

Archbishop Lori meets with priests to hear concerns, offer support

Archbishop William E. Lori met with more than 100 priests Aug. 28 at St. Margaret in Bel Air to offer his support and to listen to their concerns approximately two weeks after the release of the Pennsylvania grand jury report on clergy sexual abuse.

The graphic report, which reviewed the files of six dioceses, outlined sexual abuse of more than 1,000 minors by more than 300 priests over seven decades. It also recounted the failures of Pennsylvania bishops to protect children.

The grand jury report came in the wake of allegations of sexual abuse against Washington Archbishop Theodore McCarrick, who advanced to the rank of cardinal despite reports that some in the church hierarchy were aware of allegations against him.

Pope Francis accepted the resignation of Archbishop McCarrick from the College of Cardinals, ordering him to a “life of prayer and penance.”

Priests attending the private session with Archbishop Lori told the Catholic Review they had a chance to speak openly and honestly about the church’s response to the crisis and how the church can rebuild trust.

“We are a diverse presbyterate,” said Father Steven Roth, director of vocations. “We all have different ideas and opinions, but what came across the most was that we all love the church.”

The archbishop acted as a spiritual shepherd, Father Roth said, concerned “first and foremost for the victims, his priests and the people of God.”

Father Roth said priests recognized that the meeting, which included evening prayer, was just one step in a much longer process of discerning the best path forward. That will involve listening carefully to what people in the pews have to say, he said.

The archdiocese is planning a series of regional listening sessions across the archdiocese for parishes and Catholic school educators.

“Because everyone is so hurt, people are looking for a quick answer,” Father Roth said. “I hope that through our listening, it will help us get to a point where we get not to a quick answer, but the right answer. We can’t make any excuses. We have to really listen.”

Archbishop Lori has also declared Sept. 7 a **Day of Reparation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus**, asking Catholics throughout the archdiocese to join him in praying and fasting on that day for the healing of victims and the healing of the church. Parishes throughout the archdiocese are planning Masses, prayer sessions, spiritual talks and other events that day.

Father Roth, who oversees 40 seminarians preparing for the priesthood in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, said he and the archbishop reached out personally to every seminarian.

“They are aware of the seriousness and magnitude of what has happened,” Father Roth said. “They have a desire to help the church move forward.”

Father George Gannon – pastor of Sacred Heart of Mary in Graceland Park, St. Rita in Dundalk and Our Lady of Fatima in Baltimore – described the meeting with the archbishop as “positive” and “open.”

“I think what’s most important is that we have to continue to have an open conversation, continue to be open, honest and transparent,” Father Gannon said. “We have to continue to focus on the prayer life of the church and continue to turn to the Lord to guide us.”

Father Patrick Carrion, pastor of the Catholic Community of South Baltimore, said priests pledged their commitment to the archbishop of Baltimore when they were ordained. In holding the meeting, Father Carrion said, the archbishop showed his respect back to the priests.

Father Carrion said he tries to recognize the pain Catholics are going through. He also tries to make people aware of the ways the archdiocese protects children, helps

abuse victims and deals with allegations of abuse. (**Click here** for more details)

“It’s about knowing what’s happening and what the church has been doing,” said Father Carrion, adding that it’s not an easy time to be a Catholic.

Father Roth said he has received calls, texts, emails and personal visits from people offering their support to him as a priest.

“What I find inspiring is when I go to Mass and look out at the people,” he said. “They have so many reasons not to come to church and yet they’re still here. They keep their eye on what’s most important: the Eucharist. As long as we continue to do that, I think we’re going to get through this and look back at this as a dark moment in the church, but one that will not destroy us.”

Emily Rosenthal contributed to this story.

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*For more on the church’s response to the abuse crisis, visit **www.archbalt.org/accountability**.*