

Report a step toward reform

When attorney Robert Bennett asked me to testify before the "causes and context" committee of the U.S. bishops' National Review Board, I told him that, once the tape recorders were turned on, the first thing I'd say was that I didn't think the NRB made much ecclesiological sense — but since it had been commissioned by the bishops, I believed it my duty to cooperate with their work. I'm happy to say now that, in my judgment, the NRB report released on Feb. 27 is a genuine service to the church and a potentially crucial step toward authentic Catholic reform.

Why?

1) Because the report is set within a genuinely Catholic and thoroughly ecclesial framework. The report makes clear that the church, by the will of Christ, is led by her bishops; that the priest is far more than an ecclesiastical functionary; that celibacy is a great gift to the church; that Catholic doctrine didn't cause the problems the report addresses, but rather the failure to teach and live the truths of Catholic faith; and that what the church needs is authentically Catholic reform.

2) Because the report squarely faces the two dimensions of the crisis — i.e., sexual misconduct and episcopal misgovernance — and suggests that both aspects of the crisis are reflections of a deeper crisis of fidelity and spirituality.

3) Because the report,



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The Catholic Difference

rather than calling for "power-sharing," calls for evangelically and pastorally assertive episcopal leadership, including far more fraternal challenge and correction within the body of bishops.

4) Because the report faces the overwhelmingly homosexual nature of the clerical sexual abuse of minors over the past 50 years, without either euphemism or "scapegoating."

5) Because the report frankly describes the failures of seminaries in the late '60s and '70s, stressing lapses in spiritual and ascetic formation, and thus sets the stage for accelerating the seminary reform already under way.

6) Because the report decries the many occasions on which psychiatric and psychological categories and processes trumped theological categories and available canonical remedies in handling clerical malfeasants.

7) Because the report delicately suggests that "zero tolerance" is too blunt an instrument to be an instrument of genuine justice.

8) Because the report warns against encroach-

ments by the state into internal church governance, while also warning that those encroachments can and will happen if bishops abrogate their responsibilities.

9) Because the report demonstrates that lay people can take on a task of great complexity and delicacy in the church and do it in such a way that, for all its (legitimate) criticism of the hierarchy, reasserts the divinely-ordered structure of the church and calls the episcopate to exercise its legitimate authority.

There are particular recommendations in the report with which reasonable people can disagree — and I do. But at this point in time, it's much more important to concentrate on the many, many things the NRB got right than to focus immediately on this or that recommendation which may or may not be imprudent or inappropriate or in fact inapplicable.

The National Review Board, created in part to appease an out-of-control media, declined to follow the media script. Rather than proposing a dismantling of Catholic belief, structure and practice, it produced a report which persuasively argues that the answer to a crisis of Catholic fidelity is — Catholic fidelity. We're in their debt.

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Suggests plan for vocations

To the editor:

It was disheartening to hear that the Diocese of Rochester has the lowest number of priestly vocations in our whole country. Feeling we all have a responsibility to do something about this, I offer these suggestions:

One, I'd like to suggest that priests preach often and enthusiastically about our need for priestly vocations. Enthusiasm is contagious! Being excited and showing what a great privilege it is to be chosen by God for the precious work of saving souls would attract our youth. Radiating a special love for God, as well as pride and love for one's vocation, makes it irresistible. A happy priest is our best salesman!

Two, let's take advantage of our Catholic schools. A Vocation Curriculum for Catholic schools should be commissioned that would include:

a) Daily recitation of a Vocation Prayer.

b) "Witnessing" by priests, sisters, and even parents who have first-hand knowledge of religious vocations from their own homes.

c) A yearly study of religious orders that would show what priestly and religious life is really like.

d) Frequent presentation of inspirational movies and books on "Lives of the

Saints."

e) Essay and poster contests held yearly in the schools or on the parish level. The *Catholic Courier* could sponsor and offer prizes. We could start with a parish Vocation Prayer contest for families, with the best ones published.

Three, prayer and fasting are our most powerful assets. We need a spiritually attractive Vocation Prayer Card, perhaps with an image of the Good Shepherd. These cards could be distributed to schools, churches, hospitals and to shut-ins, enlisting the sick to offer up their prayers and sufferings for the cause of religious vocations. Prayers for vocations should be mandated after all weekend Masses. Frequent private confessions need to be encouraged and successful dioceses studied and imitated.

Janet Schwenkler
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Survey done, work remains

To the editor:

The sex abuse crisis in the Roman Catholic Church is too painfully large for any single Catholic or committee to remedy. Conducting a survey has never remedied anything. I disagree with Bishop Wilton Gregory's comment that the sex abuse scandal is history. The result of the Bishop's survey is in our laps but a crisis remains. Catholics need to pray now! We need to pray for Divine assistance to lead us from further harm. We are the Body of Christ that God readily breathes His Spirit into. Catholics need to get off the "couch" and exercise the tools God gave them. Do more than look alive! Reach! Don't despair because our Heavenly Father always hears when we implore even the least little bit! Pray for guidance. Be watchful! Look and know where you stand! Don't be sleeping when the bridegroom arrives. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival.

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