



Voice of the Faithful™

"Keep the Faith, Change the Church"™

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***CLERGY AND LAITY UNITE IN CALL FOR CHANGE
IN THE INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE
OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH***

NEW YORK, Saturday, May 22--A distinguished Jesuit educator and journalist joined his voice to that of the Interim Chair of the lay National Review Board for the Protection of Children and Young people, and that of the only New York member of the Board in a call for change in the institutional culture of the Catholic Church at a forum held here today before nearly 400 New York-area Catholics.

"There must be a change in the institutional culture of the Church in the U.S., a change in how we communicate, a change in managerial style, and a recognition of the personal and professional contributions of lay Catholics", said Fr. Joseph A. O'Hare, S.J., associate editor of America magazine and president emeritus of Fordham University, at the forum held at St. Paul the Apostle Church in Manhattan. Entitled "A Call to the Bishops: Preserve the National Review Board, Build Trust in the Church," the event was sponsored by Voice of the Faithful of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut.

"Our call for reform within the Church is for authentic, Catholic reform," said the Honorable Anne Burke, Interim Chair of the National Review Board, echoing O'Hare's call for change. Speaking as a warrior returning from the battlefield, Judge Burke acknowledged the difficulties he encountered in working with the bishops over the past two years, but was confident that progress has been made. Among the most notable was the establishment of the National office - the Office of Child and Youth Protection - to monitor through audits the institution effectiveness of each diocese in the nation in regard to the safety of minors.

The gathering took place in the aftermath of the release in February of the audit statistics, which revealed that over 4,000 priests abused more than 10,000 children over the last 50 years, with more than \$500 million in settlements paid by the church.

Judge Burke addressed the issue, saying, "The tragic failure of the bishops to safeguard our children raises serious questions. They have yet to acknowledge the enormity of their own complicity in the crime of sexual abuse." Fr. O'Hare admitted that from his own personal viewpoint, "the most painful discovery was not the actions of individual clergy, but how bishops

reacted to the reports of such abuse. How could these actions, once reported and confirmed, not have led to more decisive action? Why was there passive denial on the part of church authorities? How could they keep reassigning them?"

Burke explained in some detail how the current controversy over the possible postponement of the second round of audits was for the moment resolved. "My colleagues and I were shocked to discover in late March that following a presentation by several of us from the National Review Board before the Administrative Committee of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, we learned well after the fact that the bishops of that committee voted to postpone any implementation of an audit for 2004." She reported that in a recent meeting, the bishops' Ad Hoc Committee and the National Review Board were able to resolve the issue at this time. "Now, it is wait and see", she said.

Pamela Hayes, Esq., a former chief of the Brooklyn District Attorney's Sex Crimes Unit, and a member of the National Review Board with Burke, added the dimension of social justice to her presentation to the enthusiastic crowd. She said, "The sex abuse scandal is about justice for the abused, young and old. But justice also includes the laity, and it also includes our bishops. And what about the priests who have been falsely accused, the priests who kept faith with their vows, yet are falsely accused. Doesn't justice require that they receive the same fair treatment? This particular crisis that we are dealing with is a matter of social justice."

O'Hare was supportive of the report issued by the National Review Board earlier this year. "I found the report to be balanced but candid. It was based on sound theological and religious principles, and was inspired by a love of the church." He went on to note that while there is a role for theological dissent in the Church, the report of the National Review Board was not a statement of theological dissent, but an initiative aimed at the reform of institutional culture in the church today. He admitted that the process will be slow. "How will the culture be changed to a culture of greater transparency? Slowly. Real dialogue requires patience."

Voice of the Faithful, an organization of mainstream Catholics, was founded in 2002 in response to the clergy sexual abuse crisis. Its three goals are to support those who have been abused; to support priests of integrity; and to work toward structural change in full accordance and harmony with Church teaching. Voice of the Faithful's membership exceeds 30,000 registered persons from 50 U.S. states, 39 countries and 203 Parish Voice affiliates throughout the world.

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