

PAST EVENTS

The WATCH Committee met for nearly two hours on November 16 with Fr. Michael DiGregorio, Prior Provincial of the Augustinian Province of St. Thomas of Villanova and with the Liaison for Victim Assistance and Director of Ministerial Conduct and Education for the Augustinian Province of Saint Thomas of Villanova. Fr Michael explained in some detail the significant efforts the Augustinians have undertaken to prevent, investigate, and respond to alleged sexual abuse by its members. While the discussion was too detailed for a full summary here, these key points should be highlighted:

1. Since 2005, the Augustinians have contracted with a professional third party called Praesidium to design a comprehensive sexual abuse avoidance and response plan for the Order, and implementation of this plan is continually audited by Praesidium.
2. Whenever the Order receives any allegation of sexual abuse by its Friars, it immediately notifies law enforcement and restricts the access of the alleged abuser away from the public while a full independent third party professional investigation is conducted.
3. The Order contracts with another independent professional organization in the Washington, DC area to conduct a third-party Review Board of the investigation and its conclusions before any final decision is made. The Order has always accepted the conclusions reached by this independent third party process.
4. Of the 144 current Augustinian Friars, six are currently living under supervision due to a finding of a "credible allegation of sexual misconduct." In addition, two Friars have been restricted recently while a full investigation has been conducted, and the conclusion was recently reached through the process described above that the allegations are not credible.

Visioning the Lay Apostolate of Tomorrow

- **What does Church teaching** tell us about the role of the laity in the Church?
- **In what ways** are the laity called to leadership in the New Chapter of Evangelization that Pope Francis calls for?
- **How might the laity be called** to help lead the Church through the COVID19 situation?

Join the [St. Thomas of Villanova WATCH committee in exploring and discussing these and topics related to lay leadership. Click Here](#)

Fr Hans Zollner speaks at Villanova on Global Perspectives on the Sex Abuse Crisis On January 29, Fr. Hans Zollner presented his views on the Sex Abuse Crisis to an audience on the Villanova campus that included many clergy such as Fr. Peter as well as students, STV parishioners, and interested community members. Fr. Zollner is President of the Centre for Child Protection of the Pontificia University Gregoriana in Rome and is considered to be one of the world's leading experts on this topic. He spoke about the history of this issue, the different phases of the Church response, and the way forward. **The lecture was taped and will be available on YouTube soon.**

The Watch Committee expressed its appreciation for the substantial transparency and information provided during this exchange. The Committee encouraged the Order to publish more information about their extensive and impressive efforts to prevent and respond to this painful issue. In addition, the Watch Committee also asked Fr DiGregorio to consider releasing the names of all those credibly accused of sexual misconduct. This issue remains under consideration. The WATCH Committee will continue to work together with our Church leaders on behalf of all STV parishioners to address the terrible scourge of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church.

Reimagining the Church

Reflections on the Bridge Dialogues

On four Tuesday evenings this fall, the Lay Leadership Task Force of WATCH hosted a program called the Bridge Dialogues. Thirteen lay people and three members of the clergy met to engage in conversation about the Church today. Drawn together by shared distress over the current state of affairs in the Church, as well as a desire to move forward in healing, this group addressed a variety of issues using a set curriculum. Acknowledging that the Church today is a far cry from the Gospel, participants engaged in respectful discussion by sharing opinions, concerns, hopes, and emotions. The group realized that, because of the complexities of an enormous, centuries-old institution, systemic change within the Catholic Church will be slow. However, there was emphasis on the phrase “think globally, act locally.” There is much we can do right now within our parish of St. Thomas of Villanova. Some of the key take-aways from the discussion are:

- 1) The need for education of the laity. Most lay people are unaware both of their rights and responsibilities conferred on them through Baptism. Additionally, for most people, religious education ends after Confirmation. There is a need to try to engage churchgoers more fully in their faith life beyond Sunday Mass.
- 2) The need for the laity and the ordained to recognize, confront, and unlearn clericalism. Attitudes among clergy must shift from “set apart from” or “above” lay people to an attitude of servant leadership. The laity, while remaining respectful of clerics, must abandon a deferential attitude toward them.
- 3) The need for a greater role of women within Church ministries and leadership. This issue was one of the most frequently discussed and agreed-upon points throughout the discussions. The Church would be so much richer if it allowed women’s voices to be heard, in preaching and in leadership roles.
- 4) The need to engage young people in the Church. This is a most serious consideration regarding the future of the Church. (All participants in the Bridge Dialogues were older than 50 years of age.)
- 5) The need for full transparency from the hierarchy regarding Church governance, particularly disclosure regarding the abuse crisis and regarding finances.
- 6) The need for healthier psycho-sexual development of seminarians.
- 7) Most importantly, the need to pray daily for our Church, realizing that it is only through the Holy Spirit that our Church will be renewed.

Parishioners at two Philadelphia-area churches organize on abuse crisis.

Pictured Left to Right: Mia Holman, Augustinian Fr. Joseph Genito, Cara Tripodi and Ann Carr

