

NOTES FROM OPEN FORUM HELD IN RESPONSE TO THE MURPHY REPORT

Parish: Sandyford Parish, Dublin
VENUE: *Our Lady of the Wayside Church*
DATE: 15th December 2009

The meeting began with an introductory talk by Gerard Gallagher (*Dublin Diocese, Office of Evangelisation*) on the Murphy Report after which the floor was opened for comments, responses, views etc. The views expressed were delivered with strong emotion ranging from anger and frustration to deep sadness and a sense of betrayal.

The following points were made by those present. They are in no particular order as they have been written from memory and therefore not comprehensive or ordered:

- The clerical model of the Church is deeply flawed with little or no sense of accountability to the majority of the Church who are the laity.
- Bishops censured in the Report should resign even if only to show they understand the seriousness of their omissions and to dispel the impression that they want to cling to power at any cost.
- Power and abuse of power were noted as key factors in how the hierarchy conducted and continues to conduct itself and how detached they are from the lives of the majority of the faithful
- The laity have never been encouraged to take up roles of responsibility in the governance of the Church
- Women have been sidelined - if they were more central to Church governance its unlikely that such cover-ups would have been permitted
- It was suggested that we should pray but not pay ie withhold monetary contributions until the governance of the Church is radically reformed and that means starting at the top with a clearout of many of the Bishops
- There should be a reduction in the numbers of Bishops
- Lay people should be more active in the Ministry ie deacons, preachers etc
- It was suggested that enforced celibacy of priests contributes to the problem of abuse in the Church – this was disputed as the statistics and research available do not support this thesis
- The promise of a letter from the Pope in response to the Murphy Report was greeted with a ‘So what?’. What is important to us is the integrity of our own priests, community and local Church.
- The priests are also suffering and angry about what has happened and along with the laity feel excluded from having their voice heard
- A question was asked as to how much the Pope has known over the years about abusive priests and whether the instruction was given by him (as Cardinal Ratzinger) to only allow abuse to be reported to the diocese and the Vatican to avoid scandal and damage to the institution of the Church.
- Again it was emphasised that unless there is radical reform at the top there would be no change and no hope for the institution of the Church
- The need for the laity to stand up and be counted was emphasised
- A specific suggestion of writing to the offending Bishops and to the Papal Nuncio letting our views be known was also put forward
- A suggestion to make banners and organise a protest march outside the Papal Nuncio’s and the Archbishop’s residences was suggested

- Most speakers prefaced their remarks by praising the openness and courage of Archbishop Diarmuid Martin in challenging the culture and attitudes of a deeply entrenched hierarchy who seem to have no sense of the public anger which includes churchgoers
- One speaker spoke of her difficulty in persuading her young children to go to Mass in light of the scandals and said she wasn't sure how long she herself would be able to hang on if no change happened and quickly
- People spoke about how they had been on Diocesan bodies to do with the role of women, the role of the laity etc in the Church but nothing seems to have changed. It as though Vatican II never happened and the universal call to holiness has never been heard by the Irish Church.
- It was also suggested that as a community we should support each other and develop more of a sense of how the early Christians lived
- The complex structures of hierarchy and bureaucracy have nothing to do with the life or message of Christ
- There has to be a distinction between the institutional Church and Christ's message
- There has to be a decoupling of our relationship with the institutional Church and our relationship with Christ.
- We are not good in this country at standing up and challenging wrongdoing – look at the banks – we need to be more courageous in standing up to those who abuse their positions of power in any institution.
- One speaker said that Bishops, priests, religious are not central to the faith – what's important is our relationship with Jesus particularly in the Eucharist
- The challenge was issued by one speaker who said either we stay and fight to reform the Church or we walk away – that is the stark choice facing us.
- One speaker questioned whether some priests really believed in the Eucharist.
- One person said to Mr.Gallagher that he was wasting our time here tonight if things we not going to come to a head at the top, and bishops own up to their mistakes and the cover-up.
- People expressed a sense that the diocese and Rome do not understand the level of hurt that people feel. Also, a sense that even this message will not be heard or treated seriously.
- One person asked the question... "Has the diocese tried to look into the reasons WHY clerical sex abuse was happening." The response was that this should come from a third party independent body so as to be believed.
- Concern was expressed about the formation of priests and how they are supported in their ministry by the hierarchy as they are the frontline 'troops' facing the people day in, day out. What support do they get from the diocese?
- Our priests noted with appreciation the support they get from parishioners
- Someone commented that they didn't know how the victims of abuse can get up in the morning, their suffering is so great
- Some speakers who had experience of dealing with the church authorities in advisory capacities spoke with some hurt of the unwillingness of the church authorities to listen, consult or engage with the laity. The consensus was that this is not a listening church.
- Other speakers cautioned against engaging with the internal politics of the church and advised fellow parishioners to engage on a spiritual level and perhaps to ignore everything else. Their view was that Religion should be experienced as a relationship with God.
- The question was asked about priestly formation and ministry that allowed paedophilia to flourish?
- Also, why did the church authorities not apologize for the cover up?
- What can we do to change this church?