

National Catholic Restorative Justice Initiative

*Restorative justice is rooted in the Gospel and animated by the holistic and unifying power of the Eucharist.
-From National Catholic Restorative Justice Initiative Mission Statement*

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Brief Overview:

In September 2021 and 2022, approximately 25 participants gathered for two national consultations at the University of Notre Dame and the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota, respectively. They included victim-survivors, advocates, restorative justice practitioners, psychologists, scholars, deacons, priests, and bishops. Both consultations explored whether restorative justice could help bring greater healing to victim-survivors of clergy abuse and the broader Church. They were sponsored by a grant from the President's Office at the University of Notre Dame and support from the University of St. Thomas Law School.

Centered on restoring right relationship among all the people wounded by an injustice, restorative justice has become a worldwide movement because of its effectiveness. The

consultations asked whether lessons for the Church could be found in the restorative justice efforts of nation-states such as South Africa, Rwanda, Canada, and Indigenous peoples. Two strong points of consensus emerged: significant wounds remain and the teachings of Jesus call all Catholics to promote holistic justice and healing.

Our planning committee feels the conclusions from the national consultations, alongside the Synod on Synodality summary reports are a call to action.

- **From the USCCB National Synod Synthesis Report:** *“Chief among the enduring wounds that afflict the People of God in the United States is the still unfolding effects of the sexual abuse crisis.”*

Our four proposals:

- Develop a National Center with experts and practitioners to equip the broader Church in restorative justice, particularly healing circles, to accompany those who have been directly and peripherally harmed by abuse.
- Establish a National Healing Garden as a permanent site of healing, prayer, and accompaniment for victim-survivors of clergy sex abuse and for the broader Church.
- Institute an Annual Day of Prayer and Penance for Healing and Reconciliation for victim-survivors of clergy abuse and for broader healing in the Church.
- Initiate trauma-informed training for clergy, seminarians, lay ministers, lay leaders, and parish communities to communicate the realities and effects of trauma in order to compassionately accompany victim-survivors.

We believe these proposals reflect a synodal Church, which is called to listen to, accompany, and heal the broken-hearted, in addition to being a witness to the broader culture, which suffers from similar wounds.

Background information:

[National Working Group on Catholic Sexual Abuse Crisis Makes Bold Restorative Justice Proposals to U.S. Bishops](#), Dan Philpott

[National Healing Garden Dedication](#) YouTube

[The Courage to Forgive After #MeToo](#), Emily Ransom

[My Journey of Healing from Clergy Abuse](#), Michael Hoffman

[Pursuing restorative justice amid the Church’s sex abuse crisis](#), Fr. Daniel Griffith

[Catholics need a restorative justice approach to the church’s sexual abuse crisis](#), Dan Philpott

[US bishops to elect new leaders, mark abuse reform milestone](#) | AP News

[Can Forgiveness Help Heal a Hurting Church?](#) Rev. Thomas Berg, PhD.