

Archdiocese of Baltimore to hold virtual town-hall meetings for input on sexual abuse crisis

Archbishop William E. Lori spent the five weeks after the release of a Pennsylvania grand jury report listening to clergy, seminarians, educators and laity with meetings, listening sessions and chatting with parishioners after Mass on at least eight occasions.

The grand jury report – on the heels of reports of abuse by Archbishop Theodore McCarrick, retired archbishop of Washington who resigned from the rank of cardinal in July – again rocked the Catholic world with wide-ranging reports of sexual abuse of minors over the last seven decades.

“Many Catholics may be bewildered and angry at what’s going on in the church now,” Archbishop Lori said. “As this crisis has deepened, people are demanding action, and action now. You rightly ask what will be done, what will be different, and what is in place to prevent such terrible things from happening again.”

He said, “At every one of my more than 20 gatherings with parishioners, clergy, seminarians, Catholic Center employees, educators, parents, students and others, people have demanded transparency and accountability.

They want to play a more active role in the life of the Church, not only pastorally, but also administratively. Put simply, they don’t trust the bishops or Church leaders to address these issues on their own. I agree.”

The archbishop noted that the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Administrative Committee, of which he is a member, announced Sept. 19 **new initiatives to promote accountability**, including establishing a third-party system for people to report complaints of sexual abuse of minors by a bishop and sexual harassment of or sexual misconduct with adults by a bishop; instructing a USCCB committee to develop policies for addressing restrictions on bishops who were removed or

resigned because of allegations of sexual abuse of minors or sexual harassment of or misconduct with adults, including seminarians and priests; and supporting a full investigation into the situation surrounding Archbishop McCarrick.

Archbishop Lori said he regretted that he could not meet with every parishioner in the archdiocese, noting that three regional listening sessions were a way to engage with school personnel and leaders from as many parishes as possible as quickly as possible.

He encouraged pastors to hold local listening sessions and said that the archdiocese's auxiliary bishops could be available to attend some of those meetings.

"Because we were not able to invite everyone to the regional conversations we have already held, we are using two communications platforms - MyParish app and Flocknote - to facilitate conversations and solicit input from the wider archdiocesan community surrounding specific issues related to the abuse crisis," the archbishop said.

"Conversation can't be just one-way. You have heard enough from me. I want to hear from you," he said.

Flocknote is an email and text message tool created for use in Catholic ministries. MyParish App is a phone-based app which has event scheduling, Catholic prayers and other communication options for parishes. Both communications platforms are provided to all the parishes in the archdiocese by the Archdiocese of Baltimore in coordination with the Catholic Review.

The virtual town halls will present information from Archbishop Lori and ask parishioners to reflect on the same questions that have been asked at regional listening sessions. Users will be able to respond to the questions in either platform and see the comments of others in the discussion.

The virtual town halls are scheduled to launch Sept. 23. Those signed up will receive notifications when the discussions are open for comment.

Parishioners who wish to ensure that they can participate in the discussion can sign up for Flocknote to receive email/text messages by texting TOWNHALL to 84576

(202-765-3441 for Spanish) or **join via the web.**

Those who wish to participate via MyParish app can search for “My Parish” on the Apple iOS Store or Google Play. To join the discussion group, tap on the “Groups” button, search for the Archbishop Lori Town Hall group and join, or **join via the web.**