

12-18-07 – [Gloucester MA] VOTF gone but need for reform remains
Ellen Ford, Gloucester Daily Times

Usually at this time of year, I write about the joys of Christmas in Rockport: Santa's arrival by lobster boat, the lighting of the tree in Dock Square and the Christmas pageant that turns Rockport into the little town of Bethlehem for several hours - far away from shopping malls and traffic jams.

This year, however, sadness mixed with the joys of the season. As 2007 comes to a close, I mourn the loss of the Rev. Myron Bullock as well as the Cape Ann affiliate of Voice of the Faithful, which held its final meeting last month at St. John's Episcopal Church in Gloucester.

After Cardinal Bernard Law banned us from meeting in our own parishes, more than 70 people showed up at the Rose Baker Senior Center on Sept. 23, 2002, for our first meeting. After that meeting, the Revs. Richard Simeone and Lyn Brakeman invited us to meet at St. John's, and we were grateful for their generosity and ecumenical spirit.

Attendance continued to drop, however, as the ban continued. Voice of the Faithful members were criticized as "dissidents" and Cape Ann churches closed and merged into one parish.

Father Bullock attended many of our meetings at St. John's before illness confined him, including one night when a survivor of clergy abuse was our guest speaker. Before her talk, Father Bullock spoke privately with her and later she told us how much she appreciated his courtesy and kindness.

That incident made me realize how much of the pain suffered by victims, families and faithful priests and parishioners could have been alleviated if church leaders had confronted clergy abuse with as much concern for victims as they had for protecting the image of an institution.

Instead, they consulted attorneys rather than moral principles and continue to blame everyone but themselves for the consequences.

Recently, Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Paprocki of Chicago called for "legal reforms" to "shield Roman Catholic institutions," saying that "settlement or award of civil damages is punishing the wrong people" - parishioners and donors "who have no role in the supervision of clergy."

Unfortunately, those responsible for the supervision of clergy have never been held accountable for their negligence. One of them, Cardinal Francis George, archbishop of

Chicago, was recently elected president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, so "the wrong people" will continue to see churches and schools closed and services curtailed while prelates remain untouched by the suffering of priests and parishioners.

I'm saddened by what happened to our group but proud that children are safer today because of the reforms brought about since Voice of the Faithful began in Wellesley five years ago. Where reforms haven't been instituted, it's usually because some bishops continue to abuse their power and ignore directives of their own Civilian Review Board.

I'm proud of one courageous bishop, a man I consider a friend. In his Nov. 11 online "Peace Pulpit" homily, retired Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Gumbleton of Detroit, founder of Pax Christi USA and the only bishop who has publicly called for bishops to be held accountable for their role in the abuse of children, said he isn't allowed to speak in some dioceses because he "can be controversial."

I'm also proud of a local friend, one of the original steering committee members of our affiliate. Lydia Priest, a Catholic chaplain working in local hospitals, recently wrote a letter to this paper titled "Disciples in the marketplace," speaking for those who bring "faith-based values" to "health care systems and ministries, educational systems, city, state and federal government ... and more," reminding us that while parish activities are important, we are all members of a wider community.

A few days later, Rabbi Samuel Barth's article, "The lights and the spirit of Hanukkah," echoed similar sentiments and concluded with, "May your lights shine brightly throughout this sacred season."

I struggled this year to get into the spirit of Christmas but I am grateful for all those whose lights shine brightly all year long, reminding me that every season is a sacred season and we live in a blessed community.

Merry Christmas. Happy Hanukkah. Happy every day.

Eileen Ford is a retired police officer who lives in Rockport.

The article above all is complete. Each bishop should be required to write an essay in regard to his treatment of his priests, his parishioners including victims of abuse by priests, his treatment of financial matters in terms of accountability and openness in light of what he honestly believes Jesus would do, and then ask himself who is a dissident.