

# Listening sessions

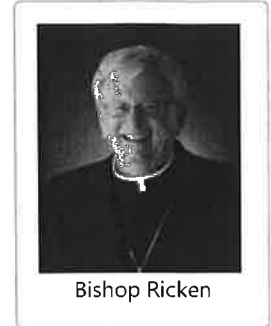
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[thecompassnews.org/2018/10/listening-sessions/](https://www.compassnews.org/2018/10/listening-sessions/)

October 10, 2018

Brothers and Sisters,

Several weeks ago, as part of my action steps to accountability in response to the sexual abuse crisis in the church, I announced plans to host a series of listening sessions at parishes throughout the diocese. These listening sessions have taken place over the past couple of weeks and today I want to share with you some of my experience at these sessions.



Bishop Ricken

First of all, I want to thank everyone who attended one of the seven listening sessions, as well as those who have shared their thoughts and feelings over the phone and in writing. In a special way, I want to acknowledge the victims-survivors who attended the listening sessions. You have suffered greatly and I thank you for your courage in sharing your experience with me and others who attended.

I also want to thank the parishes that hosted our listening sessions. We did not give them much time to plan and prepare, but out of care and concern for the people of this diocese, they responded with a willingness to help and provided a space for people to come forward and share how they have been impacted by this tragic situation.

I will be perfectly honest. These listening sessions have not been easy for me. Hearing people express anger, sadness, frustration, distrust and even despair because of the evil done by church leaders was heartbreaking, and I have felt the weight of this pain physically, spiritually and emotionally. But I needed to hear what you are feeling. Understanding the ways you are being affected by this crisis helps me to serve you better and I thank you for your willingness to challenge me and the church as a whole to do better.

One of the things that was most apparent from these listening sessions was how personal this topic is for people. This is especially true for victims-survivors and their loved ones who live with this reality every single day. I have sat with some of you before, but being at the listening sessions and hearing how the current crisis is affecting you served as a useful reminder that every person's path to healing is unique and often a winding road. We will continue to provide support to you and pray for your healing.

At the same time, I heard many personal accounts from folks who have not experienced abuse personally, but have still been deeply affected by this scandal. Parents, young and old, who don't know how to explain what is happening to their children; people who are saddened by the effect this is having on the many good priests in the world; lifelong Catholics who are wondering whether they can continue to support the church financially or even attend Mass anymore. I wish I had words to relieve their concerns, but the personal nature of this issue means that each of us will have to wrestle with questions like these as part of the healing process.

This issue is personal to me as well. I want you to know that I am devastated by the pain that this has caused to so many of you. I am angry at the people responsible for this evil and I am frustrated with our failure to adequately address this issue. I can assure you that since I have been your bishop, protecting all people has been a priority for me, and I am confident that the steps we have taken to address this problem are working in our diocese.

But being with you through this process has given me a renewed commitment on this issue. I will continue to listen to you and will keep you informed of how we are moving forward in our action steps to accountability ([thecompassnews.org/accountability](http://thecompassnews.org/accountability)). My hope is that by maintaining open communication and following through on these steps, I can begin to regain your trust.

Part of that sharing will be responding to the many important questions that have been raised. During the listening sessions, I was only able to address some of these questions, but I promised you that I would review your questions and respond. In the next couple of issues of *The Compass*, I will be doing just that.

This is a difficult time right now for many of you and for the church as a whole, but in the midst of all this darkness, I see glimmers of light. I especially see light in the commitment and desire from so many of you to help our church grow in holiness, even if that means challenging me and others to do a better job. I know that you wouldn't do this if you didn't love the church. May that love we share for the church help all of us find ways to grow in holiness.

Finally, I ask for your continued prayers and patience as we journey through this together. The path towards healing will be long and it won't be easy, but with Christ as our guide, we will never walk in darkness. May the light of Christ bring healing and hope to all people!

*View Bishop Ricken's Responses to Listening Session Questions, published in subsequent editions of The Compass.*

[OCT. 19, 2018: Responding to questions, part one](#)

[OCT. 26, 2018: Responding to questions, part two](#)