

RECLAIMING

STOLEN

LIVES



root & branch



reform
is needed
in our Catholic church!



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Early in 2022 as part of our resolve to work for a safe, just, and inclusive Catholic Church we held our series of talks 'Stolen Lives' and developed our learning resource. We wanted to break the silence and face up to the hypocrisy, and cover-up of crimes of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse as well as other crimes of abuse. Using the stories given to us or publicly available we sought to understand how the true scale of abuse of power in the Catholic Church has lifelong impact on victims and survivors.

Root & Branch are committed to putting survivors at the centre of all that we do. We believe that we must live the change that we want to see and underpin our work with the values of co-production - mutual respect, equality of input, equality of resources, support for the vulnerable, listening to and learning from those who are different, transparency and authenticity of voice.

Reclaiming Stolen Lives is being developed in partnership with Scottish Laity Network and Survivors Voices.

We are preparing Reclaiming Stolen Lives as the synodal national syntheses are published. We are encouraged that the people have spoken out against abuse and cover up and feel angry and deeply ashamed of how the hierarchy have dealt with abuse.

'Ordinary' Catholics worldwide are speaking up about the damage done by clerical abuse. The same issues crop up over and over:

From Canada

'A loss of credibility among the faithful as well as among people outside the Church. This mistrust extends not only to the Church as institution but also to the witness of its ministers and pastoral workers.'

National Synthesis for Canada (2022), page 6

From the United States

'Feedback revealed the strong, lingering wound caused by the abuse of power and the physical, emotional, and spiritual abuse of the most innocent in our community' Page 5. 'Catholic people of color spoke of routine encounters with racism, both inside and outside the Church. Indigenous Catholics spoke of the generational trauma caused by racism and abuse in boarding schools.'

National Synthesis of the People of God in the United States of America for the Diocesan Phase of the 2021-2023 Synod. Page 9

From Germany

'There needs to be an unambiguous acceptance of responsibility; power needs to be taken under control, and an attempt made to make amends to the victims of sexual and spiritual abuse.'

Report of the German Bishops' Conference to the World Synod of Bishops 2023, page 13

From Ireland

'A facilitated listening process was intentionally held with ... survivors of abuse perpetrated by Church personnel. These individuals were honest and courageous in the way they shared how abuse, in all its forms, left an open wound in their lives, an open wound which remains at the heart of the Church.'

Synthesis of the Consultation, page 3

From New Zealand

‘Participants urged honesty, humility, and openness in dealing with survivors of abuse. They want anyone with concerns and complaints welcomed, so that “the light of truth and humility shines into the dark places of our Church.”’

New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference national synthesis, page 2.

From the Philippines

‘Another very painful reality that makes people leave the church are some priests who have committed sexual abuse and those who have sired children. They have wounded not only the reputation of the Church but also the credibility of their fellow-priests. Some male parishioners have gone to the extent of prohibiting their children or their wives from being actively involved in church ministries and activities presumably to protect them from abusive priests’.

Salubong (Welcoming Encounter) The Philippine Catholic Church Synodal Report, page 3

From Zimbabwe

‘The Holy Spirit invites us to create deliberate open and safe platforms for listening and speaking out. In cases of abuse people should be made aware of the processes of inquiry. Church governance issues should be marked by transparency and inclusivity.’

Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops’ Conference National Synthesis Document

Let’s build on the momentum that our discernment has created.... and take our co-responsibility seriously.



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The mission is entrusted to all the baptized (clerics and laity, men and women). We must start again not exclusively from the entrusted office but from the baptismal ministry of each and every one.

Diocese of Coutances and Avranches in the Collecte des synthèses synodales

In Stolen Lives 2 we will consider how lives can be reclaimed, the lives of victims and survivors and all affected by abuse in their families, friendship groups, parishes and beyond.

We have learned that there can be a huge distance between what we say we want and what we’re prepared to make happen, so **Reclaiming Stolen Lives** begins where we last paused.

You are very welcome to join us for our first talk in Stolen Lives 2.

Reclaiming Stolen Lives: Changing Hearts and Minds - Hans Zollner

We're delighted that Rev Dr Hans Zollner SJ, a theologian, psychologist and psychotherapist has accepted our invitation. He is Ordinary Professor and Director of the Institute of Anthropology, Interdisciplinary Studies on Human Dignity and Care (IADC) at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and has been a member of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors since its inception in 2014. He is regarded as one of the leading ecclesiastical experts in the field of safeguarding from sexual abuse, especially in the Catholic Church.

He will speak about:

- The effects of spiritual abuse
- The culture of secrecy, defence mechanisms and processes that silence victims/survivors and their allies and impede change.
- The impact of what Pope Francis calls 'the cult of appearance', the risks of believing that structures and systems are in place that leads to the false and damaging security of 'it's all alright now'.
- Taking personal responsibility for change. Empowering ourselves spiritually and emotionally to be part of the change, not part of the problem.

[Register \(Zoom\) here >>>](#)



Reclaiming Stolen Lives will continue over the winter of 2022 and into 2023.

OUR PARTNERS

Root & Branch

www.rootandbranchsynod.org/

Root & Branch is an international grassroots forum for a safe, just and inclusive Church. We believe that ALL should be welcome, ministry should be open to all, diversity should be celebrated and church law re-thought. Power and authority must be shared. Our thinking has the endorsement of pastorally sensitive and well-informed thinkers and theologians, including clergy and is summarized in our Bristol Text. It is offered in the spirit of Canon Law 212.3, which states that 'the Christian faithful have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters that obtain to the good of the Church and to make their opinion known.'

Scottish Laity Network (SLN)

www.scottishlaitynetwork.org.uk/

The Scottish Laity Network (SLN) seeks to enable Scottish laity to come together as disciples of Jesus and through prayer, dialogue and discernment to find 'new ways' of being Church in Scotland in the 21st Century. We are rooted above all in a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and the teachings of the Gospel. We are inspired by the principles of Vatican II seeking to make the gospel values a lived reality in the world today, and by the encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*, the vision of Pope Francis to listen and respond to the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth.

Survivors Voices

<https://survivorsvoices.org/>

Survivors Voices is an abuse survivor-led organisation that turns the pain of abuse into power to improve responses to trauma. We believe that accountability for the use of power is paramount and that the abuse of power is the heart of all abuses. We work with survivors of all types of abuse, harnessing our 'expertise by experience'. We believe that survivors are experts in their own healing and as such their stories and perspectives need inform policy and practice in response to abuse, trauma and violence. Our work includes peer support, education and research, publications and activism, such as LOUDFence.

LOUDfence

A means of empowering people of faith to put gospel values into practice by reaching out in compassion and humility to those injured by abuse. In doing this we also challenge the culture of churches which have retreated from those who have been traumatised.