

“Canon Law and Lay Involvement in Church Governance” Conversation Guide



This conversation guide consists of both questions for discussion and a list of resources referred to in the lecture. Facilitators may wish to make use of these other resources as a part of their presentation and discussion of the materials. In utilizing this guide, we recommend facilitators choose those questions most helpful to the purpose of their group.

View this lecture here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7BgYPXiY3o>

Questions for Conversation:

- Tom Doyle states that it is important to remember three things as we seek a meaningful future for our Church:
 1. The laity did not cause the problem of sexual abuse and abuse of power.
 2. The hierarchy caused the problem and the clerical culture tried to cover it up.
 3. The People of God will resolve the problem.

What is your reaction to this statement from Doyle? Does it give you hope, make you angry, fill you with frustration or energy for change? Take a few minutes to share with those around you.

- Throughout his lecture, Doyle refers to the Church’s system of governance as a “monarchy.” Do you agree with his evaluation of the institutional Church as a monarchy? What barriers does the monarchical model create for implementing a transparent, accountable, co-responsible Church?
- How could a renewed theology of baptism help to shift our understanding of church governance?
- Doyle argues that the bishops have never taken a proactive step in responding to the sexual abuse and leadership crises. Rather, he says, all work for justice has come from the survivors, the civil courts, the media, and lay Catholics. How does this help us to understand how and why transformation occurs in institutions of power?

- Doyle sees three primary areas of causality in the sexual abuse and leadership crises: the current model of priesthood, a monarchical church governance structure, and the current model of pastoral care. In your estimation, how have each of these contributed to the current crises? Do you think there are other areas of causality not named by Doyle?
- The sacraments, in particular the Eucharist, are central to Catholic spirituality. And yet, it is in the very context of the sacraments that abuse occurs in many cases. Doyle argues that in light of this, spiritual healing for victims cannot focus primarily around reconciliation, Eucharist, or liturgical penance services. Indeed, he suggests that the current sacramental model in the Church serves to keep lay people as passive dependents on clerics. How do you think the Church might arrive at a less hierarchical model of pastoral and spiritual care?
- Doyle clearly states that as it currently exists, canon law is a tool in service of a monarchical church. He insists that canon law will only serve the whole People of God when both those administering it and those receiving it seek to implement transparency and accountability. Based on this lecture, how do you think current canon law needs to be revised?
- What does the story of former Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny's response to the Vatican tell us about the lack of institutional honesty in response to the abuse crisis? How does Doyle suggest canon law serves a culture of secrecy?
- In the final lines of the lecture Doyle quotes Marie Collins, who encourages the laity to remember that it is our Church and that we must keep hope alive while resisting all forms of clericalism. How do you hold on to both hope and resistance in the work to transform the Church?

Resources:

Survivor Support

If you have been the victim of abuse in the Catholic Church, please reach out to someone. Below are contact points that can help.

RAINN National Sexual Assault Hotline	800-656-HOPE (4673) or online chat
Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests	Assistance Line: 1-877-SNAP-HEALS (877-762-7432)
Victim Assistance Coordinators	Click here to contact a victim assistance coordinator in your diocese.

- For reports and documents on the abuse crisis, educational information, and steps on how to take action, visit <http://catholiclayresponse.com/>.
- Tom Doyle refers to the following canons in his talk: 129, 204, 207, 208, 221. These can be accessed through the online Code of Canon Law: http://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/cic_index_en.html.
- The NCR editorial referenced in this lecture on the “heroic priesthood” and the crimes of Marcial Maciel can be found here: <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/finally-legions-terrible-truth>.
- Former Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny’s statement on the 2011 Cloyne report can be found here: http://www.bishop-accountability.org/news5/2011_07_20_Kenny_Statement.htm.
- *Vos Estis Lux Mundi* is a *motu proprio* promulgated by Pope Francis which establishes new procedural norms to combat sexual abuse in the Church: http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20190507_vos-estis-lux-mundi.html.
- Pope Pius X refers to the laity as the “docile flock” in the 1906 encyclical *Vehementer Nos*: http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_11021906_vehementer-nos.html.

- Doyle lists five key moments of transformation in the history of the sexual abuse crisis and cover-up:
 1. 1997 – [The trial in Dallas for the victims of Rudy Kos](#)
 2. 2002 – [The series of revelations by the Boston Globe](#) (Jan. 6)
 3. 2018 – [The Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report](#) (Aug. 14)
 4. 2019 – [Cardinal McCarrick is laicized](#) (Feb. 16)
 5. 2019 – Statue of limitations changes in [New York](#), [New Jersey](#) and [California](#), after years of opposition from the bishops costing over \$10 million of the peoples' money