

VOICE OF THE FAITHFUL
IN THE DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT
November 6, 2003
Congregational Church on the Green

Joe O'Callaghan, Chairman, welcomed the gathering of 75-plus people and opened the meeting with prayer. He then explained, for the benefit of newcomers, that we meet at the Congregational Church through the kindness of Pastor Yordon because our Bishop has banned us from meeting in our parishes. We have yet to receive a reply to our letter of a year ago requesting an explanation from the Bishop.

Announcements –

Greenwich Affiliate – Next **Thursday, November 13th**, Kieran Scott will speak on The Church's Power and Authority, at St. Augustine Church, Larchmont. The next regular monthly meeting will be held at the Christ Church, Greenwich, at 7:30pm, on Tuesday, November 18th. Please check our website, www.votfbpt.org for directions, or call Tom Malarkey (914) 946-7315 about either of these two events.

Tri State Conference – 10/25 – Bob Mulligan, Connecticut Chairman, reported on a very well-received day of outstanding speakers, a very accommodating venue, and a spirit-filled Eucharist at the end of the day for some 1500-plus attendees.

Voice of Compassion Fund – Gifts of \$2500 each to Family Stages and The Merton House, Bridgeport, were gratefully received. A letter was sent to Father DeProfio, Queen of the Clergy Home, requesting an appointment for the purpose of presenting our VOC check for \$2500.

Diocesan Audit – The Diocese of Bridgeport received a high rating for compliance from the Gavin Group on October 12th. On October 17th, the Diocese settled 40 claims against 16 priests in the amount of \$21 million, followed by another undisclosed settlement against Fr. Moore. To these, the claims paid in 2001 totaling \$16 million, are added, for a total of some \$37million paid so far. We have been assured by the bishop that these funds are not taken from the Bishop's Appeal, but that they are paid from the sale of property and insurance. Presumably the property was initially purchased by funds from Church members, and the insurance premiums are also paid for by members.

In the bishop's response to Catholics who chose not to participate in the Bishop's Appeal, he suggests that we are Catholics who are not willing to accept all the teachings of the Church. He also stated that we (VOTF) have to take a position on married priests, women priests and that we need the advice of theologians. Joe responded that we all need to make the distinction between doctrine and structure.

A suggestion was made that we adopt some of the ideas presented by Paul Lakeland – the election of bishops, the retirement of cardinals, the establishment of a constitution. A point was made that Bishop Lori is on record as not accepting Paul Lakeland's teaching.

To a question raised as to how we define ourselves, Joe referred to our stated and published mission and goals. Joe also noted that we are currently involved with a survey and study of parish councils.

New Diocesan Policy – All paid employees and volunteers are required to have criminal background checks done, as well as to attend a 4-hour awareness program. Joe encouraged people to attend parish meetings on this subject, with questions, such as, What is the cost?, Who pays for it?, What kind of information is reported?, How often will this be done?

Financial Report – Mary Jane Range, Treasurer, reported a balance of \$9,772.00. The full report will be posted on our website. The VOC fund will be diminished by the \$2500 donation to Queen of Clergy Home.

JAMES POST, President and Founder, National Voice of the Faithful - Our guest speaker began his talk by addressing the bishop's banning us from meeting on church property. Jim Post stated that "we are who we say we are – faithful Catholics." Further, it is the bishops who have decided that we are a danger to the dioceses. He asserted that "any bishop in any diocese who bans groups such as ours is committing an immoral act. The bishops have to show what we have done to justify the ban." Post referred to Peter Steinfels' book, A PEOPLE ADRIFT, in which Steinfels predicts that "either the Church will become an institution in decline or in transformation, but it cannot continue as it is." Post spoke of the numbers of priests today – 30,000; and the number of active lay people – 30,000, with 35,000 more in training. The result – more than twice the number of lay people than ordained priests will be involved in the work of the Church, which leads to a crucial need for conversation about the laity's role which cannot begin when "there are padlocks on church doors and closed minds."

On the subject of survivors, thus far numbering about 4,000, with 1,000 abusive priests, Post said that there are bound to be more in 2003. The financial settlements have been essential, but that is only the first step; healing and reconciliation with the Church must be done with all four parties –survivors, priests, laity and hierarchy – involved. The task for VOTF is to repair the system in which a dysfunctional culture of cover-ups has existed. The elements that have allowed the abuse to happen – clericalism, power, privilege, secrecy - must be addressed.

Post encouraged the group to continue seeking dialogue with Bishop Lori.

In the period following his talk, questions were asked regarding how much patience we should have. Jim Post replied that since there is no doubt that this is a situation with deep problems, we should not expect quick solutions. Other questions centered around the absence of young adults at our meetings, the exceptionally closed minds of the hierarchy on the American Northeastern seaboard, establishing child safety programs in all parishes, and the need to work with law enforcement authorities in reporting abuses.

The gathering was most enthusiastic in their appreciation of this informative and inspirational talk.

The meeting closed with prayer.

Respectfully submitted,

Gloria Seymour, Recording Secretary

NEXT MEETING – THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4th.