

Catholic group acknowledges odds in changing church

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NATICK -- Natick Parish Voice knows it is going to take a lot to make meaningful changes in the Catholic Church, and, its members say, hope is just as important as more practical methods.

Even last night, when the group was confronted with frank talk about the Boston Archdiocese's impenetrable hierarchy, its members said they have not given up the idea that the ordinary Catholic can become a bigger part of the religion's leadership.

During the panel discussion commemorating Natick Parish Voice's third anniversary, about 60 Catholics from local parishes met at Morse Institute Library to keep their reform-oriented goals in mind.

Natick Parish Voice wants the Catholic clergy to be accountable and able to communicate with the laity, but the priests on hand at the forum said such a reality is a long way off.

"I don't think the Bishop (Sean O'Malley) plans to make any changes," said the Rev. Walter Cuenin. "With reconfiguration, (the archdiocese had) no willingness to look at different models. It says to me, we're not planning changes."

Cuenin, the pastor of Our Lady Help of Christians in Newton, relayed news from the frontlines. Saying the priesthood has been "demoralized," he offered a dose of reality.

"The priesthood is pretty broken. ... It takes two to tango, but you can't get contact" with the archdiocese, he said.

In light of such appraisals, Natick Parish Voice members are sticking to their guns.

Erin Parker, a Natick Parish Voice member and a Natick native who attends St. Zepherin's Church in Wayland, plans to contact the Natick representative of the archdiocese's Pastoral Council to continue her own campaign for change.

She said she has been encouraged by the recent news of the Boston Archdiocese's agreement to be audited.

"The archdiocese, they don't want our questions," she said. "I want transparency."

Cuenin insisted things within the church can change. "We're in the middle, but where the end is I'm not sure."

But the middle is much better than the beginning, which began about three years ago, when most Catholics were just learning about decades of sexual abuse that had been going on across the state.

"As far as the protection of children, I'm fearful if a lot of laity don't get involved it can be business as usual as in the past," said Donna Manganaro, a founding member of Natick Parish Voice and a religious education teacher at St. Patrick's Church in Natick.

Manganaro is also part of her church's child abuse prevention training team. She shares with other adult parishioners two videos the archdiocese released that focus on protecting children from sexual abuse.

"Are we going to assume we all saw the two videos and all is fine?" she asked. In Manganaro's mind, the laity has a responsibility to be vigilant members of a parish.

Even as a child abuse prevention facilitator, Manganaro comes across brick walls when she has questions that need to be answered by the archdiocese.

"There is no forum to discuss dilemmas," she said.