

PRESS RELEASE

Amy Hammel-Zabin and Helen McGonigle to discuss Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church

Dr. Amy Hammel-Zabin and Attorney Helen McGonigle will discuss the problem of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church at Voice of the Faithful's monthly meeting on Thursday, February 1, at 7:30 p.m. at the First Congregational Church on the Green in Norwalk. Everyone is invited to attend.

Despite Bishop Wilton Gregory's claim in 2003 that priestly sexual abuse and the attendant cover-up by bishops was "history," stories of priestly predators, financial settlements, and declarations of bankruptcy continue to fill the headlines across the United States and abroad. Coupled with other stories of embezzlement and the misappropriation of parish funds (as at St. John Parish, Darien), it is clear that the Catholic Church is in crisis.

Dr. Hammel-Zabin, raised in a Texas Catholic family and author of *Conversations with a Pedophile: In the Interest of Our Children*, published in 2003, has had significant experience as a music psychotherapist in working with victims of sexual abuse. Attorney McGonigle, who recently obtained a multi-million dollar settlement for a male survivor of childhood sexual abuse, advocated for the extension of the Connecticut criminal statute of limitations for sex offenses.

The stated mission of Voice of the Faithful, an organization of mainstream Catholics, is to be "a prayerful voice, attentive to the Spirit, through which the faithful can actively participate in the governance and guidance of the Catholic Church." VOTF believes that a reasoned dialogue among bishop, priests, nuns, and laymen and women will contribute to the renewal of the Church.

In order to encourage greater lay participation in the governance of the Church, VOTF developed five proposals for structural change: (1) the election of bishops by the clergy and people of the diocese; (2) the right of parishioners to participate with the bishop in the selection of their pastors; (3) the establishment of elected, representative diocesan pastoral and finance councils with real authority; (4) the establishment of elected, representative parish pastoral and finance councils with real authority; and (5) the right of the faithful as members of a parish corporation consisting of their elected representatives, the bishop, and the pastor, to own church property. The full text of the proposals can be consulted at www.votfbpt.org/proposal.html.

For further information about VOTF in the Diocese of Bridgeport and for directions to the First Congregational Church on the Green in Norwalk consult www.votfbpt.org.