

PRESS RELEASE

ROBERT J. WILLIS TO DISCUSS THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN AMERICA

Robert J. Willis, a distinguished psychotherapist and former executive director of the Pastoral Counseling Center of West Hartford, will speak on the topic, “An American Catholicism,” at VOTF’s monthly meeting on Thursday, December 7, at 7:30 p.m. at the First Congregational Church on the Green in Norwalk. Everyone is invited to attend.

In his book, *The Democracy of God: An American Catholicism*, Willis argues that the Catholic Church in the United States is fragmented and polarized and at a critical stage. New ideas drawn from the American experience may set the Church on the right course again. Citing the efforts of John Carroll, the first American bishop, and John England, bishop of Charleston, to adapt the principles of democracy to the Church, Willis believes that that bishops must abandon “their status as minor lords in a medieval monarchy and, instead, embrace a servant leadership within the People of God.” He is also the author of *Transcendence in Relationships: Existentialism and Psychotherapy*, and *Breaking the Chains: A Catholic Memoir*.

The stated mission of Voice of the Faithful, an organization of mainstream Catholics, is to be “a prayerful voice, attentive to the Spirit, through which the faithful can actively participate in the governance and guidance of the Catholic Church.” VOTF believes that a reasoned dialogue among bishop, priests, nuns, and laymen and women will contribute to the renewal of the Church.

In order to encourage greater lay participation in the governance of the Church, VOTF developed five proposals for structural change: (1) the election of bishops by the clergy and people of the diocese; (2) the right of parishioners to participate with the bishop in the selection of their pastors; (3) the establishment of elected, representative diocesan pastoral and finance councils with real authority; (4) the establishment of elected, representative parish pastoral and finance councils with real authority; and (5) the right of the faithful as members of a parish corporation consisting of their elected representatives, the bishop, and the pastor, to own church property. The full text of the proposals can be consulted at www.votfbpt.org/proposal.html.

For further information about VOTF in the Diocese of Bridgeport and for directions to the First Congregational Church on the Green in Norwalk consult www.votfbpt.org.