News



St. Anselm parishioners, staff and clergy came together Aug. 29 to share thoughts on the clergy sex abuse scandal at the invitation of Fr. Jose Shaji, pastor, seated far left. (Photo by Christina Gray/Courtesy of Catholic San Francisco)



by Dan Morris-Young

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Grassroots reactions to the church crises of authority and sex abuse have taken place at cathedrals, parishes, universities, public squares and pubs.

Catholic News Service's Carol Zimmerman recently pulled together a representative list of episcopal or diocesan-organized events — listening sessions, rosaries, novenas, and even a Facebook Live Q-and-A with the Diocese of Colorado Springs' Bishop Michael Sheridan.

"Several dioceses held Masses for healing Sept. 14, the feast of the Triumph of the Cross, or Sept. 15, the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, emphasizing the dates as appropriate for penance and seeking God's grace," Zimmerman reported Sept. 18.

Some dioceses scheduled August healing masses. According to Zimmerman, more than 1,100 attended the Archdiocese of New Orleans' Aug. 28 "Mass for Forgiveness and Healing" celebrated by Archbishop Gregory Aymond at sizable St. Joseph Church .

CNS also reports that several hundred participants gathered at Philadelphia's Cathedral Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul on Sept. 14 for a prayer vigil organized by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

Many bishops issued calls for prayer and penance such as Bishop Paul Bradley of Kalamazoo, Michigan, in an Aug. 19 letter:

> We will pray and fast for healing for all victims of sexual abuse, for a conversion of mind and heart on the part of those in need of repentance, and for a renewal in our individual commitment to follow Jesus with conviction, joy, and purity of heart.

Supporters praised the efforts as needed steps toward healing. Critics described them as venting operations to keep the Catholic community from exploding.

Here are more examples — some akin to angry spot fires.

- At St. Isidore Church in Macomb, Michigan, the Sept. 12 monthly "Theology on Tap" gathering's scheduled discussion of Hebrew Scripture prophets appears to have been put on hold for an exchange with pastor Ron Victor on the abuse crisis. The parish has also scheduled an Oct. 25 forum. Victor is no stranger to controversy, having been pilloried by traditionalist-leaning Catholic websites for remarks he made after his gay nephew's civil marriage three years ago.
- A Sept. 25 panel discussion at Georgetown University was described as "akin to a very large parish town hall meeting."
- A similar panel discussion took place at Santa Clara University on Oct. 9.
- Describing pew Catholics as concerned, angry and confused, the pastor of St. Kateri Tekakwitha Parish in Schenectady, New York, Fr. Robert Longobucco set a listening session for Sept. 13 as did St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Albany.
- Diocese of Nashville, Tennessee, Bishop J. Mark Spalding has spearheaded a series of panel discussions around the diocese which he will attend in addition to legal, psychological and safe environment experts.
- Mundelein Seminary at the University of Saint Mary of the Lake in Illinois staged a nine-day novena Sept. 7-15.
- For nearly two hours on Aug. 29 the pastor of St. Anselm Parish in Ross, California, Fr. Jose Shaji, listened to more than two dozen parishioners air concerns.



An interfaith gathering in Mill Valley on Sept. 15 prayed for wholeness and healing in response to the sex abuse crisis. The event came out of a listening session Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish held after the publication of the Pennsylvania grand jury report in August. (Nicholas Wolfram Smith/Courtesy of Catholic San Francisco)

- As a result of an earlier listening session at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish in Mill Valley, California, an interfaith group of about 50 gathered at the city's Depot Square Sept. 15 to pray for sexual abuse victims and perpetrators.
- In a Sept. 21 open letter San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone announced "five opportunities for people in our archdiocese to meet with me and speak to me directly" on the abuse crisis between Sept. 30 and Oct. 28.
- In the adjacent Diocese of San Jose, about 70 persons, including some who said they were abuse victims, gathered at the diocese's invitation on Sept. 22 t at Our Lady of the Rosary Parish, in Palo Alto, California, to confront San Jose Bishop Patrick McGrath. Some reportedly called for a criminal investigation of the diocese. Some said they are leaving the church.

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