

Dear Bishop Barber,

We, members of the Body of Christ at the appropriately named Corpus Christi Parish in Piedmont, feel an urgent need to share our thoughts regarding the reignited clergy abuse crisis. We are proud members of our parish and the Oakland Diocese, but are deeply troubled by the many allegations of sexual abuse and abuse of power.

We write as partners in the mission of the Church. As members of the lay apostolate, we are the primary presence of the Church in society. We work hard to make Christ present every day, doing our best to transform the world into the Kingdom that Jesus described so colorfully. We do this through our jobs, in family life, within our neighborhoods, and through invitations to non-Catholic and fallen-away Catholics. We also generously share our financial gifts for the work of the institutional Church to serve those in need.

We have prayed and reflected on where God is leading the Church at this difficult juncture. We recognize that you have inherited a crisis, and we want to dialogue with you and work alongside you to heal our wounded Church and move forward in our mission.

We cannot overstate the negative effects of the crisis in the Church. Beyond the tragic impacts on the victims of abuse and their families, it has also decimated the moral authority of the Church hierarchy, and, by association, the whole Church. Our role and responsibility—to live as missionary disciples in the world—has also been undermined. As members of the lay apostolate, we feel an absolute responsibility to save our Church and protect the vulnerable who have been or could be victimized by it. We agree with Pope Francis that the root cause of this crisis is “the evil of clericalism,” and that it is essential for us to work together—clergy and lay—to discern and envision how to respond and become the Church that the world needs today.

We commend you for pledging to release the names of all clergy credibly accused of abusing anyone and your commitment to involve Dr. Kathleen McChesney for reviewing diocesan files and auditing diocesan processes. These are good initial steps. However, they are not enough. We respectfully request that you take the following additional modest actions within the Oakland Diocese:

We request that you meet with a small group of representatives of our parish, so we can share more specifically our thoughts, recommendations and requests.

We urge you to reinstate the Oakland Diocesan Pastoral Council to provide diverse, representative lay voices, selected by the faithful, to advise you on major pastoral decisions within the diocese.

We ask that you convene a diocesan congress to set vision and priorities for the future of the diocese.

We also call on you to take actions to fight on our behalf for change in the broader Church, through your role as a member of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. We urge you to call for greater transparency, accountability and active involvement of laity, especially women.

We ask you to strongly advocate for:

A strong mechanism to hold bishops accountable for abuses of their power, especially, but not exclusively involving clergy sexual abuse. Independent accountability must be part of the solution.

A system for embracing synodality and lay representation within the United States and beyond. Perhaps this could take the form of a Conference of Catholic Laity, as suggested by Massimo Faggioli.

Lay input and participation in the February bishops' summit on abuse prevention.

Thank you for reading this challenging letter. We ask you to prayerfully consider what Jesus would say—what he is saying—about this crisis. We will be holding a Service of Healing for parishioners during the Advent Season to pray for reconciliation, healing and action in the midst of this crisis.

Today, as St. Teresa of Avila reminds us, we are Jesus' feet and hands. We need to all discern how we fulfill that solemn duty.

In Christ,  
The people of Corpus Christi Parish, Piedmont CA.