

**VOICE OF THE FAITHFUL
IN THE DIOCESE OF –BRIDGEPORT
Annual Report – Year of July 2004 to July 2005**

From: Tony Wiggins, Chairman

Our year began with a very enjoyable VOTF Picnic on the Fairfield Beach in July. The new Officers all socialized with the Board and Group, and each briefly addressed the large group and their families.

During the year we continued to meet each month at the Congregational Church on the Green in Norwalk. Our monthly Board Meetings were held in the conference rooms of HealthMarket Inc. in the Merritt –on - the -River Bldg. in Norwalk. Our membership continued to increase slightly, however not meeting our goals in this area. Peg Mooney, Vice Chairman, chaired Board and regular meetings in the months when I was gone, and this arrangement seemed to work well.

2004-2005 Program

Speakers –

Since September, 2004, our speakers have included:

Prof. Nancy Dallavalle (Sept.) – Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Fairfield U. Prof. Dallavalle spoke on the Bishop’s Appointive Committees and the Diocesan Pastoral Council of which she is a member.

Gerald Renner (Nov.) – Journalist with the Hartford Courant and co-author with Jason Berry of *Vows of Silence: The Abuse of Power in the Papacy of John Paul II*. He discussed his ongoing investigation of charges of sexual abuse against Father Marcel Maciel, founder of the Legionaries of Christ.

John Healey, Ph.D (Jan.) – Former Director of the Archbishop Hughes Institute of Religion and Culture, and former Dean of the School of General Studies at Fordham U. He reflected on his experience in Rome during the Second Vatican Council.

Paul Lakeland, Ph.D (Mar.) – Holder of the Aloysius P. Kelley, S.J., Chair of Catholic Studies at Fairfield U. He commented on our proposals for structural change in the Church.

Anthony Padovano, Ph.D. (April) – Professor of Literature and Philosophy at Ramapo College and author of “Resistance and Renewal,” (2002) who spoke on “Hope in the Church.”

SNAP – Our chapter continued to support Linda Mauriello-Vernon and her CT-SNAP Chapter, in various efforts in the state, and by having a SNAP speaker at most meetings.

“Reforming a Challenged Church” Conference on May 14 at Fairfield University. This conference was done in collaboration with members of the University’s Religious Studies Department. Paul Lakeland again arranged the use of Fairfield’s facilities and moderated the sessions. Attendance was reported at 80.

Speakers –

Dr. Francine Cardman, Professor of Historical Theology, Weston Jesuit Theological Seminary

Dr. Paul Lakeland, Fairfield U.

Linda Mauriello-Vernon, CT. Coordinator of SNAP

Daniel Thompson, Assistant Professor of Theology, Fordham University

Mass of Renewal

In then past year, our chapter **undertook two major programs:**

Structural Change Program – In early September, our Board began to study the issue of our third VOTF tenet, to “work for structural change in the Church.” It had been stated by Bishop Lori and others that because of this tenet that VOTF had a “hidden agenda.” Our Board began to search for an “open agenda” which would be out in the open, and knock down the “hidden agenda” objection. We appointed a Structural Change Committee consisting of Joe O’Callaghan, Peg Mooney, and Tony Wiggins. The committee had early meetings to bring their ideas forward, and in the end, produced a document, which was mainly Joe O’Callaghan’s work and written by him. It was titled “Five Proposals for Structural Change in the Church.” After discussion by our Board and in our full membership meetings, the document was overwhelmingly approved. The final document advanced the idea of open election of bishops, parish priests, parish and diocesan pastoral and finance councils, and the ownership of church property by the people of the parish. The document supported its proposals with historical notations, and noted that this was the model in the early church. The necessary changes required in Canon Law were also noted. The final document was sent to every parish in the diocese, as well as the bishop and chancery. It was also publicized in the media. The plan will be presented to the National VOTF at the convocation in Indianapolis in July. We now have an “open agenda” and have not since heard any reference to a “hidden agenda.”

Communication Program – Since we have had no response from Bishop Lori to our many requests for meetings, our Board decided it would be more effective to advance our message of truth directly to “the people in the pews.” In line with this strategy, our Board decided to use some of our treasury reserve to communicate directly to Catholics in the Bridgeport diocese. The Board authorized an advertising program to be conceived and implemented by our Communications Committee. This committee, headed by Bob Mulligan and Bill O’Sullivan created a series of 8 ads and the board authorized the funds

for the ads to be placed in 3 main Fairfield County newspaper dailies, as well as a few of the weekly publications. The ads, which highlight our “Five Proposals for Structural Change,” as well as our other strategic programs, have been well-received and positive comments have been offered from parish priests, as well as new members coming in to our chapter, of which we are proud.

Voice of Compassion – VOTF Bridgeport continued our successful program, which gives members and others the opportunity to contribute directly to worthy charities in the area, without going through the Diocese, where the money might be used improperly. In 2004 we distributed checks for \$2500 each to Merton Center, Bridgeport, Daughters of Charity Day Nursery, Bridgeport, Shepherds Inc., Bridgeport, Birthright, Norwalk, and New Covenant House of Hospitality, Stamford. At present we have over \$10,000 toward our goal of \$15,000 for the 2006 donations.

Where are we going? We are progressing in our efforts, even though it may not seem evident from our small membership increase. We get encouraging comments every day from people “in the pews,” as well as parish priests, that we are doing the right thing, and to “keep it up.” It just seems that these Catholics do not choose to actively join us, or are merely afraid of the power of the diocese and hierarchy. At any rate, we must re-double our efforts, and pray that these supporters will join us in some way. On a national basis, we see good progress, with the sponsoring of a ***“National Convocation of the Laity” to be held in Indianapolis July 8-10, which 5 members of our Board will attend.*** With our newly elected, young and vigorous Officers, I am encouraged that the work of VOTF-Bridgeport is paying off.

Personally, I am grateful and proud to be able to be part of the strong and articulate group of dedicated and insightful Catholics in this chapter. It has inspired me to keep striving to contribute in a small way to the restructuring of our church. I am sure that our hard work will result in a more holy and democratic church for our children.

Anthony A. Wiggins
Chairman
June 14, 2005