

Voice of the Faithful in the Diocese of Bridgeport

Annual Report – Year of May 2005 to May 2006

Beginning Goals

At the beginning of this year, the Bridgeport Affiliate of VOTF had two major goals – 1) Initiate a major “action” in order to implement the national VOTF affiliate goals of Legislative Abuse Action; and Financial Accountability Action, and 2) To increase membership in VOTF in Bridgeport Diocese.

Performance in Achieving Goals:

Our chapter achieved a resounding success in the first goal. Early in the year a committee was formed, and Chairpersons Peg Mooney and Joe O’Callaghan were elected. The name selected was “Planning Committee for the Election of Bishops.” This was meant to implement the National VOTF action of Financial Accountability, since the committee’s action also included advocacy of election of Financial and Pastoral Councils on both the parish and diocesan level, as well as election of bishop.

2005-2006 Program

Speakers. In the fall of 2005 two speakers addressed our meetings:

Thomas C. Casey, adjunct professor of theology and biblical studies at Fordham University spoke on “The Development of the Concept of Bishop in the New Testament (and Beyond)” at our monthly meeting on November 3.

Kieran Scott, professor in the Graduate School of Religion and Religious Education at Fordham University spoke on “The Role of the Bishop: Vatican II and Beyond” at our meeting on December 1.

The other general meetings were devoted to discussion of the proposal being developed by the Planning Committee for the Election of a Bishop.

Planning Committee for the Election of a Bishop. As the election of bishops was one of nine proposals adopted by the VOTF Convention at Indianapolis in July 2005, VOTF in the Diocese of Bridgeport established a Planning Committee for the Election of a Bishop under the co-chairs, Peg Mooney and Joe O’Callaghan. Together with the other members of the Committee, namely, Dan Sullivan, Jeanne Fogg, Anne Pollack, Marie Rose, Jim Alvord, Bob Mulligan, John Lee, and Dick Maiberger they met monthly (and in April 2006 weekly). In addition to placing ads in the newspapers soliciting input concerning the wisdom of electing bishops and the qualities desirable in a bishop, and requesting comments from all the clergy and religious, the Committee drafted the proposal “The Selection of Candidates for the Office of Bishop” and the “Petition to Pope Benedict XVI” mentioned above, and planned the conference at Fairfield University.

“Elect our Bishops? Why Not?” Conference on April 29 at Fairfield University. As in the past the conference was co-sponsored by the Aloysius P. Kelley, S.J., Chair of Catholic Studies

currently occupied by Paul Lakeland. Professor Lakeland arranged for the use of Fairfield's facilities and moderated the morning session. Attendance was reported at approximately 200.

Fr. Richard McBrien, Crowley-O'Brien Professor of Catholic Theology at the University of Notre Dame, gave the keynote address on "The Election of Bishops: The Return to Tradition."

In the first afternoon session Joe O'Callaghan chaired the roundtable discussion on the election of bishops. Members on the panel were: Sr. Dorothy Ann Kelly, OSU, Provincial of the Eastern Province of the Ursuline Sisters; Susan Troy, a founding member of Voice of the Faithful; John Healey and Thomas C. Casey, both adjunct professors of theology at Fordham; and the psychologist Robert J. Willis, formerly of the Pastoral Counseling Center of West Hartford, and author of *The Democracy of God: An American Catholicism*.

In the second afternoon session Peg Mooney, Joe O'Callaghan, Dan Sullivan, and John Lee, presented a document entitled "The Selection of Candidates for the Office of Bishop: A Proposal by Voice of the Faithful in the Diocese of Bridgeport."

Also presented was a "Petition to Pope Benedict XVI, Bishop of Rome, for the Restoration of Episcopal Elections by Clergy and People." The petition requests the pope to "gather a body representative of all the faithful to establish norms for the restoration of the ancient practice of episcopal elections by the clergy and people of the diocese."

Both the proposal for "The Selection of Candidates for the Office of Bishop" and the "Petition to Pope Benedict XVI" were drafted by the members of the Planning Committee for the Election of a Bishop. Both documents can be consulted at www.votfbpt.org.

A letter enclosing both the proposal and the petition was mailed to Bishop William E. Lori on April 29.

A beautiful Liturgy of Hope celebrated at 4 p.m. in the Egan Chapel brought the day to a close.

Voice of Compassion. The VOC Fund raised \$13,300 which was distributed among the following:

Bridgeport: The Thomas Merton Center - \$2,500; and Shepherds, Inc. - \$1,000.

Danbury: Dorothy Day Center - \$1,000.

Norwalk: Christian Counseling Center - \$2,500; Birthright - \$1,000; Christian Community Action - \$800.

Stamford: Sexual Assault Crisis and Education Center - \$2,500; New Covenant House - \$2,000.

Representing some of these charities were the following: Patty Russell of Shepherds, Inc., spoke at our meeting on January 5, 2006; Dr. Constance Lawrence of the Christian Counseling Center, on February 2, and James Stone of Christian Community in Action, on April 6.

Progress on Second Goal

Our Affiliate Chapter and your Chairperson did not perform up to expectation in the second goal -- increasing membership. We did use newspaper ads, telephone campaigns, and direct mail, but did not budge very many of the “people in the pews” to come to our meetings and participate in our committees and actions. Our Communications Committee, headed by Bob Mulligan, did an excellent job of placing strong ads, as well as direct mail, and there were numerous Letters to the Editor by our members, as well as an Op-Ed by your Chairperson, “It’s time to end Monarchy in the Catholic Church.” We have tried to identify ways we might increase membership, and this should be a top priority for the coming year.

The Future

We have a strong base, with over 250 listed members, and approximately 50 attendees at our monthly meetings at Congregational Church in Norwalk. We must find a way to more strongly state our message that structural change is necessary in the church, so that more people Catholics will abandon complacency and join us. We see the need for VOTF exercising eternal vigilance and calling for structural change as highlighted by two recent happenings: Cardinal George of Chicago, a member of the 5-man USCCB steering committee for sexual abuse (with our Bishop Lori) arrogantly ignored his own guidelines in allowing a Chicago priest to remain on duty after sexual abuse was proven. In addition, the local financial and sexual scandal at St. John’s in Darien indicates that there is not much hierarchal vigilance on these matters in our diocese or parishes.

As an outgoing member of the elected National Representative Council, I will attend the NRC semi-annual meeting in Chicago in early June. The meeting will concern itself with gauging the progress of the actions advocated a year ago at the VOTF Convention in Indianapolis. As it nears the end of my term on the NRC, I strongly advocate that some member of our Bridgeport VOTF step forward to run for election to VOTF NRC, or the VOTF Board of Trustees, in order to keep our voice on the national VOTF scene. Financial Summary attached.

Tony Wiggins