

# **Voice of the Faithful**

**In the Diocese of Bridgeport**

## **ANNUAL REPORT**

**July 2014–June 2015**

**FROM: Jamie Dance, *Chairperson***

This year marks VOTF-Bridgeport's thirteenth year as an affiliate. Our engagement with Bishop Frank Caggiano, begun last year upon his arrival in the Diocese, has continued and flourished. Bishop's recognition resulted in the appointment of three of our board members (John Marshall Lee, Anne Pollack, and Jamie Dance) as delegates to the recently concluded Diocesan Synod. John Fitzpatrick, another board member, served as a delegate from his parish, St. Philip in Norwalk. Anne Pollack and I were appointed to the Synod's study committees as well. We were very pleased with our reception from the broader Church and enjoyed the camaraderie and service aspect of the Synod. To keep our membership aware of Synod progress, summaries of the six General Sessions were set out to our email list and posted on our website. In recognition of our participation and the great hope that the Synod would succeed in energizing our diocese, VOTF-Bridgeport held a Mass on September 11 at St. Philip Church to honor the opening of the Synod and to pray for its success. Celebrated by Father Michael Boccaccio, pastor, the Mass attracted almost two hundred people, including Synod delegates. It was a beautiful event with magnificent music and liturgical ceremony. A reception for attendees followed. This was the first time in our history that we have been allowed to meet on Church property. Reports of the Mass were carried on the Diocesan website and in the Diocesan newspaper.

In recognition of the general difficulty that our wintry climate imposes on our membership, the Board of Directors voted to eliminate General Meetings during

the months of December, January and February. This proved advantageous this past year as Connecticut experienced one of the worst winters on record. We have decided to continue this schedule.

## **2014-2015 PROGRAM**

Since September 2014, our speakers have included:

**Natalia Imperatori-Lee** on “Counting and Recounting the Latino Presence in U.S. Catholicism”

**Angela Bonavoglia** on “Catholic Women in a ‘Man’s Church’: Should We Stay or Should We Go?”

**Christopher Bellitto** on “Reforming a Challenged Church: Six Lessons from Church History”

**Bishop Frank Caggiano** on “The Synod Journey: Lessons Learned and Our Path into the Future”

## **ANNUAL CONFERENCE AT FAIRFIELD UNIVERSITY**

**The Sense of the Faithful:**

**The Voice of the Spirit in the Church**

**March 14, 2015**

Our Annual Conference, co-sponsored by the Fairfield University Center for Catholic Studies and VOTF-Bridgeport, featured Paul Lakeland as the keynote speaker. His topic was “A Place of Mercy Freely Given: The Church in the Vision of Pope Francis.” Following the speech, table discussions were held among the attendees, stimulating a very animated question and answer period that dealt with the future of the Church under Francis and the likelihood of reform given the current status of the Curia and College of Cardinals. Following brunch, a panel discussion featuring the VOTF Board members who are Synod Delegates (Jamie Dance, John Fitzpatrick, John Marshall

Lee, and Anne Pollack) ensued. Each was given ten minutes to offer impressions of their Synod participation and other observations. A question and answer period followed and attendees offered many comments and questions regarding the Synod Challenges and particularly how they were arrived at. Audience participation was notable at this conference, and comments following the event were very positive. The fact that there are so many parallels between what is happening under Pope Francis and what is happening locally under Bishop Caggiano gave great impetus to the conversations. All involved thought it was a great success.

### **ANNUAL VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR AWARD**

VOTF's Saint Anselm of Canterbury Award was presented to Professor Paul F. Lakeland to honor him as "our constant inspiration and guide" for "his wise counsel, his gracious manner, his wry humor, and his courage in standing up against abuse by those who deem him to be a dissident voice in the Church." These words were taken from the magnificent citation composed by our patriarch, Joe O'Callaghan, to honor our friend.

### **2015 VOICE OF COMPASSION AWARDS**

Since the Voice of Compassion (VOC) Fund's inception, a total of more than \$130,000 has been awarded to a variety of organizations serving the poor and needy. Each year, 100 percent of the money collected is given directly to charity. Contributions to the VOC fund are tax deductible, and interested members are annually invited to serve on the Granting Committee, directed this year by Bob Wilkins. When grants are distributed at VOTF conferences, representatives are given an opportunity to describe their work on behalf of the needy. This year, contributions to the VOC fund totaled \$7,500. Among those receiving grants were the Bridgeport Rescue Mission, Manna House, Center for Youth Leadership at Brien McMahon High School, Daughters of Charity, Open Door Shelter, Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests-CT, and the Safe Environments Office of the Diocese of

Bridgeport. This last award marked a welcome turnaround: it was the first time a Diocesan agency had been allowed to accept a contribution from VOTF.

### **THE YEAR IN REVIEW**

This has been another exciting year for VOTF-Bridgeport. Our participation in the Synod, Bishop Caggiano's continued engagement with us, and our continuing ability to find and present great speakers and teachers to our membership contributes to our overall feeling of hopefulness. While our meeting attendance numbers are down, we feel that we can still maintain a presence in the Diocese that is productive and valuable, particularly for those groups who are on the margins. Nationally, we still rank among the most active and vigorous of the VOTF affiliates, and consider ourselves lucky to have a hard-core group of supporters, on and off the board, who keep us going. This was especially apparent at the VOTF National Assembly held in Hartford on April 18. Numerous affiliates continue to struggle to maintain a presence in dioceses where Church leaders are unfriendly and rigidly traditional in their approach to Church reform organizations.

Internally, VOTF-Bridgeport continues to thrive because of the talent and dedication of our board members. John Fitzpatrick (with Bill Sweeney) keeps us looking good online, Anne Pollack takes care of the money, and Marge Hickey keeps our membership informed. The rest of the board contributes time and talent as needed, especially in program planning and setup. I am proud to call them friends. Our Women's Group continues to meet regularly and graciously has offered to annually plan a November program for the membership. The Study Group on Church and related issues, led by Jamie Dance, continues to meet, this year studying John Thiel's latest book, *Icons of Hope*.

### **THE FUTURE**

The outlook for VOTF-Bridgeport remains bright. Because of the heightened recognition of VOTF due to our Synod service, the Bishop's engagement with us, and

the general hopefulness that has gripped the diocese, we are optimistic about our future. There seems to be a place at the table for us in the life of the Diocese that wasn't apparent before. Also, Bishop Caggiano's statement ("We still need to heal the broken trust that exists between victims and the institutional Church and the people at large") at the Final Synod Session regarding the victims and survivors of clerical abuse has given us great hope that finally the Body of Christ will be healed.