



The Blue Hills Collaborative

20 Como Road, Readville, MA 02136

Friends,

I am a people-pleaser by birth. I don't like confrontation. I want everyone to get along and love each other. It's in my genes, and most of the time I'm comfortable with that personality—so when something I say or preach about gets people upset, I'm not happy about it.

I was on vacation the past two weekends, so I wasn't able to approach the issue of sex abuse/St. John's Seminary/the coverup by the institution.

I remember speaking very honestly and directly about this crisis when we experienced it as it became public in Boston, beginning in 2002 and leading to Cardinal Law's resignation. I was at St. Albert's in Weymouth at that time, and over the years continued to speak about it periodically in different parishes.

In the past few weeks, many issues regarding sex abuse and the Church have once again made the headlines, and have become the topic of conversation.

Being a people-pleaser, I begin by admitting that some of our parishioners are sick and tired of the entire situation and would prefer not to hear about it in church, while others believe that if we can't talk about it in church, there is something seriously wrong.

So, what I say will not please everyone, but we are talking about an issue that can literally destroy the Church that we love. Some people probably believe that has to take place if we are to heal.

My feelings: the structure of the Church as we know it today is no longer effective. The Second Vatican Council did a lot to alleviate the separation of clergy vs. laity. Those terms were believed to be divisive, so we were together called the People of God. The Council tried to see the Church and society as needing each other to enhance God's presence in both. It was no longer the Church *and* the world, but the Church *in* the world.

As long as the Church stood apart, it answered to no one, and was accountable to no one outside the institution itself. That led to serious issues surrounding authority. Bishops answered to no one and controlled others by fear.

Fr. Richard McBrien, a wonderful progressive theologian, e.g., who was not allowed to speak in the Archdiocese during Bernard Law's time, once said, when I heard him speak elsewhere: "If you want to bring about the biggest change in the Catholic church, you don't have to ordain women or married men—you have to change the way bishops are selected." He was a true prophet.

Before I go any further, whatever I say is one of my ways of paying tribute to any victims or survivors of sex abuse, especially anyone who has been violated by priests, others in ministry, or by the institution itself. I'm talking about children, teenagers, or adults. This is about them and their families and our responsibility toward them.

The institutional Church has betrayed the trust not only of Catholics, but people of all religious affiliations and those with none. Just think how you feel when you mention you are Catholic, or that you still go to church; or when you tell someone you have a friend who is a priest. The admiration of the past is now disbelief, as friends question how you could still be affiliated with anyone or anything representing the Catholic Church. How sad and pathetic is that—to have to defend yourself. As an institution we have lost the respect of many, and until we regain that respect, we will continue to experience anger, disgust, vitriol, and hatred. I hear it and sense it. There's also profound sadness on the part of those who still love the Church and are devastated and heartbroken to witness its collapse and demise in front of their eyes.

When I grew up, I was surely given the impression that the Church and God were equal—therefore the Church's image was always one of perfection. That image was a lie, and now the truth has been revealed. This crisis and these crimes will force many wonderful people

The Catholic Parishes of Most Precious Blood, Hyde Park, St. Anne, Readville, and St. Pius X, Milton

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to divorce themselves from the Church and from organized religion. That loss reaches to the heart and soul of who we are. It has and will continue to cripple us for years, decades, and generations. These decisions will impact Catholic health care, Catholic education, Catholic social services, and Catholic parishes in this Archdiocese, throughout our country, and around the world. Catholic people have the right to speak out, and they will--verbally, physically, and financially.

So where does all this leave the parishes of the Blue Hills Collaborative?

As I was writing these thoughts, I had a severe headache, and I'm sure it's not a coincidence. Fr. Charles and I grew up thousands of miles from each other, and years apart, but it is our Catholic families and Catholic communities that fostered our vocations. We both went to St. John Seminary in Brighton, although once again, years apart. They weren't the happiest eight years of my life, and I believe he feels the same, but we persisted because we were idealistic and believed God was beyond the walls of the seminary building. Say what you will about my varying view of God and my differences with the Catholic Church throughout the years, but I am still a Catholic and a priest today because I did not and do not put my faith in institutions or people in authority. My faith is in God, and I choose to celebrate that faith in the Catholic Church.

Every single one of you has to make a decision. Can you in good conscience continue to celebrate in the Catholic Church, and can you still trust the Church by contributing financially? Personally, I will respect your decision. Everyone here is vital to the present and future of the Catholic Church. Your absence would be a devastating loss to the parish and to the Church, but you have every right to make that choice and to be respected by your family and friends, no matter what your decision.

As I look out at you, I think how blessed we are to have you, and I would hope you choose to remain and challenge your Church and parish to represent the true presence of God, and no longer allow us to isolate our decision-making from you. Because I tend to be observant, I will be aware of the absences in the pews, and you will be missed if you cannot continue—but your decision will be respected.

I don't believe survivors need any more Church prayer services or acts of penance from the Church, nor do they want to hear the Church apologize again—these were initial responses, but today they fall short. The survivors, their families, and healthy people want accountability and transparency, and they demand that trustworthy human beings be put into positions of authority in the Catholic Church and beyond. In 2018 we are among those responsible for making that a reality and saving the lives of our children and teenagers. I hope it is not too late.

By the way: I am in favor of bringing women into the priesthood, and I'm in favor of ordaining married men, but I agree with Fr. McBrien that the greatest impact in the Church will take place only when we change the way in which bishops are selected.

Sincerely,



Fr. Ron Coyne