

VOICE OF THE FAITHFUL
IN THE DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT
GENERAL MEETING
JUNE 5, 2003

The meeting opened with prayer. President, Joe O'Callaghan, welcomed 43 attendees and asked that all remember Tony Wiggins, undergoing heart surgery tomorrow, in their prayers. Joe invited newcomers to introduce themselves; some spoke of their desire to heal our wounded Church; others were motivated by outrage over the crisis; concern was voiced regarding the low turn-out of young people; and some came simply to see what VOTF was all about.

Jim Alvord, Chairman of Elections, installed the newly-elected Officers and Board Members.

Minutes of the May 1, 2003 meeting were prepared and submitted by Kathy Benham, and approved.

Joe referred to Fr. Walsh's presence and advised that he invited him to this meeting; Fr. Walsh responded that he would be unable to attend this time as he was escorting seminarians to Mexico to study Spanish.

Announcements

Tom Malarkey, of the Greenwich VOTF affiliate, gave a brief history of their group and announced their next meeting: **Tuesday, June 17th, 7:30pm, at Christ Church, Greenwich** (directions may be found on our website)

Gloria Seymour reported that our new website is up and running, with profound thanks to Bill Sweeney, our webmaster. She encouraged all to visit the website at <http://www.votfbpt.org> and will welcome any suggestions/revisions for inclusion. E-mails to the website may be sent to contact@votfbpt.org

Sheila Rietano announced a **potluck picnic, to be held on Thursday, July 10th**, on the grounds of St. Birgitta's, Darien, at 6:00pm until sunset. VOTF will cover the use fee. All attending are asked to sign up for food/drink contributions on a circulated sheet tonight, or to e-mail Sheila at rietano@aol.com or telephone 846-0413. They are looking into the possibility of celebrating a liturgy. Joe commented that this will give all of us an opportunity to do more socializing with each other, something he feels we need at this point.

Jim Butler reported on a seminar he attended on "Compassionate Listening" – a means toward reconciliation. He thought this would benefit our endeavor to dialogue with the Bishop.

Joe recommended articles, available this evening:

-COMMONWEAL, June 6th – "Are the Bishops Listening?" - an interview with Jim Post, with commentary, "Consulting the Laity," by Paul Lakeland.

-THE NEW YORKER, June 9th – "Father's Helper: how the church used psychiatry to care for – and protect – abusive priests" – by Barry Werth

-ST. ANTHONY MESSENGER, June, 2003 – issue is dedicated to "Crisis in the Church: Our Search for Healing"

Bob Mulligan asked for help on behalf of Goz Gosselin, who provides via e-mail news about clergy abuse across the country and around the world through the Poynter Institute. Anyone present not already receiving it were given the opportunity to sign up with names and e-mail addresses.

Bob also reported on the November 15th Tri State Conference at Fordham, appealing for volunteers.

Financial Reports

Mary Jane Range, Treasurer, gave a summary report, 1/1/03 through 5/27/03, indicating a balance of \$10,325.03.

She announced that she had received word from NCCF that they are unable to furnish our anticipated administration of the Voice of Compassion Fund. We will administer the Fund ourselves. She asked for volunteers to assist in selecting charities to receive contributions on a quarterly basis. People may still add to this tax-deductible Fund.

The subject of possible dues was discussed, with points made that people who support us but do not come to meetings might welcome the chance to contribute financially through dues; the opinion was expressed that since we do take collections each month to defray the cost of our contribution to the Congregational Church, those in attendance are in a sense paying dues.

The collection was taken up.

Subcommittee Work

Richard Maiberger, reported for the Subcommittee on Correspondence, of the Strategies Developing Group, which met at the May meeting and again on May 15th. He outlined a plan for letter writers' responses. He suggested that all members write letters, to newspapers or to the Bishop, on single issues of concern. He urged people to bring letters to our July picnic for sorting. He stated that this should be an ongoing project, with letters going out at least every two months.

A suggestion was made that VOTF hire a Quinnipiac College student to conduct an opinion survey in the Diocese. A further investigation is needed on this.

Proposal for 2003-2004 – OUR CHURCH, OUR FUTURE

Joe presented an outline for consideration of the work to be done in the coming year. The proposed schedule is:

Speakers, followed by Working Sessions, with the goal of preparing guidelines to be submitted to the Bishop, on the topics of:

- Appointment of Pastors
- Parish Finances
- Appointment of Bishops
- Diocesan Finances

An annual conference at Fairfield University

Regarding this event, there is a need to coordinate with other scheduled events in the area to avoid conflicting dates.

Joe asked everyone present to come to the next meeting prepared to make suggestions regarding speakers and also possible locations for meetings in other areas in order to rotate meeting places to accommodate members.

THE POTLUCK PICNIC, ON JULY 10th WILL TAKE THE PLACE OF THE JULY MEETING.

NEXT MEETING WILL BE AUGUST 7, 2003.

Meeting closed with prayer.

Respectfully submitted,

Gloria Seymour, Recording Secretary