

VOICE OF THE FAITHFUL  
IN THE DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT  
AUGUST 7, 2003  
Congregational Church on the Green, Norwalk

The meeting of approximately 40 attendees was opened with a prayer. Joe welcomed everyone and, in particular, new members. On behalf of the group, he extended thanks to all who helped to make the pot-luck picnic on July 10<sup>th</sup> a success, and especially to Sheila and Mary Jane who organized it and to Marge for preparing a beautiful closing prayer service.

Next Meeting, September 4<sup>th</sup> - Joe announced that our guest speaker will be Paul Dinter, former Catholic chaplain at Columbia U., who left the priesthood in 1994, and is now in good standing with the Church. His book, "The Other Side of the Altar: One Man's Life in the Catholic Priesthood," reflects on the whole range of priestly struggles with celibacy and the clerical culture.

Greenwich Chapter VOTF – Joe reminded everyone of the next meeting on September 16<sup>th</sup>. Directions may be found on the website, [www.votfbpt.org](http://www.votfbpt.org) - and Joe encouraged all to visit the website for directions and up to date matters as well as Minutes of General Meetings. He again gave public thanks to Bill Sweeney who has done an outstanding job as our webmaster.

Announcement - Of particular interest to our group, although not sponsored by VOTF, the third annual Anne Drummey O'Callaghan Women in the Church Lecture, will be held at the Quick Center, at Fairfield U., on October 1<sup>st</sup>. Dolores Leckey, Senior Fellow at the Woodstock Theological Center, and former Executive Director of the Secretariat for Family, Laity and Women, and Youth, of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, will speak on "Catholic Women at the Threshold: New Ministries, New Leaders."

Letter-Writing Project – Richard Maiberger reported for the subcommittee on publicity the necessity of making our thoughts and comments known to the general public. Without a publication of our own, we must get the word out via letters to the area newspapers or to the Bishop. Richard reviewed a few submitted at the meeting which focused on the need for more transparency, unanswered letters to the bishop, the importance of dialogue, and a petition to the bishop to rescind his ban on meeting on church property.

Financial Report – Mary Jane reported that monthly reports are posted on the website. She stated that a subcommittee of the Board determined the disposition of \$7500 of the Voice of Compassion Fund, naming three beneficiaries, each to receive \$2500: 1) The Queen of Clergy Home for Retired Priests, Stamford, 2) Family Stages, Bridgeport, and 3) Thomas Merton Center, Bridgeport. The membership approved and each organization will be notified and invited to attend VOTF's September 4<sup>th</sup> meeting to receive donations.

Meeting Sites – The September 4<sup>th</sup> meeting will be here. Joe asked that members investigate the possibility of finding other meeting sites in Fairfield County so that we might accommodate members from those areas on occasion. The dates for future meetings are October 9<sup>th</sup>, November 6<sup>th</sup>, and December 4<sup>th</sup>.

Rev. Christopher Walsh – Joe introduced Fr. Walsh, who attended VOTF meetings in May, the July 10<sup>th</sup> picnic, and this evening. Joe asked Fr. Walsh to speak about his role on behalf of Bishop Lori. Fr. Walsh, former editor of THE FAIRFIELD COUNTY CATHOLIC, has been the Diocesan Director of Vocations for the past five years and is the theological adviser to the bishop. His field of study is Ecclesiology and he teaches at the seminary at Dunwoodie. Fr. Walsh noted that, along with Msgr. Cullen, he met with some VOTF members at St. Jerome Rectory on August 12, 2002 to discuss the crisis in the Church, the documents of Vatican II, and lay involvement in the Church, all of which would have been agreeable topics for discussion. However, the bishop's opposition to the local group arose because of its affiliation with the National VOTF. Both the bishop and Fr. Walsh declined VOTF's invitation to speak at meetings because of "the high profile nature of the group." In May of this year, the bishop asked Fr. Walsh to attend VOTF meetings, but did not give him any background. Fr. Walsh stated that he is not in any way "the advance person" before the bishop changes policy.

Joe then opened the meeting to questions which focused on the original reasons for the bishop's ban on using church property. Fr. Walsh answered that 1) VOTF needed to spell out some of its proposed structural changes, and 2) VOTF needed to explain why most of its speakers were not "conventional." He stated that he thought a basic principle of *Lumen Gentium* was one regarding the bishops having sole authority, to which a response was made that in that same document lay people are reminded of their right and responsibility to speak out. The Diocese of Bridgeport was cited as one of only seven dioceses in the Country to ban VOTF, with chapters of VOTF now in place in 40 States. Another question arose regarding the way the Church manages its daily life and the way its organization evolved – and, particularly, the fact that tomorrow it could evolve differently.

Joe thanked Fr. Walsh and asked him to come again to speak on the formation of priests.

Joe also spoke of VOTF's distress over not being able to have one of our priests come to meetings. He also expressed his concern about the language being used to discredit us – like "dissidents." He himself was singled out on the aforementioned meeting on August 12, 2002. Joe stated that we are all God's children; we do belong to this Church; we recognize that this Church has a great

diversity of people with various opinions. We must listen to people; we do not have to agree with them. Many of the issues being raised are not fundamental or have anything to do with doctrine. To talk only about these isolated issues is basically to distract from the problem at hand.

Massachusetts Attorney General Report - Joe commented on St. Paul's message that "when one member of the body suffers, we all suffer." This report illustrates the suffering of the whole church, which is being held up to ridicule. For a full report, which covers 60 years and 789 charges, Joe suggested that members refer to the website, [www.bishopaccountability.org](http://www.bishopaccountability.org).

Vatican Document, 1962 - Tom Malarkey reported on this 40-year old document of secrecy in the case of "solicitation" by a priest in the confessional. [note: see article by John Allen, Jr., The National Catholic Reporter, NCRONLINE.org or email [jallen@natcath.org](mailto:jallen@natcath.org) for an update on this]

Appellate Court Decision, June 25, 2003 - Joe noted that this unfortunate decision to keep cases sealed on the technicality of a lapse of time to appeal rather than on the substance of the cases has only assisted in the "cover-ups" of some dioceses in the sex abuse scandal. Several newspapers initiated the suit and have not yet decided whether or not to appeal. There are millions of dollars more to be paid and the faithful will not likely receive an accounting from the Diocese. Even if the money comes from insurance, those premiums, bound to escalate, will be paid for by the faithful.

Report on the Tri-State Conference, October 25, 2003 - Joe announced the current status of plans which are progressing smoothly. Cardinal Egan has been invited to celebrate the closing liturgy. Help is needed in the preparations and on the day of the Conference. Tickets are \$35.00. He then introduced the chairpersons who gave brief accounts of their respective work:

Budget - Mary Jane Range reported that, because we are incorporated and have received non-profit status, all of the monies will flow through our chapter. Also, we have contributed \$1,000 to the operational budget. On the 25<sup>th</sup>, we need help with registration, badges, and box lunches.

Fundraising - Bob Mulligan stated that, with the help of Boston, a mailing is being sent to about 3,000 for registrations via credit cards and donations. Also being contacted are the 53 affiliates to help underwrite scholarships for victims and/or students.

Speakers - Joe is making arrangements with speakers, the preliminary list of which can be found on [www.votfbpt.org](http://www.votfbpt.org). He said that he would also appreciate some of our rank and file members to volunteer to participate on panels.

Publicity/Marketing - Jim Ebzery is chairing communications via e-mail and regular mail. Joe noted that Jim coined the title of the Conference - "Being Catholic in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Crisis, Challenge, Opportunity."

Logistics - Jim Alvord is organizing greeters and guides; and working on parking and safety issues.

Priests of Integrity Awards - Jim Butler is looking for nominations of Diocesan priests in the States of Connecticut, New York and New Jersey for these awards.

SIGN-UP SHEETS FOR VOLUNTEERS WERE DISTRIBUTED.

**For future updates, please see our website [www.votfbpt.org](http://www.votfbpt.org) and please let any of your friends (who are not online) know what is current, including these Minutes.**

The meeting closed with prayer.

Respectfully submitted,

G. Seymour, Recording Secretary