

I was one of “Readers” asked to carefully read all the responses from our Town Meetings. I was then asked to reflect on what I had read and to provide my own sense of what I thought could be discovered in this careful reading. So, here are some of my initial reflections which I hope will be useful:

1. A Clarity – Confusion dynamic is clearly operative...in multiple places. This dynamic requires both careful assessment and sincere efforts to clarify. This is essential since decisions made with a lack of clarity will be faulty to some degree which works against the meaningful and effective response we are searching for. It is necessary requirement that the first actions we take are to make sure that all of us have been fully informed. Some areas for focus: accurate time line; what the National Board does and who comprises it; what the Archdiocese does; issues around sexual abusers, e.g. can it be prevented; can they be identified, etc...

2. We are not simply dealing with “facts” but also with a range of emotions that hold the potential to influence our seeing, understanding and consequent decisions. We must attend to the reality of these feelings and foster the awareness of using one’s emotions in a creative and empowering way rather than in a disempowering or distorting manner. As we all know, emotions are neither good nor bad. Whether they can be useful or not depends on how we choose make use of them rather than the emotions driving us and our decisions.

3. The individual and what he/she can personally do is perhaps the greatest challenge and perhaps the most difficult to gain perspective on. Such personal engagement is critical. Only when each of us does this very personal work can we create the environment within which we, as individuals, can join with others, i.e. the parish... diocese...the American Church, etc.

4. The central problem seems to lie with our understanding and practice of authority; accountability; transparency; communication, etc. In this sense it is a crisis around the understanding and practice of power. We are experiencing what is a “we-them” functioning when it should be, justly, simply “us.” The word “hierarchy” and “cleric” are overlaid with the practice of power that often seems to contradict the teaching of Jesus. Ultimately then, we are in a crisis of relationship, i.e. what is the right nature of a bishop viz a viz God, priest, lay person; the right nature of a lay person viz a viz God, bishop and priest; the right nature of a priest viz a viz God, laity, bishop? Paul’s teaching on the body of Christ as relational, not hierarchical, provides insight into the redefining of our interrelationships. It would seem that redefining these relationships would inevitably lead to other changes.

5. All the dysfunction we painfully see taking place among us as Church must be seen and explored within the context of the influences of the larger culture that we now recognize can override the spiritual underpinnings of being a follower of Jesus.

6. What lies before us must, first and foremost, be a spiritual task which draws deeply from the Gospel; from the spirit of Jesus present among us; from the very creativity of God. The process cannot be complete, truly complete, unless it finds its rightful place in the Spirit of God...the place of truth.

7. As a community the direction seems clear: solidarity, healing, advocacy, transformation...or one might say transfiguration without, as yet, identifying with clarity the specifics of each which will evolve as our understanding and reflection deepen. These areas of action were suggested specifically in relationship to those who were the victims of child sexual abuse by priests but may also imply they are as necessary in relation to bishops, priests, the laity...

8. Outlier voices, i.e. those who made comments such as: “the good we do”; “gratitude”; “faith in the Church”; “steadfast”, etc.] which speak to the possibility of post traumatic growth which merits our thoughtful consideration.

9. Many of those who experienced this tragedy have profound spiritual needs that they must voice and we must be attentive to. Many other have gained powerful and deeply spiritual wisdom from their experiences which requires us to be profoundly attentive to what they have to teach us.

10. The challenge and beauty of dialogue must be the “driver” for our efforts to chart the course before us.

Fr. Ray

