

January 2019

Fr. Hans Zollner, SJ  
President, Center for Child Protection, Pontifical Gregorian University  
Organizing Committee, Vatican Conference on Child Protection  
The Vatican

Dear Fr. Zollner:

Thank you again for the opportunity to offer this submission to assist preparations for the Vatican's February meeting on preventing clergy sexual abuse. I direct the Catholic Women's Forum, an international network of Catholic women seeking to amplify the voice of women in support of Catholic teachings, and offer this submission to give voice to thousands of U.S. Catholic women seeking to share their concerns over the clergy sexual abuse crisis with the Church hierarchy.

This presentation reports the results of a recent survey, conducted by the Catholic Women's Forum, of 5,038 U.S. Catholic women regarding the clergy sexual abuse crisis. The survey report, "Giving Voice to Catholic Women: A Survey of U.S. Catholic Women on the Clergy Sexual Abuse Crisis," offers a window into the concerns of Catholic women "in the pews"—women whose overall religious commitment is significantly higher than average and who are at the heart of parish life, giving generously of time and resources.

While this report does not claim to speak for all women, it offers the hierarchy a realistic, though painful, view of the clergy sexual abuse crisis, as seen through the eyes of Catholic women. The voices represented here are but a small sampling of the thousands of personal messages we received while surveying over 5,000 women.

We trust that, guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church will emerge from this time purified and renewed in mission and love. In this spirit, we urge the hierarchy to lead with faith, compassion, and integrity.

Thank you for considering this submission—for listening to the voices of Catholic women.

Mary Rice Hasson, JD  
Director, Catholic Women's Forum  
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Washington, D.C., USA

*Abridged copy of original letter*

# **Giving Voice to Catholic Women**

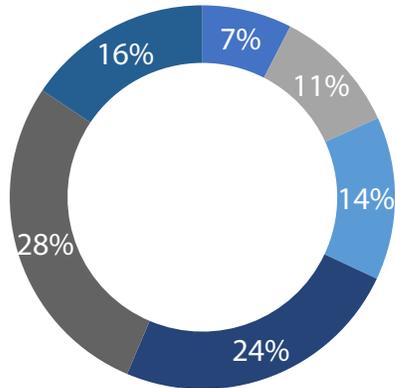
A Survey of U.S. Catholic Women on the Clergy Sexual Abuse Crisis

**January 2019**

# Who We Interviewed: Breakdown of Survey Respondents

- **5,038 U.S. Catholic women**, 18 and over, with some awareness of the clergy sexual abuse crisis.
- Survey reflects a broad sample of Catholic women, though not statistically representative of all U.S. women who identify as Catholic.
- Survey respondents notable for **higher than average religious commitment**.

## Age

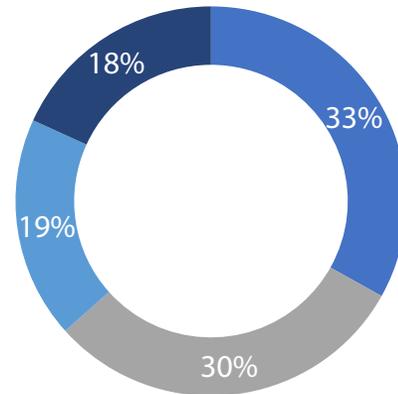


■ 18-29 ■ 30-39 ■ 40-49 ■ 50-59 ■ 60-69 ■ 70+

Median age slightly older than median age (49) of all U.S. Catholics (Pew 2015)

Note: Due to rounding, totals may not equal 100%  
**See Appendix for additional demographic data**

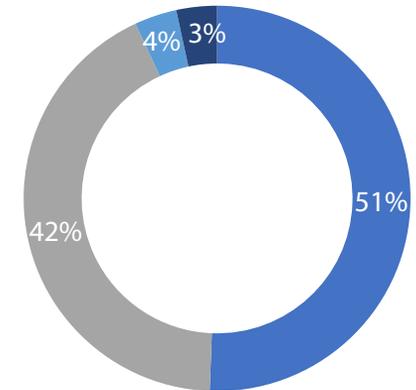
## Geography



■ South 33% ■ Midwest 30%  
 ■ Northeast 19% ■ West 18%

Compare: national distribution of Catholics (CARA, 2016)  
 30% South/Southwest  
 20% Midwest  
 26% Northeast  
 25% West

## Mass attendance



■ More than weekly ■ Weekly  
 ■ A few times a month ■ Once a month or less

**Religiosity: 94% of women surveyed attend Mass at least weekly.** 92% of women under 40 attend Mass at least weekly.

Compare: National average 23% U.S. Catholics attend Mass weekly (CARA 2017). About 21% of Hispanic Catholics attend Mass weekly (CARA 2013).

# Key Findings

*from a broad sample of U.S. women notable for strong religious commitment*

## 1. Impact on the Faithful

- The crisis has had a widespread impact on women's lives. Most women surveyed say their faith in God is the same or stronger because of the crisis, but they express significant distrust of the hierarchy. The crisis negatively affects evangelization and women's financial support for the Church.

## 2. The Problem

- Women identify clergy sexual activity ("double lives"), poor seminary screening and formation, and issues of hierarchical power and governance as key factors underlying the crisis.

## 3. The Solution

- In a word, integrity. Women express overwhelming support for a code of conduct for bishops, for an end to clergy "double lives," and for institutional reforms to increase transparency and accountability.

**NOTE: For purposes of this survey, "clergy sexual abuse" should be interpreted broadly,** referring not only to sexual abuse of minors by clergy (priests, bishops, deacons, and religious), but also to clergy sexual abuse of seminarians and vulnerable adults, abuse of power involving sexual misconduct, and cover-ups of abuse. The survey reflects the views of a broad sample of women characterized by very strong religious commitment (94% attend Mass weekly or more often).

# Key Findings: Impact

The impact of the clergy sexual abuse crisis on women's faith, evangelism, and trust in the hierarchy

# Women's Voices: Impact on Faith and Trust

*quotes from survey respondents*

"Our **trust in the clergy is shattered** as the church hierarchy has **lost all credibility.**"

"This has been a **devastating time for me as a victim/survivor**: emotionally, physically, and spiritually...it's like I am sucker punched everyday and can't catch my breath."

"It is so easy to **feel orphaned** at this moment."

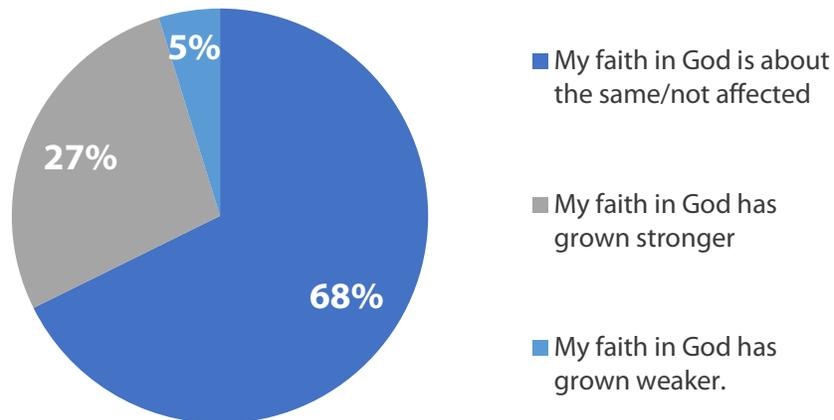
"My faith in God remains strong. **My faith in the Catholic religion** has been **obliterated.**"

"I feel voiceless. Our bishop made public comments creating a dichotomy between the 'supportive' and the 'angry.' **I am the voiceless both, who loves & supports the Church, but I am angry.**"

# Faith in God Remains Strong

In spite of the clergy sexual abuse crisis, **95% of Catholic women surveyed say their faith in God is either stronger (27%) or unchanged (68%)**. Three out of four women have responded to the crisis by praying for the victims, for all clergy, and for the Church. Far fewer (45%) include the perpetrators of clergy abuse in their prayers.

## Faith in God stronger or same



**45%** of women overall and 55% of women under 40 say their **respect** for some **priests and bishops has grown** because of their handling of the crisis.

Still, even among women who tend to be weekly Mass-goers, some describe their commitment to the Church as newly tenuous:

**13% say they have struggled in the past 12 months over whether to leave the Church.**

Women under 40 and women who identify politically as moderate/progressive are even more likely to question whether to stay or go.

# Personal Impact on Women

**3%** of women surveyed report being a **victim of clergy sexual abuse** as a child or an adult.

**7%** of women surveyed **have a family member who is a victim** of clergy sexual abuse.

However, the experience of **personal betrayal** is widespread. **58% of women** say they have felt betrayed by the Church because of the abuse crisis.

**1 in 3 women**

personally know a clergy member  
accused of sexual abuse

**1 in 5 women**

personally know a non-family victim of  
clergy sexual abuse

# Significant Distrust of Hierarchy

How much do you trust your priest, your bishop, and Vatican officials to do the right thing in handling issues related to the clergy sexual abuse crisis?

	"Not much" or "No" trust	"Complete" or "a great deal" of trust
Vatican	87%	2%
Bishop	42%	29%
Priest	16%	58%

**64%** of women surveyed say their trust in church hierarchy overall has been **"seriously damaged."**

**70%** of women surveyed are **not sure whom they can trust** among the hierarchy.

# Evangelization Declines

The abuse crisis has had a ripple effect in the lives of U.S. Catholic women. **Women are heartbroken** as family members leave the Church because of the crisis and women feel **less able, or less willing, to evangelize** others.

- 1/3 of women say that over the past year “**someone I care about has left the Church** or decided not to become Catholic” because of the crisis.
- 1/4 of women say the abuse crisis has made them **less likely to send their children to Catholic schools** or to encourage others to send their children to Catholic schools.

**53%** of women under 40 say it is harder now to invite friends or family who have left the Church to come back.

**42%** of women under 40 find it hard to encourage fellow Catholics to trust the Church.

# Women's Voices: Impact on Evangelization

*quotes from survey respondents*

**"I am heartbroken** about these scandals. With so many family members that have already **left the church**, it was already difficult. Now with this, I fear they will never come back."

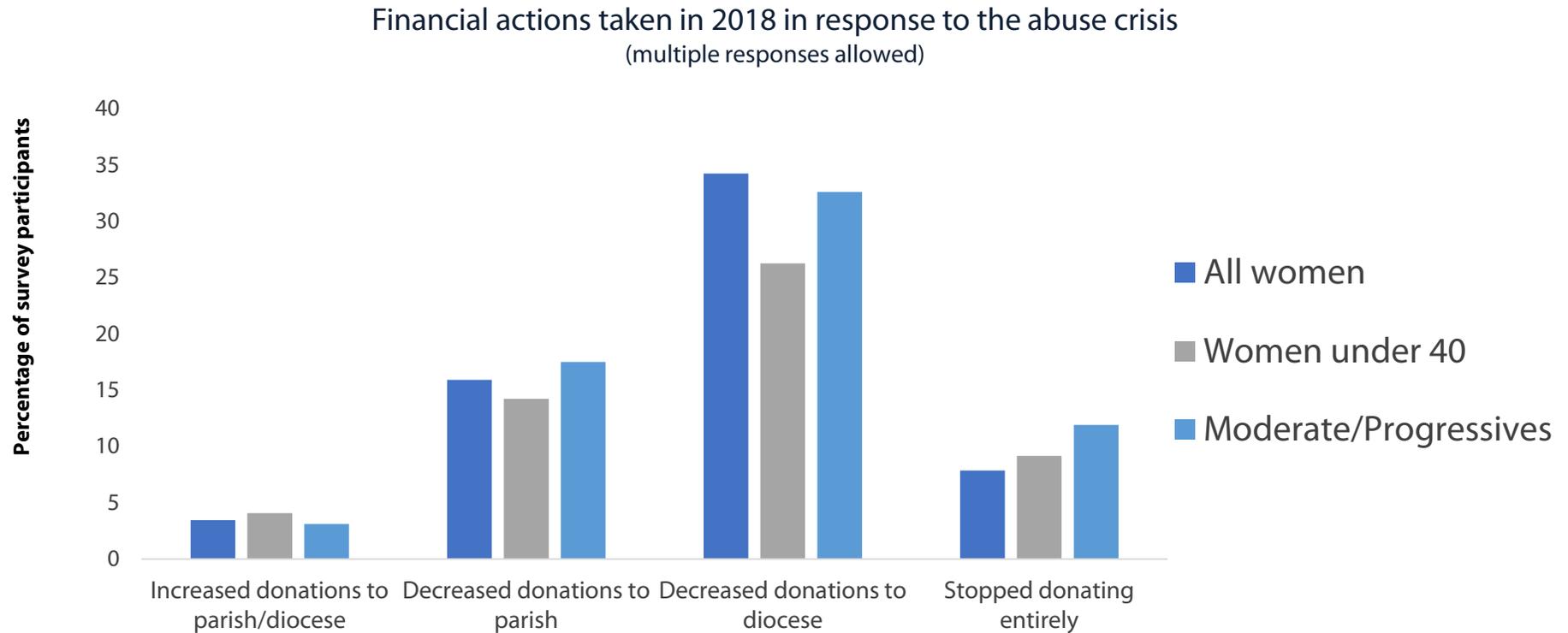
"I used to strongly encourage **vocations to the priesthood** in my home (four of my children are boys). I have **stopped talking about it** completely."

"I am a mother of four children and I **do not** let them **participate as altar servers** or in any camps that their religious formation offers."

**"I have left the church** and am taking my two granddaughters **out of Catholic school**. I keep them far away from clergy."

"My child, who was raised Catholic, is **now an agnostic**. The actions of church leaders have **cut me off at the knees** in my attempt to bring him back to the Church."

# Declining financial support for parish and diocese



# Key Findings: The Problem

Women identify factors the Church must address: clergy sexual activity, clergy formation, and hierarchical power

# Women's Voices: The Problem

*quotes from survey respondents*

**"We face a crisis of holiness.** We have lost all sense of sin. We do not now need protocols and guidelines so much as we need a complete renewal of our faith."

"The Church is not addressing the **problem of homosexuality in the clergy**, which is the main cause of the sex abuse scandal."

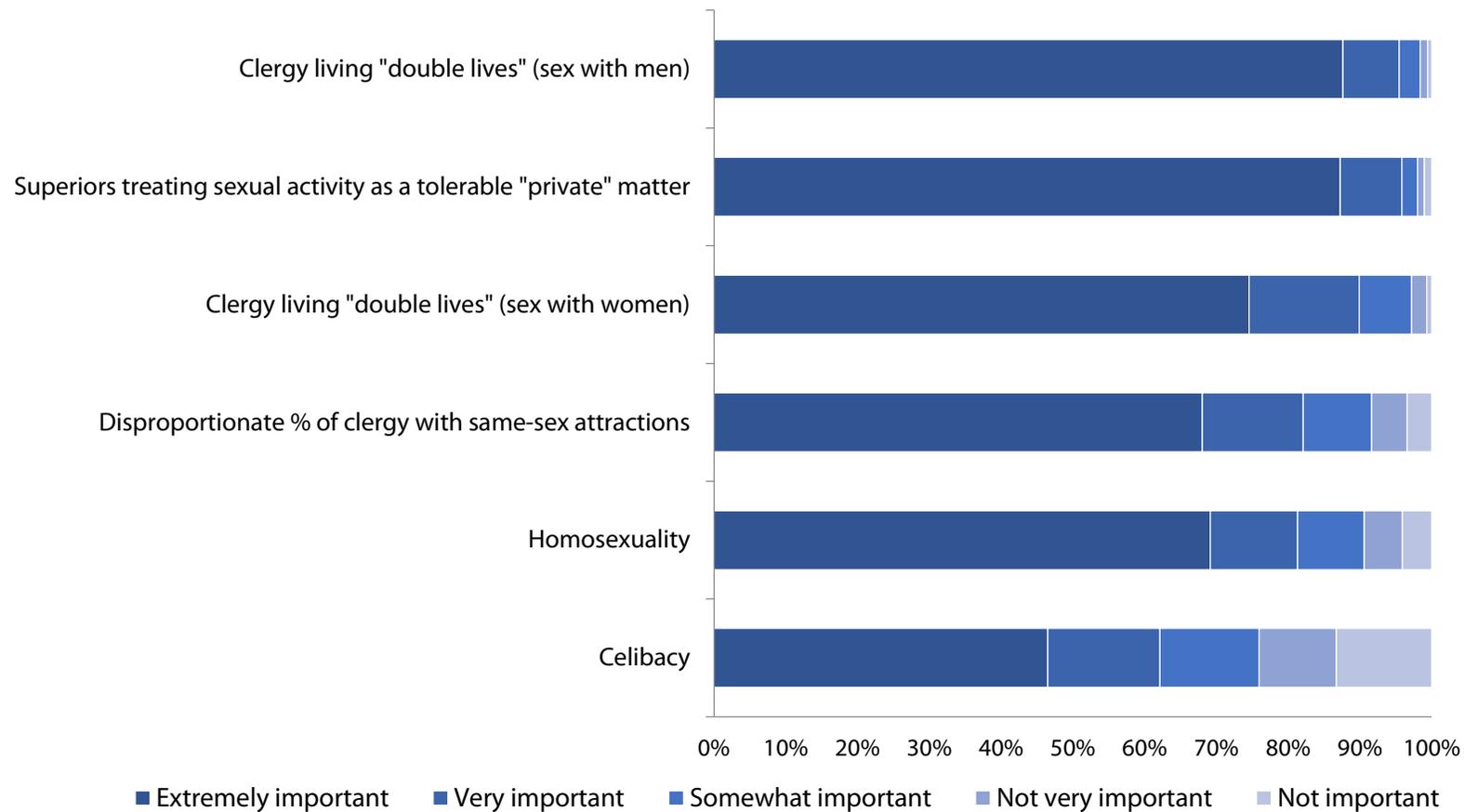
"I think this is truly **a crisis of fatherhood.** Too many priests and bishops do not know how to be good, strong, confident, faithful, pure, and selfless fathers."

"As a survivor of clergy sexual abuse...I have come to believe that **clericalism is the root cause** of this...When men in power purposely hide predators to save the Church from scandal, it perpetuates the issue."

"I am disgusted at the lack of **leadership, care, and transparency** for our young seminarians in the United States when it comes to being victims of abuse and sexual advances by other male seminarians."

# The Problem: "Double Lives" and Lack of Sexual Integrity

How important is it for the the Church to address each factor in order to end clergy sexual abuse and cover-ups?



**96%** of women say it is "extremely" or "very important" to address clergy (including bishops) living double lives involving sexual activity with men

**62%** of women say it is "extremely" or "very important" to address celibacy in the context of the clergy sexual abuse crisis

# Women's Voices: Sexual Integrity

*quotes from survey respondents*

"Clergy who cannot teach, follow, and **live by the teachings of the Catholic faith** should resign or be fired."

"The Church, our priests, and our bishops should all be held to a standard far higher than what is 'legal.' What is **moral**? Having sex with seminarians and abusing power is not somehow 'okay' just because there aren't laws against it."

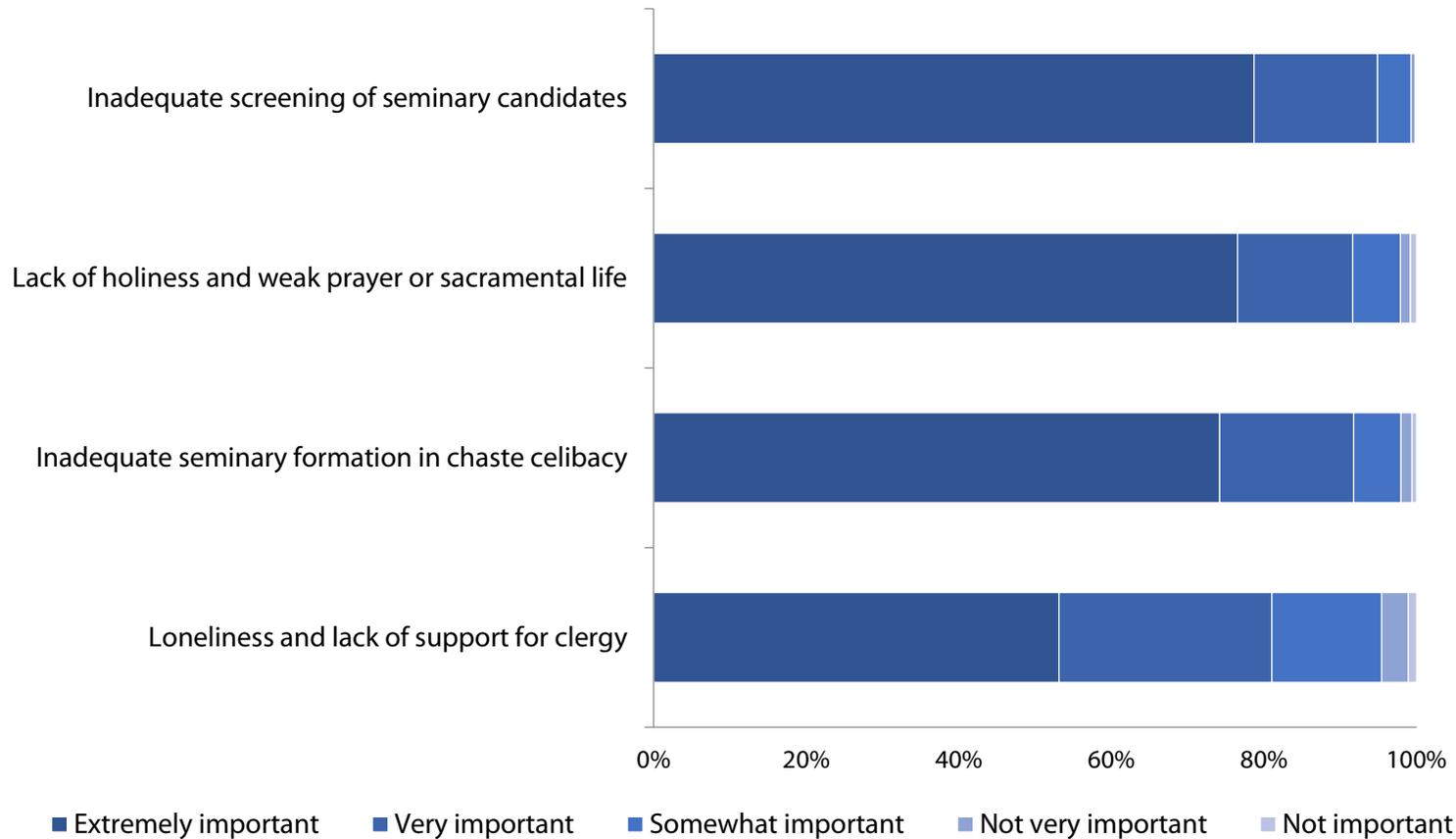
"Those of us paying close attention to the **double lives of homosexual priests** have nowhere to turn. Where is the hotline to turn my pastor in because he is not faithful to his priestly vows?"

"Sex of any sort in the clergy is against the vow of chastity. Clergy are married to the church and having sex is committing adultery. **It is always wrong.**"

"I do not think that priests being homosexual is a problem so long as they **remain celibate** like heterosexual priests should."

# The Problem: Poor seminary screening, formation and support

How important is it for the the Church to address each factor in order to end clergy sexual abuse and cover-ups?

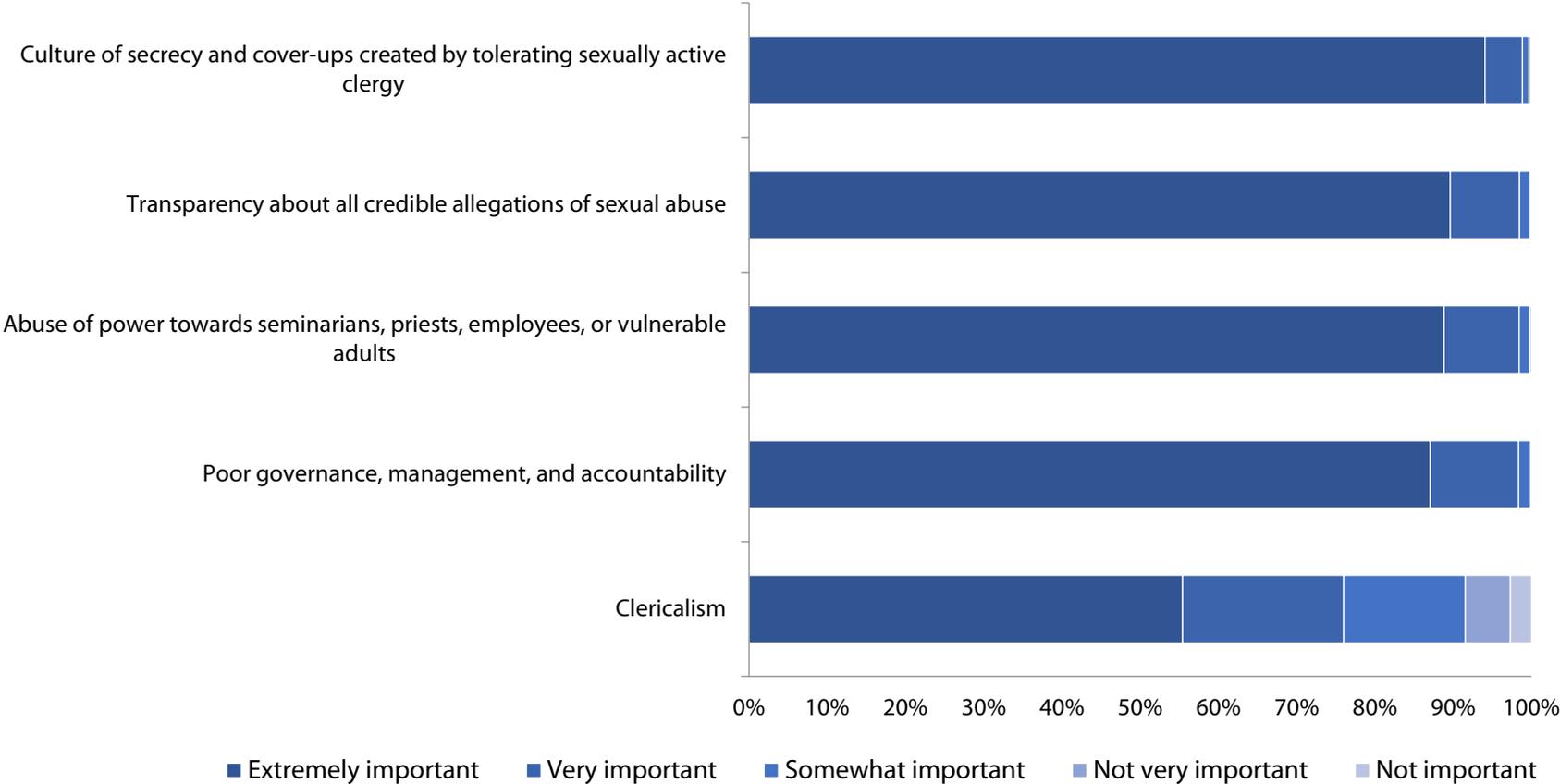


**95%** of women say it is **“extremely” or “very important”** to address inadequate screening of seminary candidates for the priesthood

**81%** of women say it is **“extremely” or “very important,”** in the context of the sexual abuse crisis, to address clergy loneliness, geographical isolation, and lack of support

# The Problem: Culture of secrecy and cover-ups, abuse of power

How important is it for the the Church to address each factor in order to end clergy sexual abuse and cover-ups?



**98%** of women say it is “extremely” or “very important” to address the culture of secrecy and cover-ups created by hierarchy’s toleration of sexually active clergy

**75%** of women say it is “extremely” or “very important” to address clericalism and the attitude of clerical superiority

# Women's Voices: Abuse of Power

*quotes from survey respondents*

"My trust has been damaged, not in matters of faith and moral teaching...but in the way the priests think **they can make different rules for themselves**. They do not practice what Jesus preaches. They are fakes."

"This is not a sexual situation but an **abuse of power** in the worst possible scenario."

"**The root of the crisis** is more about the exertion of power over those who do not have power, not whether any individual is gay or not."

"I feel like Rome has **turned a blind eye**."

"What has been most discouraging about this crisis is not the revelation that many priests are sinners, but that many bishops do not believe **they will have to answer to God**."

# Key Findings: Solutions

Women identify “essential” solutions to the clergy sexual abuse crisis

# Women's Voices: Solutions

*quotes from survey respondents*

"For me, the coverup of abuse by McCarrick was as upsetting as what he actually did. I believe it is essential to do a postmortem on **who knew, who covered it up**, and how a similar situation can be avoided."

"Priests need to remember **they are servants.**"

"**Truth** is easier to deal with than lies and half-truths. **Bring everything to the light.**"

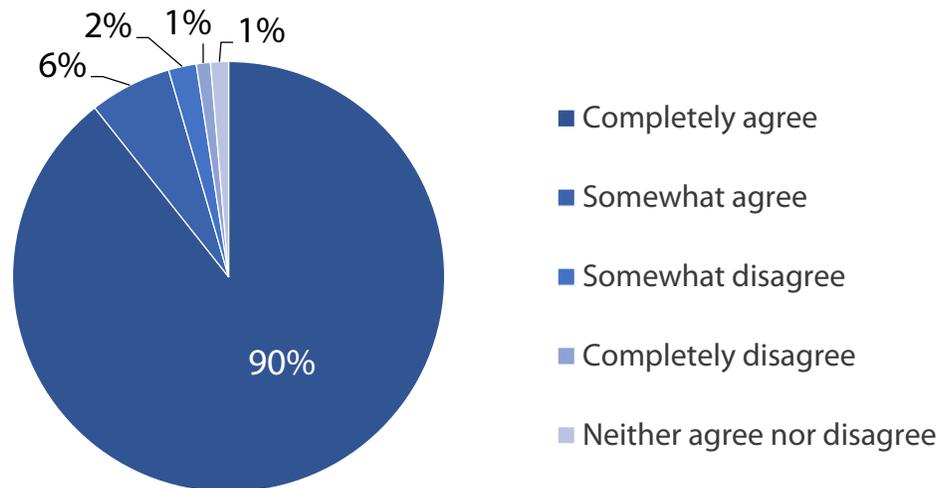
"I think it is essential to **let lay people have more say**, otherwise I do not believe that **the culture of secrecy** will ever go away."

"I hope this will lead the church into a more **substantial reflection on sexuality and ecclesiology**. It seems that behind the discussion of 'clericalism' is confusion about the proper roles of bishops, clergy, and the laity in the church."

# Women agree: Clergy living double lives should leave ministry

“Homosexual priests, religious men and women should be urged to live celibacy wholly and, especially, to be perfectly responsible, trying to never create scandal in their communities or for the holy people of God by living a double life. **It would be better if they left the ministry or consecrated life rather than live a double life.**” – Pope Francis (2018)

How much do you agree with Pope Francis about clergy living double lives?

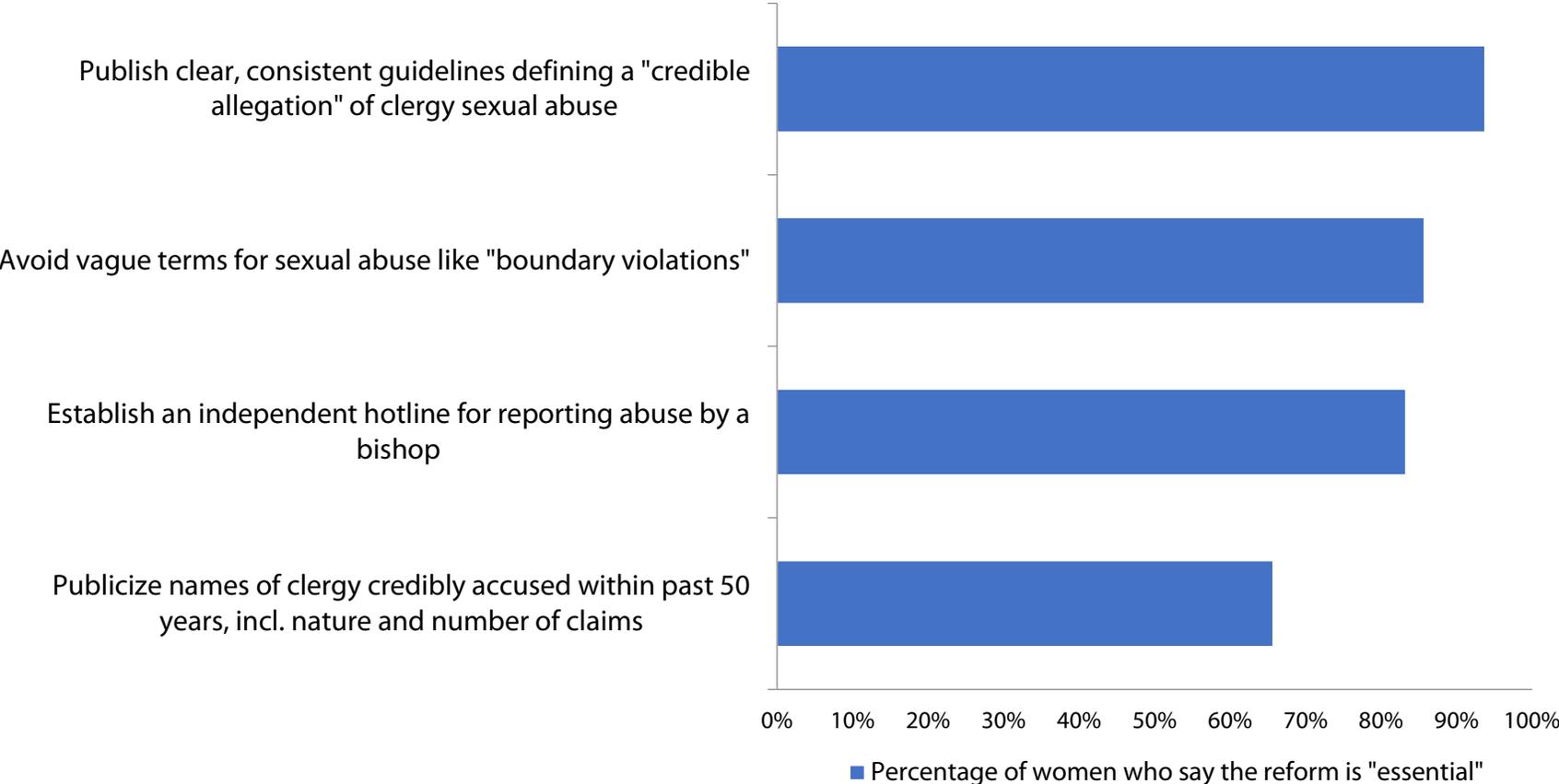


**96%** of women say they “completely” or “somewhat” agree with Pope Francis that clergy living double lives should leave ministry. 86% of women under 40 and 85% of moderate/progressive women agree.

**78%** of women say they are concerned that **bishops tolerate double lives** and cover up consensual homosexual relations.

# Solutions: Diocesan policies and procedures

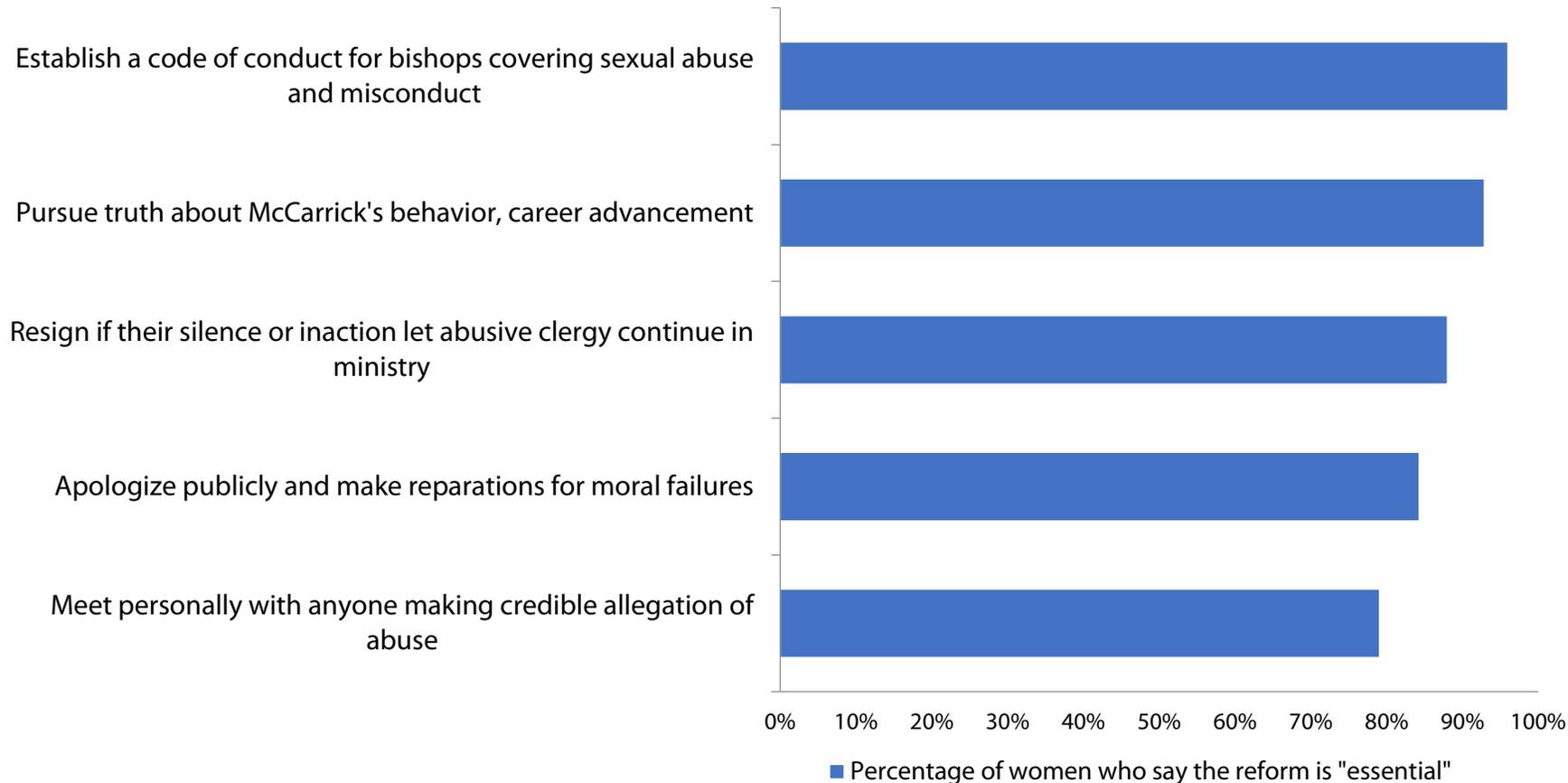
How “essential” is each proposed reform to ensuring justice for victims and restoring Church credibility?



**94%** of women say it is “essential” to publish **clear, consistent guidelines defining a “credible allegation”** of sexual abuse by clergy

# Solutions: U.S bishops' policies and procedures

How "essential" is each proposed reform to addressing clergy sexual abuse and restoring Church credibility?

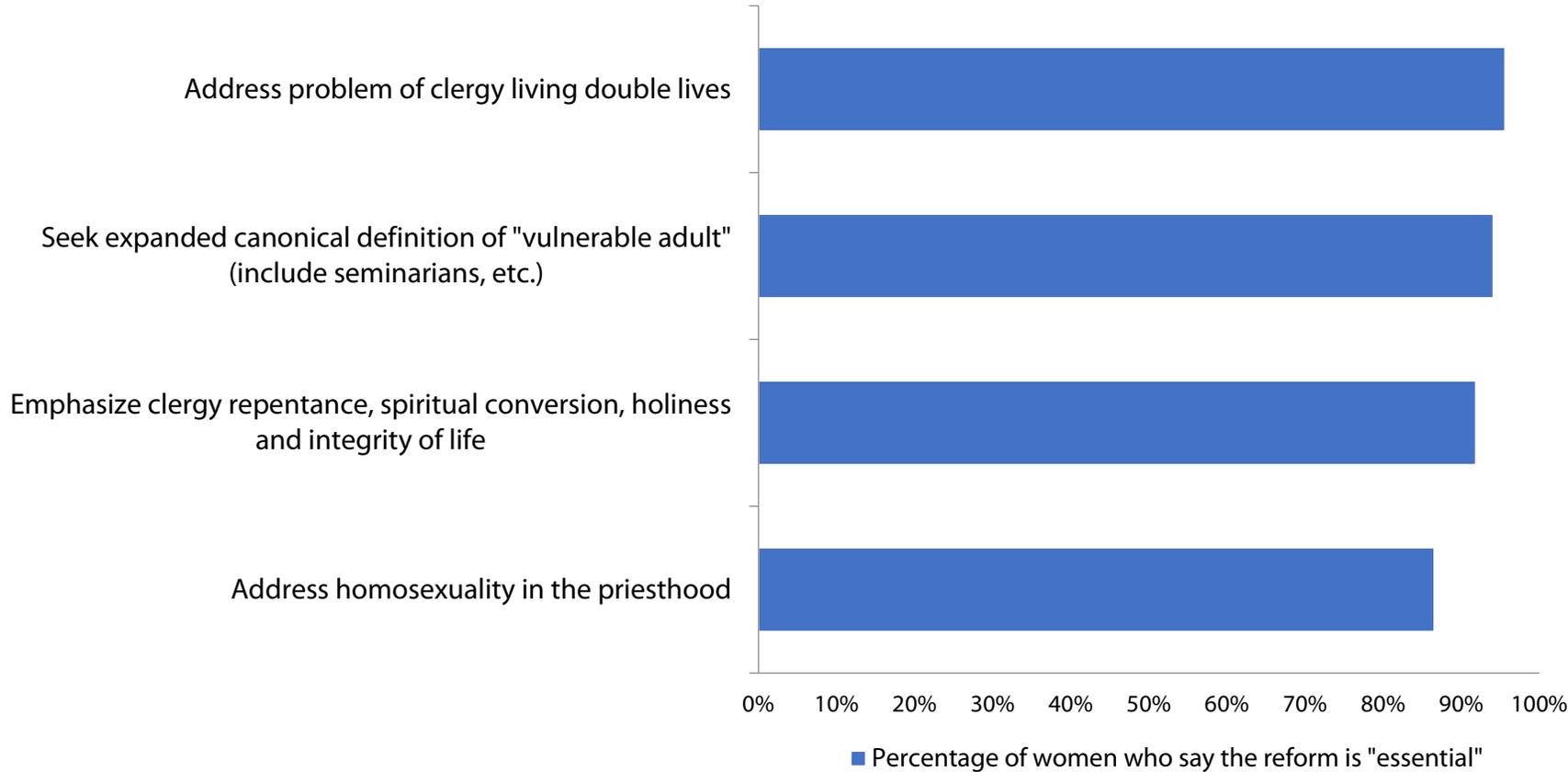


**96%** of women say it is "essential" to establish a **code of conduct for bishops** that addresses sexual abuse and misconduct with minors and adults

**92%** of women say it is "essential" to pursue the **truth about ex-Cardinal McCarrick's behavior** and career advancement.

# Solutions: February Vatican meeting

How “essential” is each proposed Vatican action to ensuring meaningful reform?

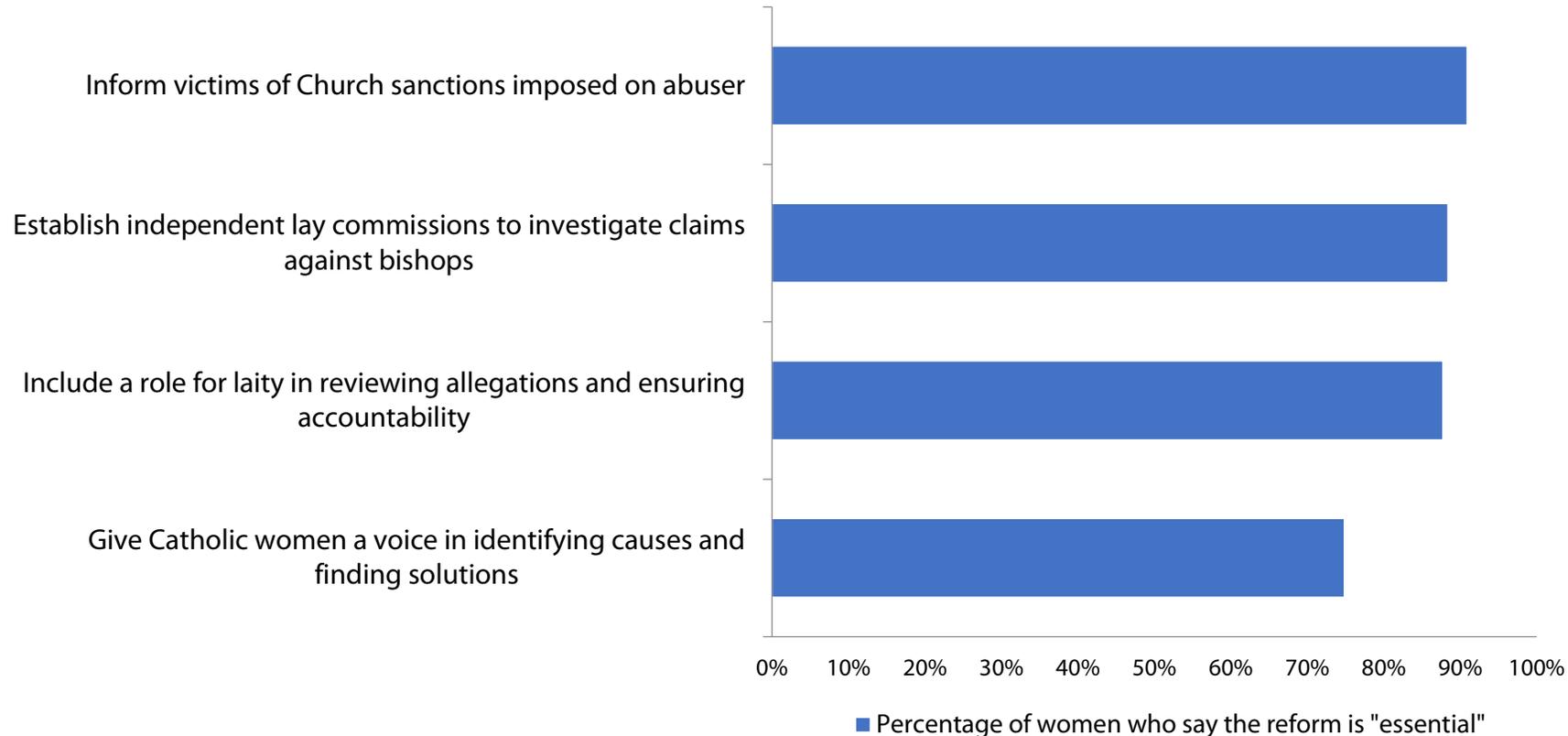


**96%** of women say it is “essential” for the February Vatican meeting to address the problem of clergy living double lives

**94%** of women say it is “essential” for the February Vatican meeting to expand the definition of “vulnerable adult” to include seminarians, adult employees, etc.

# Solutions: Focus on victims and lay involvement

How “essential” is each proposed reform to ensuring justice for victims and restoring Church credibility?

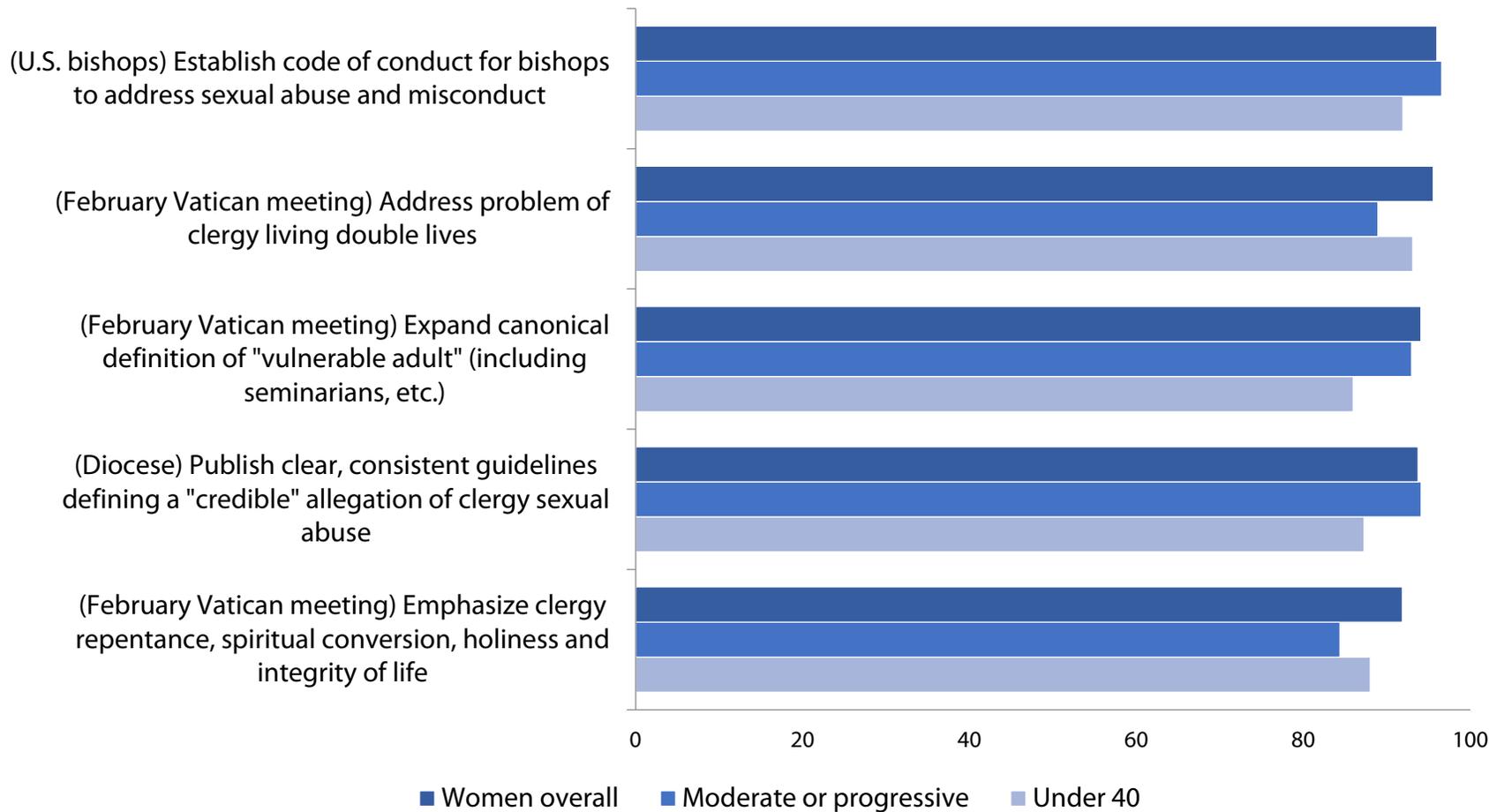


**91%** of women say it is “essential” for victims to be informed of the Church sanctions imposed on an abuser when he is not prosecuted

**88%** of women say it is “essential” to establish independent lay commissions to restore credibility

# Top 5 Solutions favored by women surveyed

Women prioritize these proposed reforms as most “essential”



**Highest priority:** for bishops to establish a code of conduct for bishops. Supported by:

- 96% of conservative women
- 97% of moderate/progressive women

**Progressives / moderates, women under 40, and conservatives generally agree on the most important solutions.**

# Lay Involvement

**69%** of women overall say they are **frustrated** that **laity cannot propose reforms** to address the sexual abuse crisis.

69% of women overall are frustrated that laity cannot propose reforms.

- 74% of moderate or progressive leaning women
- 72% of women under 40

84% of women are frustrated at the **lack of transparency** that prevents laity from being sure that all abusers have been removed from ministry.

- 86% of moderate or progressive leaning women
- 88% of women under 40

**84%** of women overall say they are frustrated at the **lack of transparency** that prevents laity from being sure all abusers have been removed from ministry.

“It is essential to let lay people have more say, otherwise I do not believe that **the culture of secrecy** will ever go away.”

“**Restoring trust** in the hierarchy [means] **being honest** with the faithful, rather than lying or covering up.”

*quotes from survey respondents*

# Women's Voices: Participation

*quotes from survey respondents*

"Think of **the mothers of survivors** who spoke out about their son's/daughter's abuse and were ignored by Church leadership...our voices must be heard."

"Mothers must be a part of the solutions created to **protect our children** from future abuse...and to promote vocations."

"If Jesus listened to the women and held them with respect and high regard as is **depicted in the Gospels**, it is time now to allow us a place at the table."

"**Be open** to the work God is trying to do through women and laypeople **eager to serve** the Church in active, meaningful roles!"

**78%** of women say the **Church hierarchy** either "**does not understand**" or "understands very little" about women's concerns over the abuse crisis.

# Women's Voices: Closing Thoughts

*quotes from survey respondents*

**"Enough** with the mealy-mouthed official statements. Enough with the vague platitudes. Enough with the secrecy, the lies, the cover-ups. The evils that have been committed under your watch are now out there for the whole world to see. Now is the time to correct them. **Be bold. Be men!**"

"Better that our church actually **practice what it preaches** and have one priest who is truly faithful than 1000 criminals. Please do the right thing."

"Jesus came as a carpenter. His hands were worn, chapped and had permanent stains from working with wood. I'm not sure at what point we decided that as priests "moved up" they needed special hats, rings and servants upon the altar. **Our focus needs to be on Him and only Him.**"

"I hope we find ways of supporting our priests and religious to live their lives in **holy and healthy** ways...And I hope we can find ways to **offer support, healing, and justice for victims.**"

"The dear **victims of abuse** suffer more than anyone, and they **are in my prayers.**"

# CONTACT

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# Appendix: Demographics and Methodology

Further notes regarding survey and sample characteristics.  
Additional quotes from survey respondents.

# Methodology

**Sample:** 5,038 U.S. Catholic women with some awareness of clergy sexual abuse crisis.

**Note:** Survey respondents included an additional 334 women from over a dozen countries. Their responses are not included here but will be reported separately at a later date.

**Geographically diverse**, including all 50 states. Higher representation of Catholics from South/Southwest (33%) and Midwest (30%) than West (18%) and Northeast (19%).

**Median age approximately 55**, higher than median age of all US Catholics (49).

## **Eligibility:**

- Female
- Over 18 years old
- Baptized Catholic or converted to Catholicism

SurveyMonkey link emailed to women who fit survey criteria, using lists generated from large database of Catholic women.

**55-question survey conducted online** January 4-15, 2019 using the survey platform SurveyMonkey on the Catholic Women's Forum website.

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**NOTE: For purposes of this survey, “clergy sexual abuse” should be interpreted broadly**, referring not only to sexual abuse of minors by clergy (priests, bishops, deacons, and religious), but also to clergy sexual abuse of seminarians and vulnerable adults, abuse of power involving sexual misconduct, and cover-ups of abuse.

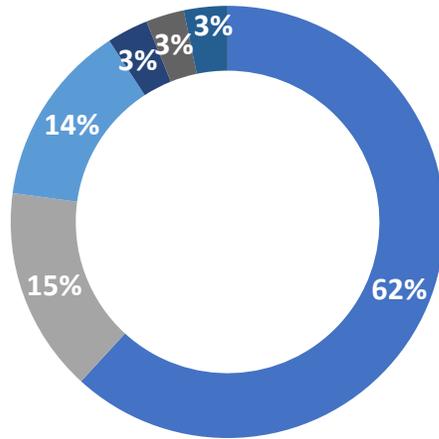
# Notes on sample characteristics: religiosity, political lean, and ethnicity

## This sample differs from a random sampling of Catholic-identified women in several important ways:

- **Higher than average religious commitment:** This survey predominately reflects the views of Catholic women whose overall level of *religious commitment is significantly higher than average*, as measured by weekly Mass attendance. The results should not be interpreted as reflecting the views of all women who self-identify as Catholic regardless of Mass attendance.
  - **94% of this sample attends Mass at least weekly.** In contrast, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA, 2017), estimates that only 23% of self-identified Catholics attend Mass every week.
  - This data, then, offers a vital window into the **concerns of Catholic women “in the pews” who practice their faith consistently.** Women who attend Mass weekly **are statistically more likely to be regular—and generous—financial contributors** to the Church’s needs. (CARA, 2013).
- **High percentage (77%) of conservative or conservative-leaning women.** The emailed survey invitation yielded responses from a high percentage of conservative or conservative-leaning women. However, the large number of respondents overall permits **a robust comparison** between the overall sample and a subset (23% of sample = 1110 women) of **women who identify politically as moderates, progressives,** and others.
  - The **moderate/progressive respondents** still reflect a higher religious commitment (84% attend Mass at least weekly) and strongly support a bishops’ code of conduct and an end to tolerating “double lives.” **Key differences** include less concern over homosexuality, and strong support, in comments submitted, for married priests and for women’s ordination as solutions.
- **Hispanic/Latina Catholic women are under-represented:** 86% of women in this sample identified as white, compared to CARA estimates that 59% of Catholic adults are white and 34% are Hispanic/Latino. (CARA, 2016)

# Additional Demographics

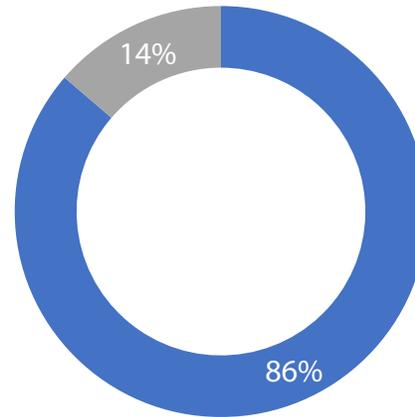
## Political Lean



- Conservative
- Lean Conservative
- Moderate
- Lean Progressive

Though most women identified as conservative or leaning conservative, views of women who identified as moderate, progressive, lean progressive, and “other” largely aligned with women overall in assessing impact, but tended to identify abuse of power, integrity, and transparency as more significant factors than homosexuality.

## Ethnicity/Race

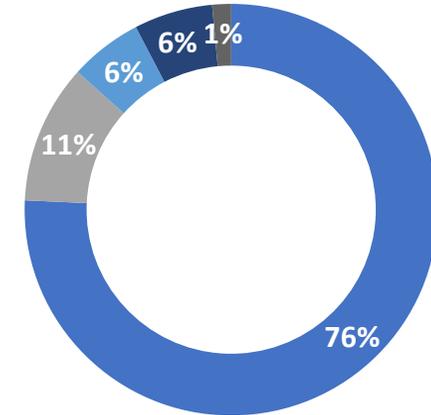


- Non-Hispanic White
- Hispanic/non-white/other

**Under 40:** 83% non-Hispanic white, 8% Hispanic, and 9% non-white/other.

Compare: National estimates – 59% of Catholic adults are white and 34% are Hispanic/Latino (CARA 2016).

## Marital Status



- Married
- Single
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Consecrated/Religious

# Hispanic Women's Voices

"Please understand that a lot of people's **faith journeys are resting in your hands**. Listen to the people first, your clergy second."

"The only way to move forward with Christ's Church is to bring everything to light. Does God not ask us to not fear truth? So who are we to hide. **Let us open our hearts (and diocesan records) to God's mercy and to let Him heal our Church.**"

"I would like to convey to the hierarchy of the Church the need for the laity to trust that our shepherds practice what they preach. **Holiness is not optional** for any Catholic regardless of their vocation."

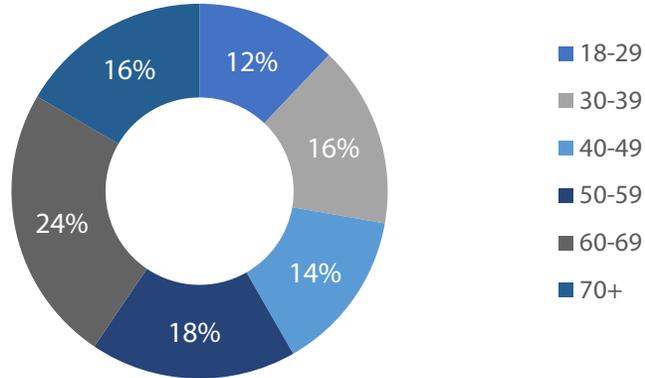
"The laity must be involved and if we suffer a shortage of priests well, thank God, that would be much better than what we've done."

"I pray that this problem does not leave the 'radar.' It is not okay for the hierarchy to drag their feet and hope people move on to other issues. We need dramatic change to **correct these problems.**"

# Views of women who identify as political moderates, progressives, or other

Sample size: 1,110 women  
85% attend Mass at least weekly

Moderate and Progressive age range



- 89% completely or somewhat agree with Pope Francis that **clergy living double lives should be removed from ministry.**
- 86% are frustrated with the **lack of transparency** that does not allow laity to know that all abusers have been removed from ministry.
- 83% express “not much” or “**no**” **trust in Vatican officials.**
- 74% are frustrated that the laity can not assist in **proposing reforms.**
- 65% have felt “**betrayed**” **by the Church** and 72% are **not sure who they can trust** in the hierarchy.

## “The Problem”

### Most important factors to address

Transparency on all credible abuse allegations	99%
Governance	98%
Abuse of power	98%
Culture of secrecy, cover-ups about sexual activity	98%
Tolerance of private sex lives	92%
Clergy double lives (sex with men)	87%

### Least important factors to address

Celibacy	54%
Disproportionate % of priests with same-sex attractions	56%
Homosexuality	53%
Weak prayer / sacramental life	79%

# Moderate and Progressive Women's Voices

"I feel that the church hierarchy has failed to include laity and women in ways that would have helped prevent some of the sexual abuse as well as abuse of power. The main reason I think priests should be given a choice of marriage is because then there would be some **feminine genius and gifts** added to the mix, even if just through priests having **a better understanding** of the other half of humanity."

"The church demonizes homosexuals by calling them 'disordered.' **Clericalism, lack of leadership roles for women and lack of lay oversight of the church** are bigger issues. Celibacy is another issue and the church in the past has been a great hiding place for men who have struggled with sexual identity. I fully support married priests and female priests and more accepting role for homosexual priests."

"Homosexuality, it seems to me, is a secondary issue here and I fear it will be used as a **scapegoat** to avoid addressing the essential questions of how seminary life prepare men to live healthy lives that successfully form community, spiritual maturity. This is not an issue of ordaining women, but of **reforming the clerical state** from the bottom to the top."

"What I want to see is a **revolution of personal holiness** within the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. This problem won't get better without true contrition, repentance, humility, and reparation. And the laity will not have its trust restored until we see this publicly developing."

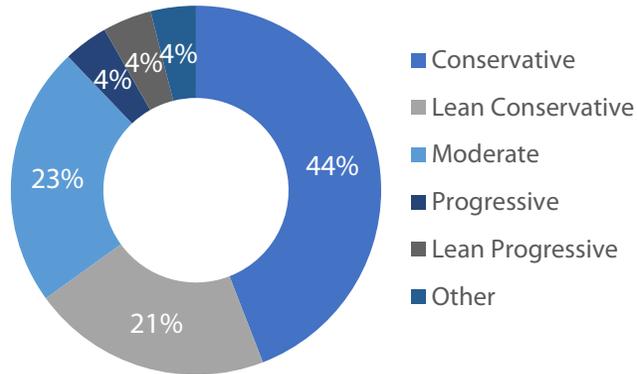
"This issue is not confined to priests/bishops living in **consensual adult relationships**, but rather one of **power over others** that causes a culture of abuse to be tolerated...Let's focus on a clear code of conduct....**no covering up...transparency...transparency!**"

"Ultimately, **clericalism** is what has hidden all of this mess for centuries. It's time for change or the Church will surely die out. It cannot ask us to **live a virtuous life** while it is not doing the same."

# Views of women under 40

Sample size: 919 women  
92% attend Mass at least weekly

## Under 40 political leanings



- 95% agree completely or somewhat with Pope Francis that **clergy living a double life should leave ministry.**
- 84% express “not much” or “**no trust**” in **Vatican officials.**
- 57% say their trust in the Church hierarchy is “**seriously damaged.**”
- 53% say it is **harder now to invite friends** or family who have left the Church to come back

## “The Problem”

### Most important factors

Governance	97%
Abuse of power	96%
Transparency	96%
Culture of secrecy cover-up	96%
Tolerance of private sex lives	94%
Clergy living double lives involving sexual activity with men	93%

### Least important factors

Celibacy	52%
Disproportionate number of priests with same-sex attractions	67%
Homosexuality	69%
Clericalism	70%
Loneliness, geographical isolation, and lack of support for priests	78%