

Archbishop Lori hears faithful's concerns about scandals

In the five weeks after a Pennsylvania grand jury released a report detailing allegations of sexual abuse of more than 1,000 minors by 301 priests, Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore visited more than a dozen locations in the archdiocese to hear the comments and concerns of the faithful about the scandals in the church.

The archbishop met with priests, deacons, seminarians and Catholic Center staff, and he addressed Catholic school educators at a convocation in late August. Along with the archdiocese's auxiliary bishops and the vicar for clergy, he conducted regional listening sessions at three locations, meeting with principals and some teachers and staff in the afternoon and with pastors and parish leaders in the evening.

At least 33 parishes responded to Archbishop Lori's call to prayer and repentance for the healing of victims of sexual abuse and the healing of the church through Masses and fasting Sept. 7 as a **day of reparation** to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

He also celebrated Mass and greeted parishioners at eight parishes during those five weeks. The archbishop noted that the time spent greeting and hearing the concerns of parishioners after Mass often took more time than the Mass itself. Auxiliary bishops of the archdiocese also visited several parishes to celebrate Masses.

All this came as Archbishop Lori also took on new responsibilities as apostolic administrator of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, W.Va., when Pope Francis accepted the resignation of Bishop Michael J. Bransfield Sept. 13. At the time of the appointment, the archbishop announced that Pope Francis further instructed him to **conduct an investigation** into allegations against Bishop Bransfield of sexual harassment of adults.

"I assure you that this investigation will begin promptly and, while I have been asked to oversee it, it will actually be conducted by competent lay persons with the necessary skills," Archbishop Lori said in a homily Sept. 15 at the Cathedral of St.

Joseph in Wheeling. “The goal of this investigation is to arrive at the truth and justice for the good of the individuals involved and for the common good of the Church we love. “

The regional listening sessions themselves – Sept. 5 in Frederick, Sept. 17 in Hanover and Sept. 18 in Timonium – were closed to the media to allow for a frank and open discussion.

After the session with educators at St. Lawrence Martyr Parish in Hanover, Meeri Kangas, who teaches at Archbishop Curley High School, said she appreciated the opportunity to talk to the archbishop and auxiliary bishops and to have them listen.

“As a church, we know we have more to do,” she said, adding that a culture of silence and a lack of transparency over the years were a great concern – and that would be the case for any organization.

She said the message she will take back to her high school students is that “there are people in the church who love them, care about them and want to protect them. I know that’s the truth.”

After the same session, Tim Kenney, a theology teacher at Archbishop Spalding High School in Severn, said he wanted to know what to say when the topic of sexual misconduct in the church comes up in the classroom. “It’s helpful for me to know what the archdiocese is doing, what steps have been taken and what things they are working on.”

He was not even a teenager when the scandal was brought to national attention in 2002 and the U.S. bishops adopted the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People and the accompanying norms. When he wanted to be an altar server, he said he had some healthy skepticism and even fear. With the support of his parents, he made sure he protected himself in situations when he was in close proximity to priests.

As a teen, he became interested in theology and considered a vocation to the priesthood for a time, both of which brought him into closer involvement with priests. “This helped me see priests as not just a scary thing,” Kenney said.

After the session for priests and parish leaders in Hanover, John Doherty, a parishioner of St. John the Evangelist, Columbia, said his parish had brought together a group of people to discuss the scandals. "The emotions were so strong, everyone just wanted to vent."

After hearing Archbishop Lori's comments and the discussion, he acknowledged that the archbishop is doing his best, "but my biggest fear is that we're going to lose a whole generation in a church I have devoted my life to." Doherty said many people, even in his own family, have a deep distrust of the church as an institution.

He said people should not lose faith that the church is not acting, noting that Archbishop Lori himself acknowledged that some things are not happening quickly enough - such as a meeting planned for February called by Pope Francis for the heads of all the bishops' conferences in the world, which the archbishop said he would have held "yesterday." Doherty said he hoped the Baltimore bishops would bring that urgency to the meeting of the U.S. bishops in November.

Pat Robuck, a parishioner of St. Joseph, Odenton, said she heard a lot of good answers to questions posed by attendees, but not a lot of plans for action. "I can't believe they haven't heard all of this before," she said.

She believes Archbishop Lori is sincere and noted that he talked a lot about the problems of subcultures and clericalism in the church. "I don't think that's going to change," Robuck said. She also thinks the church's training and screening programs don't go far enough.

However, she added, "I will say that I have hope. I love the Catholic Church."

The church "is not the priests, it's not the laity; it's Jesus Christ. You have to help from within. If you leave the church (because of the scandals), you're not helping anything," she said.

Archbishop Lori announced that though he would like to conduct listening sessions in every parish, it was impractical to do so, although additional regional listening sessions might be set up in the coming weeks. He also said the archdiocese would take advantage of its communications tools FlockNote and MyParish app to set up

“virtual town halls” to solicit input from the faithful.

Those comments and the feedback from the listening sessions would be brought to a lay Archdiocesan Pastoral Council that he will re-establish to “give the laity a greater voice and thus greater investment and confidence in the management of the archdiocese.”

Below is a list of the meetings, Masses and locations in the Archdiocese of Baltimore at which Archbishop William E. Lori has discussed the scandals in the Catholic Church and gotten feedback from the faithful:

Aug. 15 - Mass on Feast of the Assumption, Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Aug. 19 - Mass and greet parishioners, Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, Homeland

Aug. 25 - Meeting with seminarians, John Paul II Shrine, Washington, D.C.

Aug. 26 - Mass and greet parishioners, St. Louis, Clarksville

Aug. 28 - Meeting with priests of the Archdiocese of Baltimore

Aug. 29 - Meeting with deacons of the archdiocese

Aug. 29 - Meet with seminarians, St. Mary's Seminary and University

Aug. 30 - Address Catholic school educators, Catholic Schools Convocation

Sept. 1 - Mass and greet parishioners, St. John, Westminster

Sept. 2 - Mass and greet parishioners, St. Mark, Fallston

Sept. 4 - Greet parents, St. Joan of Arc School, Aberdeen

Sept. 5 - Listening sessions with educators and priests in Western Maryland

Sept. 6 - Meeting with Catholic Center employees

Sept. 7 - Masses of Reparation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Baltimore Basilica and

Cathedral of Mary Our Queen

Sept. 8 - Mass and greet, Lourdes Grotto, Emmitsburg

Sept. 9 - Mass and greet parishioners, St. John the Evangelist, Columbia

Sept. 16 - Mass and greet attendees of Faith Fest in Bel Air

Sept. 16 - Mass and greet parishioners, St. James, Boonsboro

Sept. 17 - Listening sessions with Anne Arundel County, Howard County and city educators and priests

Sept. 18 - Listening sessions with Baltimore and Harford county educators and priests