

Fairfield University professor tells VOTF dissent is important for Church

By FRANCIS X. FAY JR.

Hour Senior Writer

NORWALK — The new professor of Catholic Studies at Fairfield University told the Fairfield County Chapter of the Voice of the Faithful that it represents something that was once integral to the church, a dissenting voice.

Paul F. Lakeland, installed this week as Aloysius P. Kelley, S.J., Chair in Catholic Studies, said that the five proposals the area VOTF developed recently to give the laity a voice in church affairs harks back to the church's earliest days.

"It wasn't until 818 A.D. that a bishop was elected Pope," he told the 50 members gathered Thursday night at the First Congregational Church on the Green. From the beginning, he explained, church leadership was determined by the laity. Gradually, however, politics began playing an ever larger role in the selection of bishops and popes.

"Church leaders were once chosen by the laity on a local basis from candidates who had already been tested in the community. That is quite different from the present seminary system where people who have a calling are trained for a position that no one, not even the candidates, know they can fulfill."

The English native, with degrees from Oxford, London and Vanderbilt universities, said that conservative-minded homosexuals currently make up the preponderance of seminary graduates.

"It is possible the straights have a problem with celibacy and the liberals see the absence of dialogue in the church."

He cited onetime Bishop John England of South Carolina who convened annual synods of equal parts clergy and laity where each entity had to approve all aspects of diocesan operations.

"What was known as Bishop England's Compromise didn't survive his death," Lakeland said, noting that it wasn't politic.

He suggested that the Roman Catholic Church in this country is run by a dozen strong-willed bishops of conservative bent.