

VOICE OF THE FAITHFUL
IN THE DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT
December 4, 2003
Congregational Church on the Green

The meeting opened with an Advent Prayer around the Wreath, led by Marge Hickey.

Joe O'Callaghan welcomed the 40-50 attendees, inviting comments from first-time participants and also offering the Christmas cookies and eggnog, provided by Jim Alvord, to all. Virginia Doyle introduced three guests from her Stratford group. Joe expressed out gratitude again for the hospitality of the Congregational Church.

Financial Report – Mary Jane Range, Treasurer, reported a balance of \$24,502.71, which includes a gift this year from the Wiggins Foundation (which donated \$10,000 last year) of \$15,000. Joe expressed our deep gratitude to Tony and Rosemary Wiggins, VOTF members who were instrumental in securing this financial help.

A balance of \$2645 was reported for the Voice of Compassion Fund. A check for \$2500 will be presented to the Queen of the Clergy Home for Retired Priests in Stamford. From the balance, the Board suggested another \$2500 to be offered to the School Sisters of Notre Dame, Wilton. Over the past several years, these nuns have hosted many theologians and instructors in the Diocesan Program for Catechists. They now operate a nursery school and a tutoring program.

Our affiliate managed the books for the Tri-State Conference. The total cost was just under \$100,000, every cent of which was raised by the Conference, mostly through admission fees. She noted that contributions are still coming in.

Letter to Bishop Lori, 9/4/03 – This letter was written to the bishop requesting that he rescind his ban on our use of parish property to hold meetings. Fr. Christopher Walsh answered the letter on November 15th (copies of which were available) on behalf of the bishop. It is addressed to VOTF in Fairfield County and signed by Fr. Walsh as liaison to VOTF and states that the “current policy will be maintained.” Joe advised that on December 3rd, he and Peg Mooney and Jim Ebzery met with Fr. Walsh to clarify his role as “liaison.” Joe asked Peg to elaborate on this meeting.

Peg reiterated that their meeting was to explore the nature of Fr. Walsh's role as “liaison.” They decided not to refer to his letter since they wanted it to be a peaceful meeting, not adversarial, and their hope was to keep the door open even though it has been closed to VOTF. Honest expressions were made of VOTF's experience in the Church, and Fr. Walsh stated that he had not volunteered for his role as “liaison” but that the bishop asked him to do it because he is certified in ecclesiology. He said that he does not make a written report to the bishop, and also speaks with Msgr. Cullen and Joseph McAleer when questioned. He expressed being hurt by hearing some comments by Paul Dinter and other speakers. After listening to Fr. Walsh, there was a courteous responsiveness in the group. The VOTF group felt that Fr. Walsh was pleased with the meeting; at least it was a beginning step toward talking. Fr. Walsh noted that, should VOTF want a closed meeting, he would respect our wishes.

Jim Ebzery added that their goal of having an adult dialogue with the Bishop was presented. That, of course, presumes that the hierarchy is willing to be in cooperation and collaboration with us. Jim felt that there was hope.

Gloria Blanchfield Thomas - Joe introduced our speaker, who is Professor Emeritus of Theology, Marymount College, Tarrytown, and has been a Director of Religious Education, and conducts courses on relationships at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. She congratulated VOTF for meeting together to find new ways to become Church. She stated that the “hot button” issues depart from the Gospels and that a new model of Church should be based on the Trinity, the essence of our faith. This model is based on the Divine life of the Trinity. There are not two trinities. God does not have a private life. God's actions reveal God. God's actions are God. God enters the human situation by being in relationship with us. God became human so that we could become Divine. God is always seeking everlasting communion with all creatures. She recommended reading “God With Us: The Trinity and Christian Life” by Catherine Mowry Lacugna. Dr. Thomas stated that the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity has been locked up in itself.

How are we to be Church? We must live ways of outgoing love. It is in the giving community that God lives. We have moved away from the principle that God is shared. The three persons of God are equal; primacy, not superiority, of communion exists. Subordination is not natural, not Christian. We are a Eucharistic community. Jesus' definition of authority is service. Jesus fleshed out God; our role is to flesh out God.

Doctor Thomas advised the audience of her vision of the new church: we must listen, learn, and make communication and dialogue our top priorities. Like modern-day apostles, we should build an inclusive community of equals – based on the Trinity, protecting the world. This will require patience and faith. Our present system served us and failed. We never proffered that we were unchangeable. If we were truly moving together, we would have no fear of change.

Questions centered around the early church in America, with John Carroll asking that he be elected by his peers; the evaluation of priests by priests and lay people, noting that, as in the early church, the lay people would see the qualities in people who should be called to the priesthood.

Announcements – Joe recommended the December 1st issue of “America” – Crisis Management in the Church, by Gluck; and another article by Davidson on the shortage of priests, entitled Fewer and Fewer: Is the Clergy Shortage Unique to the Catholic Church?

Catharine Henningsen recommended an article in the most recent “Gentlemen’s Quarterly” on Opus Dei.

Joe presented a letter written to the Bishop, as requested by David Cerulli, of S.N.A.P., in which a plea is made to remove from service a priest who has admitted to sexual misconduct several years ago. This priest currently serves as a pastor in one of Fairfield County’s parishes. Joe read the letter and asked anyone interested in signing the letter to do so.

For next month’s meeting: Discussion of Background Checks in all parishes.
Discussion of bishops who have and have not banned VOTF meetings.

The meeting closed with prayer, after which more Christmas refreshments were served.

Respectfully submitted,

Gloria Seymour, Recording Secretary

NEXT MEETING – THURSDAY, JANUARY 8TH. OUR SPEAKER WILL BE KIERAN SCOTT ON “AUTHORITY AND POWER.” More information will be posted on our website, www.votfbpt.org