

# Editorial: Restoring trust

Other than the extreme damage done to victims of clergy abuse and their families, perhaps the biggest fallout from the devastating and seemingly interminable clergy abuse crisis has been a severing of trust between lay Catholics and Church leadership. This is not a desirable state of affairs, but, especially after the events of the past nine months, it has become an inevitable one.

Recognizing and responding to these challenges, The Catholic University of America is in the midst of hosting a series called "Healing the Breach of Trust: Laity, Leadership, and the Crisis." Other smaller and similar events have sprung up at parishes and dioceses across the country.

While these are helpful for lay people, what about Church leadership? Are they getting the proper advice they need to help begin to restore lost trust? Considering one particular address at the recent Vatican summit, formally known as the "Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church," the answer, assuredly, is: Yes. The question remains, however: Did they listen?

In her strongly worded talk on communication Feb. 23, Valentina Alazraki, speaking as a journalist who has covered the Vatican for nearly 45 years, as well as a woman and a mother, got right to the heart of the matter, asking the bishops to decide whether or not they were going to be allies with the press in seeking truth about the abuse crisis, or if they were going to be enemies in that process. For those choosing to be allies in the war against abuse, Alazraki laid out a clear roadmap for next steps. When faced with scandal, she recommended that Church leadership should get out in front of the story by providing as much information as possible to the public. "Report things when you know them," she said. "Of course, it will not be pleasant, but it is the only way, if

you want us to believe you when you say, 'from now on we will no longer tolerate cover-ups.'"

She implored them to learn from past mistakes, and to avoid secrecy and corruption at all costs, despite fears or temptations. And she suggested three ways bishops could strive to be more authentically transparent: by listening to victims and putting them first; by opening themselves up to the advice of experts; and by investing in solid, professional communications efforts. "I have seen with my own eyes how bad information, or inadequate information, has caused tremendous damage, harmed the victims and their families, not allowed justice to be served, caused the faith of many people to waver," she said. "I assure you that investing in communications is a very profitable matter, and is not a short-term investment; it is a long-term investment."

Alazraki was spot-on in her analysis. The benefits of a long-term investment in transparency and honest communication far exceed the boundaries of economics. Rather, they are the foundation on which the restoration of trust between Church leadership and the faithful can be based. They are the seeds of the new life and hope that the Church desperately needs.

"Transparency," Alazraki told the bishops, "will help you to be coherent with the Gospel message and to put into practice the principle according to which in the Church no one is above the law: we are all accountable to God and to others."

The entire address can be found at [PBC2019.org](https://PBC2019.org), and we strongly recommend that it be read by all, especially by those in Church leadership. Alazraki's brave words offer a path forward. All that remains now is to wait and see if they will be heeded.

*OSV Editorial Board: Gretchen R. Crowe, Scott Richert, York Young*