuse itself in terms of both the victims and the perpetrators*** of the abuse on the DOB website following the format utilized by the [Archdiocese of Boston](#), while taking care to address the due process rights of clergy.
5. ***Ensure the Faithful are Central within the Organizational Structures of the Church.*** We understand that the existing organizational chart is a collection of Diocesan offices and institutions that operate with the Bishop at the center. A better way of envisioning the type of diocese that would inspire trust is one in which the faithful are at the center, the beneficiaries of all that the Diocese and the Bishop does in his role as a servant leader.
6. ***Voluntarily Delegate Greater Authority to the Consultative Bodies in the Diocese.*** Multiple Workgroups had significant concerns about the composition, charge and authority (or lack thereof) in the Diocesan consultative body aligned most closely with their work. We recommend that the role of consultative bodies in the Diocese be examined and that the Bishop commit to re-energizing these bodies and more closely aligning them to their true purpose. As part of this, we feel these committees should be filled with laity (especially women) and clergy with the expertise, qualifications, independence and autonomy to properly discharge its duties. These recommendations align with Leadership Roundtable's conclusion that that these bodies consist of "experts with teeth."
7. ***Establish Accountability with Periodic Review of Implementation.*** As part of the implementation of these recommendations, we strongly believe that it would be important for the Diocese to work with us to develop a process that will ensure accountability. We envision a process in which the Diocese would prepare a self-study on its success/failure at implementation of these recommendations and entertain an outside review by a team recommended by MRT comprised of lay people in the Diocese with expertise, who would be charged with issuing a public report of their findings.

8. ***Engagement of the Leadership Roundtable.*** The Diocese and MRT should engage Leadership Roundtable as national experts with the competence needed for working with the Diocese on the crisis. We believe this is also an opportunity for the Diocese to demonstrate leadership at the national level.
9. ***Revive the Spirit of Vatican II.*** A recommitment by the Diocese to a process of renewal on the essential teachings of Vatican II that would encompass education and programming throughout the Diocese (at the Seminary, within parishes and by the Diocesan Central office) is an essential part of restoring trust. This recommitment to the teachings of Vatican II must also be reflected in the organizational structures of our Diocese where there is greater empowerment of and meaningful participation by laity. This effort goes “above, beyond and outside” the current sex abuse crisis and may be a way to have the Bishop work with the MRT to commit to a process of renewal that could go a long way toward restoring trust.

Specific Workgroup Recommendations

Each Workgroup also had recommendations specific to their area of focus. The MRT Organizing Committee is still reviewing these recommendations and working with the Workgroups to finalize their reports.

Conclusion & Next Steps

This executive summary and our first meeting with Bishop Malone is the start of what we hope will be a series of conversations with the Bishop about how we can work together in a constructive partnership to move forward. This executive summary represents our first attempt to synthesize and reconcile the results of six different reports. The MRT Organizing Committee is continuing its work on finalizing the Workgroup reports and would welcome preliminary feedback from Bishop Malone on priorities for implementation.

We believe that it is imperative that meaningful, tangible, visible and public action within 30 days is critical to the journey to restore trust. The faithful of the Diocese are waiting for this report and for the response of the Bishop. They expect MRT to remain visible and active in the weeks and months ahead.

We think that a follow-up meeting with Bishop Malone prior to March 9 would be optimal as we are scheduling a public meeting of the MRT Workgroups on that day to share the results of the Workgroups. It would be ideal to be able to also report the Bishop’s preliminary responses to our work.