



Letter
to a
Suffering
Church

A BISHOP SPEAKS ON THE
SEXUAL ABUSE CRISIS

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE



PART 1: *Questions for Discussion (45-60 min)*

1. Bishop Barron believes that the sexual abuse crisis is a “diabolical masterpiece.” Do you agree or disagree? How does the devil work to draw us all away from God? What is required of us for him to succeed?
2. Compare the accounts of sexual dysfunction and past Church scandals detailed in Bishop Barron’s book to the current abuse crisis. What are the similarities and differences? What lessons are evident from our past?
3. Is the difference in the number of offenses before and after the establishment of the Dallas protocols in 2002 meaningful to you? Why or why not?
4. How do you define the Church: Mystical Body or human institution? How does your definition of the Church affect your view of and faithfulness to the Church? How does it affect your actions going forward?
5. When we consider that sexual abuse and objectification happen not only in the priesthood but in scouting, in public schools, and in homes with intact families, “quick fix” solutions to the crisis seem inadequate. What can we say to those who are certain that permitting priests to marry, ordaining women, or barring all homosexuals from the priesthood will solve the crisis?



PART 2: *My Involvement in the Way Forward (Meditation and Reflection)*

Guided Meditation (30 min): Ask your group to get into a comfortable position, relax, and even close their eyes. Then ask them to concentrate on listening and making “word pictures” in their minds from what you say.

Read John 5:2-7:

“Now there is in Jerusalem at the Sheep Gate, a pool called in Hebrew Bethesda, with five porticoes. In these lay a large number of ill, blind, lame, and crippled. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been ill for a long time, he said to him, ‘Do you want to be well?’ The sick man answered him, ‘Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; while I am on my way, someone else gets down there before me.’”

Read:

The first-century Jews among whom Jesus walked believed that an angel would stir the Bethesda pools in Jerusalem and, from that stirring, healing would come to those ready and able to reach the waters.

Now imagine those pools surrounded by the people of God who are the earthly Church today, each of us bearing a portion of the wounds that have beset the whole Mystical Body from the crisis.

- What are you bearing as a result of the crisis? (*Pause*)
- How are you personally wounded? Name your hurt. (*Pause to allow the formation of an answer in their minds.*)
- Walk into the water, taking that wound or hurt with you. Can you feel God's love and mercy in the pool? (*Pause.*) Release your hurt into the water of God's love and trust that he is with you. (*Pause.*)
- How do you feel when you emerge from the water?
- Now look around you; see the people so burdened by their victimhood, or their pain, or their anger, or even by their indifference, that they will never reach the healing waters on their own. Sometimes full-scale evangelization Sometimes full-scale evangelization looks like a careful and persistent assistance, a step-by-step accompaniment meant to help someone reach the living water of Christ and be made free.
- Who will you help? Who will you bring closer to the pool, bit by bit, until when next the angel stirs the waters, they will—perhaps with your further assistance—finally be able to reach in and participate in the healing?
- See that person in your mind's eye. How can you help?

NOTE TO LEADER: You can choose to lead one or both of these personal reflections during the group, as time permits. Or participants can complete one or both at home. It would be helpful to print this page with the two reflections for participants to take home, even if you do them as a group, to encourage continued prayer and reflection.

Personal Reflection #1 (20 min)

Often, I feel at a loss to understand how I, as a lay person, might participate in the healing of the Church. Bishop Barron suggests that the awful realities before us mean that, for love of Christ, each of us must dedicate ourselves to a forthright and unstinting examination of the collective failures, weaknesses, and blind spots that have helped bring us to this moment of necessary intervention.

Can any of us doubt that at this moment, God's purposes are calling us to access our rich spiritual heritage with our whole hearts, minds, and bodies—to work within the supernatural channels of sacraments and grace available to all of us, with the specific intention of healing the wounds that are so depleting the life force of our shared Body?

Could the answer be as simple as prayer, fasting, penances, devotions—those “obvious” things—undertaken in complete trust that God will use them rightly and justly according to God's perfect understanding (and not my own) of what is truly right and just?

- Aside from those investigatory and procedural reforms now being addressed by bishops (which Bishop Barron mentions in his Letter to a Suffering Church), what sort of specific actions might I take?
- What part might I play in fostering a united effort, shared by laity and the clergy alike, to build a vibrant and energetic solidarity within the Body of Christ?
- Am I willing to encourage my pastor and bishop in leading parishes in Eucharistic processions, benedictions, and other devotions?

Personal Reflection #2 (20 min)

If human cooperation is necessary for the devil to accomplish his purposes, it is also necessary for the power of the Holy Spirit to become unleashed and made manifest. Without priests we cannot be a Eucharistic and sacramental Church; but our power as the baptized laity is real, and it resides within the Body of Christ.

- How often have I prayed for the intentions and the spiritual health of the celebrant when I attend Mass?
- What have I done to promote vocations to the priesthood in my personal life?
- Would I want to see a son of mine pursue such a calling at this time? If not, what might change that feeling?
- Can more lay involvement into the formation of priests promote the health and security of young men entering the seminary? What might that look like?
- How committed am I to praying daily for every member of the clergy that they become reacquainted with and rededicated to the still, small voice that first called them to the priesthood?