

Voice of the Faithful
In The Diocese of Bridgeport
Annual Report
July 2010 To July 2011

From: Jamie Dance, Co-Chairman

Our year began with numerous committee meetings to plan and organize two Voice of the Faithful events. A Tri-State meeting of Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York had been called by the Long Island affiliate, and planned for October 30 at the College of Mount St. Vincent in Riverdale, New York. As representatives of VOTF Bridgeport, Tony Wiggins and I attended a planning session that produced a program for the day, featuring Anthony Padovano as keynoter and an afternoon panel discussion by Chris Schenk, Jamie Manson, and our own Joseph O'Callaghan. The second event was the culmination of hours of study of the Rosado Court Documents, primarily by Anne Pollack and Joseph O'Callaghan. Their efforts produced a dramatic reading, authored by Joseph O'Callaghan, entitled *Bless Me Father, For I Have Sinned!*. John Marshall Lee hired Jack Rushen (who, as director/playwright, also hired 17 actors), engaged sound and video help, and had ads and programs printed. The production was scheduled for November 13 at Norwalk Concert Hall. As one can imagine, this was a tremendous undertaking for our affiliate, requiring many hours and great financial assistance from our membership. Both events were well received and attended.

VOTF-Bridgeport continued to hold General meetings at the Congregational Church on the Green in Norwalk, and offered board members the opportunity to dine with our speakers prior to the meetings at their own expense. Our monthly board meetings, however, have been moved to Grace Episcopal Church in Norwalk. Parking availability and its central location make it a good venue for these meetings.

2010-2011 Programs

Speakers:

Judith Kubicki, PhD., spoke on the “Coming Liturgical Changes”

Kristen Heyer, the Anne Drummy O’Callaghan lecturer, spoke on “Reservoirs of Hope and Resilience”

Brad Hinze spoke on “Stifling Dialogue in the Church and Prophetic Obedience”

Nick Massa spoke on “ VOTF National’s Universal Church Reform Platform”

Jamie Manson spoke on “The Church and Young Catholics: Is There a Future?”

In addition: Two of our General Meetings were led by VOTF Board Members. Their subjects were the production of *Bless Me Father, For I Have Sinned!* and the future of parishes in the Diocese of Bridgeport, relating to their financial health and the possibility of parish closings.

Annual Conference, March 26 at Fairfield University

Our Annual Conference, presented by Fairfield University Center for Catholic Studies and VOTF Bridgeport, featured keynote speaker Dr. Anthony Padovano of Ramapo College of New Jersey, speaking on “Vatican II: What It Did and Why It ‘s Important.” Professor Paul Lakeland responded to the address and moderated the following discussion.

A panel made up of members of our Women’s Group and moderated by Joanne Bray presented a series of discussions entitled “Ways Forward: Courageous Voices of Catholic Women Since Vatican II”

“Young Catholic Voices”, a panel of three 20-something Catholics followed, and reflected on the earlier presentations, giving comments from their own experience and perspectives. This is always a very popular part of our conference, since VOTF as an organization represents a far more senior part of the general population.

The conference was closed with a prayer.

Third Annual VOTF Bridgeport Volunteer Award

This award, The St. Anselm of Canterbury Award, honors service to our organization. It was presented at our conference to John Marshall Lee for his outstanding contribution to the success of *Bless Me Father, For I Have Sinned!*."

2011 Voice of Compassion Awards:

Gifts amounting to \$9,200 were distributed to eight non-profit organizations at the conference. Among those receiving grants were the Black Rock Food Pantry, the Bridgeport Rescue Mission, Daughters of Charity, Dorothy Day Hospitality House, Christian Community Action, Manna House of Hospitality, SNAP-CT, and The Center for Sexual Assault Crisis Counseling and Education.

The Year in Review:

This has been an unusually active year for VOTF Bridgeport. We have produced two major events on our own and have contributed greatly to a third. The impact of our production of *Bless Me Father, For I Have Sinned!*, is still being felt as we continue to sell copies of the script and DVD. We remain hopeful that it will continue to be presented to a wider audience and receive the attention of all those whose hearts and souls have been touched by the scandal of clerical sexual abuse and the resulting cover-ups by Church hierarchy.

Internally, VOTF Bridgeport continues to flourish. We are blessed with members who are willing to take on major tasks and have the capabilities required to see them through. Our two study groups remain active. The Women's Group participated in the Annual Conference, giving voice to current issues in the Church that largely effect women. The study group on Church Governance, led by Jamie Dance and Joe O'Callaghan, spent the year reading and discussing Richard McBrien's book, *The Church: The evolution of Catholicism*.

Our latest project, just getting underway, is a study of our diocese and the health of our parishes. This study will focus on diocesan finances, parish enrollment, and parish closings.

The Future:

The future of VOTF Bridgeport remains bright, as I reported last year, because of the dedication and incredible talent of its members. And, sad to say, the brightness of our future is in direct correlation to the scandals in our Church. As Catholics search for answers to the unthinkable problems they see facing our Church, they turn to us for answers, or at least for empathy.

We continue to reach out to Bishop Lori, hoping to establish a common ground for discussion and respect. Every diocese is facing financial problems as a result of the victim settlements and parish attrition, and wisdom demands that as adult Catholics, we must be ready to assist in discovering ways in which needs on all sides may be met. It is our duty by virtue of our Baptism that empowers us to serve as ministers to the world and partners in service to the Church. We will start with the Diocese of Bridgeport