

VOICE OF THE FAITHFUL  
IN THE DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT  
April 1, 2004  
First Congregational Church  
Stamford, CT

Chairman, Joe O'Callaghan, welcomed some forty-five people and asked all those present who are or have ever been involved in volunteer work in their respective parishes to stand. Nearly all present were standing. He expressed the gratitude of VOTF to Rev. Gary Brown, Pastor of the First Congregational Church, Stamford, for his hospitality this evening.

Opening Prayer – The customary prayer card was used, and special prayers were included for Marge Hickey, our Corresponding Secretary, who is recovering from major surgery, and for a change of heart for Bishop Lori to lift his ban on our meeting in our churches.

Treasurer's Report – Mary Jane Range, Treasurer, reported a current cash balance of \$23,075.24, after income of \$1,128 and expenses of \$2,705. A detailed report will be posted on our website, [www.votfbpt.org](http://www.votfbpt.org)

Voice of Compassion Fund – Last year, the VOC Fund totaled \$20,245. Donations of \$2500 each were distributed to The Merton House and Family Stages in Bridgeport, the Queen of Clergy Home for Priests in Stamford, and the Retirement Fund for the School Sisters of Notre Dame in Wilton. This year, we have increased our goal to \$12,500 so that we can make contributions to five agencies. This fund has been established as an alternative to the bishop's fund, the financial statements of which do not clearly define the sources or amounts of monies raised to cover the cost of sex abuse settlements. All of the money raised by the VOC Fund goes directly to the agencies designated. A copy of a letter with details was circulated and will be included in a mailing in the next week or two. Contributions may be sent to VOC Fund, PMB 104, 25-13 Old Kings Highway North, Darien, CT 06820.

Letter to Bishop Lori – A copy of the letter to the bishop was circulated for signatures. The letter requests that every parish in the Diocese set aside one mass each month dedicated to repentance and atonement to restore and renew the Church. It included recommendations that specially written General Intercessions be made for blessing our boys and girls abused by priests, for praying for our priests, for praying for the restoration of trust and credibility once enjoyed by our bishops and priests, and for a renewed Church in which lay men and women will be able to offer their gifts for the well-being of the whole. Copies of the letter will be sent to every pastor in the Diocese as well.

Petition – Copies of a petition to the Pope and all bishops in the U.S.A. are available on the back table for signature and online at [www.votf.org](http://www.votf.org) in which four requests may be selected: 1) for the Pope – to meet with an international delegation of victims/survivors of clergy sexual abuse to begin reconciliation; 2) for the Pope – to hold those bishops responsible who knowingly transferred sexually abusive clergy; to accept resignations when offered, and to call for resignations where appropriate; 3) each U.S. Bishop – to disclose details of his oversight in transferring abusive clergy and clergy who had credible allegations against them; and 4) each U.S. Bishop – to cooperate with civil authorities in investigating crimes by clergy, as well as any negligence or cover-up by those who were responsible for overseeing actual or accused perpetrators.

Tri-State Speaker, May 22<sup>nd</sup> - On Saturday, May 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Tri-State VOTF will present a program from 1:00pm to 4:00pm, featuring Judge Anne M. Burke, of the National Review Board, as its keynote speaker. The event will take place at St. Paul the Apostle Church, 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue at West 60<sup>th</sup> Street, Manhattan. There will be a charge of \$10.00 to defray expenses.

May 1<sup>st</sup> Conference at Fairfield University – Plans are in the final stage for this Saturday conference. Flyers will be mailed to all.

Questionnaire on Parish Councils – people were asked to fill out one of these questionnaires to determine where Councils exist.

VOTF in the Diocese of Bridgeport Election, 2004 – Nomination forms are available for completion this evening. The election will take place at the June 3<sup>rd</sup> General Meeting.

Speaker for the Evening – Our speaker this evening, Landa Mauriello-Vernon, the new coordinator of Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) Connecticut, was introduced by David Cerulli, who has recently been named Director of SNAP for New York. David acknowledged the assistance provided by Joe, Catharine Henningsen and Jim Alvord in finding Landa to be the leader of the newly formed chapter of SNAP in Connecticut. Landa's very moving presentation included her personal history revealing the ease with which a very charismatic nun gained her confidence and friendship. Her parents saw that the nun became her only friend and did not encourage her to enter the nun's order; they even made unheeded complaints to the nun's provincial.

Landa stated that this abuse is really about power – taking advantage of children, knowing they can hide behind the confessional or a bishop or a cardinal. She stated that she wrote to the five bishops in Connecticut asking them to request space in parish Sunday bulletins for an announcement of the creation of SNAP-CT. So far, she has received four replies which were condescending, noting that SNAP people were not “credentialed” and did not know what survivors needed. Only one bishop failed to respond – Bishop Lori of our Diocese. There are now some 37 members in the chapter. They need all the support they can get. “It is only by speaking about it that we can take the power back,” she concluded.

The enthusiastic response of the audience was reflected in the question/answer period which followed. Questions were answered by Landa and David. The nun in questions has left her order; a St. Louis study revealed a high percentage of nuns as abusers, a fact which is largely overlooked because of the high regard in which nuns are held; victims are still coming forward, and since it takes a minimum of ten to twenty-five for victims to speak out, there will be more in the years ahead; tragically, for every person who does come forward, there are many more who have committed suicide.

With the new chapter in Connecticut, most people have contacted Landa through the website, [www.snapnetwork.org](http://www.snapnetwork.org) - they meet on the fourth Monday each month, from 7pm – 9pm.

The subject of “gag orders” was discussed. These orders are imposed on victims to keep the scandal quiet; the victim gets paid to keep quiet or else he/she will have to return the settlement; “gag orders” are never good for the “little guy;” people were urged to contact legislators to seek the elimination of gag orders.

Landa stated that she wanted to go back to church, in spite of hearing a priest say from the altar that, “maybe it never happened.” She does not feel safe in church just yet.

As for false accusations, studies show that these represent less than 2% of allegations. However, we should be aware of devastated priests; the majority are good; but they need to be encouraged to come forward and say what they think.

“We are not looking for a fight,” she said, “we are looking to get well.”

Both Landa and David agreed that the scandal was the creation of the bishops, some of whom continue to cover up.

A Collection was taken.

Closing Prayer – After thanking our speakers and those who came from a distance, Joe led the group in prayer.

Respectfully submitted,

Gloria Seymour, Recording Secretary

**NEXT MEETING - SATURDAY, MAY 1<sup>st</sup> CONFERENCE AT FAIRFIELD UNIVERSITY; 10:00am to Closing Liturgy at 4:00pm. In place of a registration fee, an offering will be collected. Please see [www.votfbpt.org](http://www.votfbpt.org) under EVENTS for details.**

**NO GENERAL MEETING IN MAY. NEXT GENERAL MEETING – JUNE 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7:30pm, at the Congregational Church, Norwalk.**