

Press Release

EMPOWERING CATHOLICS OF PITTSBURGH RELEASES RESULTS OF CLERICAL SURVEY

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Pittsburgh, PA, August 8, 2019—*Empowering Catholics of Pittsburgh* (ECOP), a grassroots group of devout but disheartened local Roman Catholics committed to giving the clergy and laity a voice in the Church of Pittsburgh, has released the results of an anonymous survey of priests and deacons on the current state of the Diocese of Pittsburgh. While the anonymity of respondents is strictly protected, the aggregate results and verbatim responses have been compiled in a written report that is now available on line at **empoweringcatholics.org**.

This ground-breaking survey, conducted in April-May, 2019, gave local diocesan clergy an opportunity to evaluate the performance of The Most Reverend David A. Zubik, Bishop of Pittsburgh, and his curia. While pastors/priests are regularly evaluated, there is no current mechanism for evaluating the bishop by the laity or the clergy under him. As promised, the report has been shared first with the clergy themselves and with Bishop Zubik, other members of the Church hierarchy and local laity leaders, and is now being shared with the media.

As ECOP founders Margaret McLean and Sandra Lannis explained in the letter to clergy that accompanied the mailed surveys, “The laity and the clergy on the front lines of ministry have had little or no say in what happens in our diocese. It is our purpose to fix that.” According to ECOP, the first step in establishing accountability of diocesan leadership is to hear from the priests and deacons of the diocese. As Ms. McLean explains, “Until now, we had heard from the laity in the listening sessions and from the bishop in his Pastoral Letter issued in March, but had not heard from an essential piece of the puzzle—the clergy on the front lines of ministry--on how to solve what ails the Church of Pittsburgh. The results of this clerical survey provide that missing piece of the puzzle and finally give the clergy of the diocese a public voice.”

With a response rate of 13%, the reactions of clergy to the survey were varied, with one respondent writing “You have some nerve” while other clergy members welcomed the opportunity to share their views. As one self-identified priest noted in a note accompanying his survey response, “...even by your small survey, you have given me far more of a voice in these grave matters than I have ever been allowed in the Church, some twenty years involvement in the Diocese of Pittsburgh...”

The areas covered by the survey include evaluation of the bishop’s handling of the recent *On Mission* reorganization of parishes and the child sex abuse scandal as well as reasons for the shortage of men entering St. Paul Seminary, the current state and future needs of the diocese and the level of clerical confidence in Bishop Zubik and his curia. The report of survey results includes graphics as well as an exhaustive catalog of verbatim quotes from responses across the

spectrum of viewpoints. Only portions of responses that could possibly identify the respondent were omitted from the report.

ECOP describes the responses to the survey as “extremely enlightening” and encourages all interested stakeholders in the diocese to review the clergy’s tabulated responses and to draw their own conclusions. The responses run the gamut from those who are highly supportive of the bishop’s performance to those who are highly critical of it.

According to ECOP founders, there are some major take-aways from the responses of those members of the clergy who chose to participate in the survey:

- 86% of self-identified priests and 65% of all survey respondents found the bishop’s March, 2019 Pastoral Letter on the child abuse scandal to be an inadequate response.
- 81% of self-identified priests and 79% of all survey respondents say there is a need for whistleblower protection for priests, seminarians and diocesan employees so that they can speak without fear of retribution. Priests in the diocese, with their entire vocation and livelihood on the line, say they are discouraged from opposing diocesan policies and that those who do are often punished for doing so.
- 76% of self-identified priests and 61% of total survey respondents report having no or minimal level of confidence in the bishop and his curia to lead the Diocese of Pittsburgh. That is in contrast to 24% of self-identified priests and 39% of all survey respondents who report having a moderate or high level of confidence in diocesan leadership.
- 71% of self-identified priests and 72% of all survey respondents said that the diocese does not have sufficient resources to run and manage St. Paul Seminary. To the extent that the diocese is in financial trouble and is closing or consolidating schools across the diocese, closing St. Paul Seminary or merging with a neighboring seminary may be a necessity, according nearly three-fourths of local clergy who responded to the survey.
- 76% of self-identified priests and 67% of all survey respondents said that they do not think the bishop has been well-served by the people who make up the curia around him.
- 63% of self-identified priests and 69% of all survey respondents agree that there will be a better chance of effecting positive change and addressing urgent problems facing the diocese if the laity and the clergy come together as a united voice.

An overriding theme is the need for the bishop to truly listen to the pastors/priests on the front lines of ministry who know the needs of their people and to the laity as well, instead of to outside paid consultants. As one respondent noted, “The Bishop claims to listen, but he does not hear nor act upon the voices of his priests or laity.” From the survey results, Ms. Lannis observes, “What is needed is a return of confidence among the laity and clergy in the Church of Pittsburgh as a holy body that represents Christ and rejects a culture of control and secrecy. There must be a distinct and notable break from the past, if there is any hope for the diocese to heal and to attract back to the fold members of the flock who have fallen away.”