

General Meeting 1/8/09  
VOTF Bridgeport

Dan Sullivan, co-chair, called the meeting to order. The opening prayer, introduced by Marge Hickey, followed.

Announcements included: reminders of the need for contributions to the Voice of Compassion Fund and of a weekend workshop on Vatican II at St. Thomas More in Darien.

Bob Mulligan, chair of the Program Committee, introduced the speaker, Paul Scarbrough, co-president of Call to Action USA, whose topic was “The Changing Face of Catholicism: Opportunities and Challenges for Reform Movements”.

Scarbrough began his talk with some statistics gathered from the Pew Foundation Forum on Religion in February, 2008. Although the unaffiliated are the largest growing group, the percentage of Catholics in the population is practically the same today as it was in the 1970's, about 24%. This seemingly constant number is actually the result of the growing immigrant population from Central and South America. This growth in the number of Latino Catholics has importance to the reform movements within the church. The causes of those of us in these movements, especially concerning the renewal within the institutional church, have little or no relevance to these new members who are more interested in how we speak out about immigration reform, drug enforcement policies and American policies toward their native lands.

From this point, Scarbrough went on to speak of how Call to Action faced the systemic racism within the “majority culture “ members within its ranks. CTA developed an anti-racism team based on the Crossroads Ministry model out of Chicago. Through a difficult and sometimes painful analysis this team examined how their own policies and practices within CTA kept racism going in their own organization. As a result of this work, the CTA Conference in 2007 was centered around anti-racism with several outstanding speakers including Eddie Moore and Sister Jamie Phelps. Scarbrough concluded this section of his talk with the statement, “Confronting and rooting out racism will transform us.”

In reference to his communication with VOTF’s co-chair Jamie Dance, Scarbrough then went on to discuss her question, “Where are all the young people?” He described CTA’s efforts to engage the “Next Gen” Catholics from 20 to 42. This group now has a presence within CTA and conducts their own sessions at the national conference. He pointed out that this self-directed group is more interested in social justice issues than church reform and has no interest in working for institutional change. CTA has developed several strategies for Next Gen. Among them are cultivating a vibrant leadership, having staff support and providing opportunities for dialog with leading speakers. Their documented history has been reported in the book, “Lighting the Way”.

Finally, Scarbrough delineated how CTA views the process of change in outlining Moyer’s “Doing Democracy”, eight steps of successful movements. From the beginning steps when the public is still unaware of any problem in the power structure to the final stages when the power structure is forced to adapt to the new reforms, is a long and difficult process. Scarbrough

pointed out that VOTF seems to be in one of the stages of this process: a stage when membership seems to have stalled and there is a general sense of powerlessness and discouragement. He assured the membership that this is a normal stage in the development of movements and we need not falter in our pursuit of our goals. He then pointed out those additional steps that lie ahead that will keep us going toward our destination and the formulation of new strategies,

The question and answer period reflected the deep interest of the assembled members in many of the points expressed by Paul Scarbrough in his talk. One fact repeated several times was that we all need to move beyond our comfort zones and look at our own attitudes. It was agreed that we of VOTF are at a point in our history when we have to examine ways we can reach out to our Latino brothers and sisters as well as to our younger Catholics.

Dan Sullivan brought the meeting to a close by thanking Paul Scarbrough for his inspiring and encouraging talk and announcing our next meeting on February 5.

Submitted by: Peg Mooney, Recording Secretary