

VOICE OF THE FAITHFUL

In the Diocese of Bridgeport

ANNUAL REPORT

July 2013–June 2014

FROM: Jamie Dance, Chairperson

THIS YEAR MARKS VOTF- Bridgeport's twelfth anniversary as an affiliate. It truly has been a remarkable year for us. In late July, Pope Francis named Frank Caggiano the new bishop of Bridgeport. A native of Brooklyn and an auxiliary bishop in that diocese, Frank Caggiano has brought a new vibrancy and openness to the diocese and has extended a welcome olive branch to us. Joe O'Callaghan and I formally met Bishop Caggiano in his office in Bridgeport for an hour-long conversation in early September that set stage for an ongoing and pleasant collaboration. This new relationship has been chronicled in several area newspapers, and the coverage has served to mainstream our formerly "marginalized" organization. The membership has been energized by this turn of events, and turned out in record numbers for Bishop Caggiano's conversation with us on March 13th. The impact that Bishop Caggiano has had on the diocese also extends to a new relationship with his brother priests. In April, Fathers Michael Boccaccio of St. Phillip and David Blanchfield of St. Jerome agreed to speak at our General Meeting, a program that never would have been allowed under the auspices of Bishop Lori. This year, our affiliate also sponsored a new event; a one-day retreat held at the Convent of St. Birgitta in Darien on October 12, led by Joseph O'Callaghan, Jr. It was a wonderfully successful program on a magnificent day. Views of Long island Sound from every room enhanced the whole experience. To say that our world has been turned upside down is almost an understatement!

2013-2014 PROGRAM

Since September 2013, our speakers have included:

Beth McCabe of SNAP-CT, **Tom Kelly**, a survivor, and **Dan Tepher** of the CT Post, speaking on “Where Are We Now? A Historical Perspective.”

Paul Lakeland, speaking on “What Can We Expect from Our New Bishop?”

Terry McKiernan of Bishop Accountability.Org, speaking on “What Was the Scandal: Abuse or Cover-Up?”

Father Paul Mast, speaking on “A Pastoral Response to Abuse.”

Band of Sisters, a film by Mary Fishman.

Bishop Frank Caggiano, speaking on “An Evening of Conversation with the Bishop.”

Fathers Michael Boccaccio and David Blanchfield, speaking on “Being a Pastor in the Age of Scandal.”

Jocelyn Collen, speaking on “Is Service Serving Faith?”

ANNUAL CONFERENCE AT FAIRFIELD UNIVERSITY

The Catholic Church Today: What Do Women Really Want?

March 22nd, 2014

Our Annual Conference, co-sponsored by the Fairfield University Center for Catholic Studies and VOTF-Bridgeport, featured a panel of four distinguished Catholic women. Theresa Kane, RSM, is the former president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious who, in 1979, greeted Pope John Paul II and urged him to open all ministries in the Church to women. Barbara Blaine is the founder and president of Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), an international advocacy group for survivors of clerical sexual abuse. Jamie Manson is a columnist for *National Catholic Reporter*, a frequent speaker and retreat leader, and regular homilist for the New York City chapter of Dignity USA. Erin Saiz Hanna currently

serves as the executive director of the Women's Ordination Conference, the world's oldest and largest national advocacy group working for the ordination of women in the Catholic Church. The panelists were introduced by Paul Lakeland, and each was given thirty minutes to speak to the topic. Table discussions, facilitated by Women's Group members and board members, followed the presentations. Peg Mooney led the discussion that followed and asked facilitators and panelists to comment. It was a terrific success, and many attendees commented on how interesting and stimulating the day had been. We were very pleased with the results, especially given that we had never produced this type of event at any previous conference.

ANNUAL VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR AWARD

VOTF's Saint Anselm of Canterbury Award was presented to Jamie Dance to honor her service to this organization. She served as Co-Chair for four years and as Chair for the last two years.

2014 VOICE OF COMPASSION AWARDS

Since the Voice of Compassion (VOC) Fund's inception, a total of more than \$120,000 has been awarded to a variety of organizations serving the poor and needy. Each year, 100 percent of the money collected is given directly to charity. Contributions to the VOC fund are tax deductible, and interested members are invited annually to serve on the Granting Committee, directed this year by Bob Wilkins. When grants are distributed at VOTF conferences, representatives are given an opportunity to describe their work on behalf of the needy. This year, contributions to the VOC Fund totaled \$9,200. Among those receiving grants were the Bridgeport Rescue Mission, Daughters of Charity, Open Door Shelter, SNAP-CT, and Center for Youth Leadership.

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

This has been a particularly exciting year for VOTF-Bridgeport. Between the outreach by Pope Francis to people on the margins and his insistence on a Church of Mercy, and Bishop Caggiano's outreach to us and his call for a Diocesan Synod, we are feeling very energized. Both leaders have exerted enormous influence in the public arena. In our diocese, Bishop Caggiano is met with prolonged applause in every public appearance. In an article published by *National Catholic Reporter* [LINK: <http://ncronline.org/news/faith-parish/bridges-fairfield-county-new-bishop-reaches-out-through-simplicity-dialogue>], the writer bemoaned the fact that he could not find anyone with a bad word to say about him. He continues to reach out to us and has offered us three slots as general delegates to the Synod that will begin in the fall and last for one year. We continue to address issues of importance to our diocese and the Church at large. Recently we sent a letter urging Bishop Caggiano to put the ordination of married men on the next USCCB agenda. We also participated in the Vatican Survey in preparation for the Extraordinary Synod on the Family. Many board members participated in VOTF National's Assembly in April in Hartford, Connecticut.

Internally, VOTF-Bridgeport continues to flourish because of the dedication and incredible abilities of its members. John Fitzpatrick now coordinates our online presence with webmaster Bill Sweeney and has begun the updating process. He also has put us on Facebook, potentially enabling outreach to a younger generation of interested Catholics. Marge Hickey, although retired, keeps our email lists updated and the news always fresh. Anne Pollock keeps our finances straight and maintains a record of notorious priests in the diocese. Joe O'Callaghan is our voice of reason and go-to person for a well-written essay. Tom Larkin, Anne Pollack, and Jamie Dance will be Synod delegates for VOTF-Bridgeport. Our Women's Group, led by Joanne Bray, continues to look at Church issues from a feminine perspective and to respond when deemed necessary. The Study Group on Church and Related Issues, led by Jamie Dance, discussed two books over the last year: Paul Lakeland's *Catholicism at the Crossroads*, and Robert Nugent's *Silence Speaks*.

THE FUTURE

The outlook for VOTF- Bridgeport has improved dramatically over the last nine months. The whole diocese has been infused with a new sense of purpose and enthusiasm. Bishop Caggiano's enlightened leadership style and his respect for the People of God in the Diocese are life-giving to a diocese that was depressed and angry with the status quo under Bishop Lori. It is, as they say, a whole new day. We look forward to participation in the Synod, knowing that the people will be listened to and their needs met. An open and accountable administration, based on truth and straight talk, has rejuvenated our priests and people. Never before has the Diocese of Bridgeport been more hopeful.