

**VOICE OF THE FAITHFUL (VOTF)
IN THE DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT
Annual Report- July 2007- June 2008**

This is my second and final report as a leader of our local VOTF affiliate. It has been my wonderful experience for personal growth and of community gift to work with fellow adult faithful American Catholics pursuing the original goals of VOTF here in Fairfield County:

- To support survivors of clergy sexual abuse
- To support priests of integrity
- To shape structural change within the Catholic Church

This past year it became clear to many of us on the Board that meaningful contributions to our cause depended on our getting to know each other better, to our becoming better informed about Church history, theology, organization and tradition as well as about the viewpoints of contemporary scholarship, especially that which deals with our goals.

Attendance and participation in Board Meetings by elected leaders was exemplary. In a change of practice from past years, meetings were held in the homes of Board members which fostered hospitality and additional acquaintance opportunities that served to build stronger relationships. We continued with requests for support of the needy through our ongoing Voice of Compassion Fund. 100% of the gifts, a sum exceeding \$9,000, was distributed to worthy groups selected by a volunteer group from VOTF. [Please see FINANCIAL page]

Issues of interest to VOTF ongoing in the Diocese included:

- Federal court proceedings against Father Michael Jude Fay including his sentencing on December 4, 2008 in New Haven Federal Court at which ten members of VOTF picketed outside with signs. Inside victim's statement by Bishop Lori and the new Darien pastor were read but they were not made public in their entirety to all the Catholics of the Diocese through the Fairfield County Catholic (FCC). Fay is not yet in Federal custody.
- Father Michael Moynihan's financial transgressions in Greenwich have not been dealt with publicly by any court or in the FCC. And concerns in several other parishes circulated but have not reached the embarrassing levels in the media as happened in Darien and Greenwich.
- Financial accountability in each parish has changed noticeably this past year with a full press towards standardized recording and centralized reporting, the existence of parish financial councils (as Canon Law had always directed), and the revelation of certain information to parish members on a regular basis.
- CT Supreme Court appeal December of 2006 regarding the Rosado v Diocese of Bridgeport case that was settled and was sealed in the '90s. Freedom of Information requests by four US newspapers have been sought for more than ten years and unsealing of the record has twice been ordered by the Court, only to be appealed by the Diocese. Briefs have been filed and we await oral arguments soon. The reason for interest in this case is the testimony by Bishop Edward Egan and other diocesan leaders about the handling of abuse complaints and abuser treatment.
- The Diocesan website reports facts and information about Church activities in Fairfield County. It notes that the Fairfield County Catholic 'communicat (es) all the news of the Diocese' which is accurate if it means all the news that the Bishop chooses to publish. However, the website has continued to note (The Diocese-At A Glance) for several years that 51% of the population of Fairfield County or 460,000 people are Catholics. Recently in 2008 on the right hand of the same page they note a more recent number 45% or 410,304 people are Catholics. A decrease of 50,000 Church members over this time period has not been addressed. Did they die? Did they move away? Were they suddenly abducted by UFOs? It would seem to be a worthy subject in terms of causes, effects, and responses especially since this Bishop has made evangelization a primary goal of his tenure. How many RCIA last year? The number of clergy decreases as does the health and vitality of current ordained just as their average age gets closer to retirement age.
- Pope Benedict visited the US. His comments on multiple occasions relative to the "deep shame" of sexual abuse of the young and steps that his brother priests needed to act upon provide hope and grounds for change to the extent that there is follow up, in the US, in Australia and in all of the countries where the culture of clericalism and embarrassment of those in power has sought to defend the status quo.
- Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church: Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus by Auxiliary Bishop Geoffrey Robinson (AU-retired) was one of many books dealing with the world scandal of hierarchy mishandling and cover-up with the ordained who misused their power and sexual wants to abuse young

persons. Bishop Robinson visited Fairfield University for a talk sponsored by the Chair of Catholic Studies on May 24 which more than 120 attended. His prepared comments, as well as responses to questions from the audience were, fair minded, factual and fraternal. The talk was not covered by the FCC though his book was unfavorably reviewed with a headline 'Diatribes from Down Under'. Was the headline written before the book was read?

- VOTF National ran an ad in the NYTimes in April preparatory to the Pope's visit calling attention to the sexual abuse unfinished business in the US. Members of our affiliate contributed to the cause and the local VOTF participated with a contribution of \$1,000.
- 90,000 diocesan clergy, employees, volunteers, Catholic High students, teachers, parents and contractors have received training during the past six years regarding the warning signs of abuse and mandatory reporting requirements. Have there been reports of clergy or non-clergy sexual abuse of youth? What about the abuse in Catholic families that has been disclosed increasingly in recent years? Where was the Church? How are rights to accused and responsibilities to the young being handled in a moral and just manner?

Previous year subjects having to do with financial accountability, ways of supporting those who were sexually abused and understanding the role of women in the Church were part of our early planning for our April 26 Conference at Fairfield University. "Who Owns Our Church?" was the title that included addresses on American Church history, theology of the subject and speakers on Women of the Church and their roles in history, diocesan finances and governance.

General meetings included successful picnic outings in Bridgeport in mid-July 2007 and June, 2008 that encouraged the introduction of new faces to VOTF in a social atmosphere.

Tom Gallagher, an attorney and former Church trustee from Greenwich, spoke about the intersection of Church ownership of property and governing law in the State of CT. His own early experience in dealing with a parish with a pastor guilty of sexual and financial wrongdoing was part of his awakening to the need for structural change in CT statutes.

Phyllis Zagano, PhD. From Hofstra spoke November 1, 2007 on "Women in Ministry". Her special attention was to the possibility for female Deacons in the Church just as there had been in the first centuries, women with orders. Her previous work assisting Cardinal O'Connor in New York and serving in the US Navy Reserve where she taught 'Leadership and Management' at the Naval War College made her informed comments especially interesting.

On December 7, Angela Bonavoglia, author of "Good Catholic Girls" expanded on the history of women in the early Church and the need for women, more than 50% of Church members, to exercise their talents more fully on its behalf. Her talk was well received.

Leslie Lothstein, Ph.D. director of psychology at the Hartford based Institute of Living spoke on January 10, 2008 when the meeting moved to the First Church Congregational in Fairfield. He shared an entire bibliography of books and articles that have dealt with the subject of clergy sexual abuse for several decades. He further dealt with the different types of abusers and the likelihood of therapeutic success depending on the nature of their diagnosis from his decades of treatment of both clerical abuser and those who have been abused.

Sister Elisabeth Brinkmann spoke on February 7, 2008 in Norwalk on, "The Foremothers of Jesus and What They Teach the Church Today". She covered the outsider women mentioned unusually in the genealogy of one of the gospels and indicated the importance of each in continuing the line from Abraham. These differences in the context of the times are what inform us today.

In March bishopaccountability.org was invited to Christ Church in Greenwich for a Saturday morning sharing of the information they have archived about clergy sexual abuse of youth in the US. Helen McGonigle, a Brookfield attorney, also a survivor, shared developments in her family story. Several representatives from Bishop Accountability shared information from their database in addition to recommending remedies for the problem going forward.

April 3, 2008 returned us to the Congregational Church on the Green in Norwalk where Dan Sullivan and Joseph O'Callaghan shared information on current financial accountability issues.

The program year ended on June 5, in Norwalk with a talk from Peggie Thorp, co-founder of VOTF and long-term communicator for VOTF as editor of "In the Vineyard" on the topic of "A Woman's Place: Engaged and Unafraid". Peggie was an original co-sponsor of the National Representative Council 2008 passed resolution on the Role of Women in the Church, calling for a full study and examination of that subject.

I personally have written several essays in the past year that have appeared in secular newspapers in the County. These have received positive feedback and no negative letters in response. They have been written respectfully and factually.

I also took part in a Vigil held during April in NYC during the Pope's visit to remember the many victims/survivors of clergy abuse. It also honored the release of CROSSES a book by Carmine Galasso providing visual and text witness to the stories of 37 families. I have also served for the better part of the past year as an elected member of the National Representative Council for Region 1. While I feel we can do more than we are currently doing to assist the voice of the survivors, there are difficulties that must be overcome with compassionate determination.

With regard to supporting priests of integrity, I have met many during the past 24 months, some in service to the Diocese, some who are responsible to a Superior in their community or to another Bishop where they are incardinated and finally those who were ordained at one time and for a variety of reasons no longer practice their full former priestly functions. The stories they have lived inform us of a Church that is different from our Catechism learning.

That leads us to our most important ongoing task in terms of working for structural change in the Church. That is to continue to encourage each other and many others to actively study, learn and share a fuller understanding of our Church and how our special blessings as Americans provide a cultural viewpoint that is congruent with Christ following in its original meanings in the early Church. The Church has seen amazing change over 2,000 years and will undergo similar changes in her future life.

In the past two years the Bishop has not responded to multiple written requests to meet with me (or us). He has also failed to provide a reason for his ban on VOTF meeting on Catholic premises or respond to requests to explain the use of Diocesan funds to appeal to the CT Supreme Court, to provide addresses for the current location of all abusing clergy, to participate in masses for those abused, etc.

Fear seems abundant at this time, whether spoken or not, but we must remember that the Lord told us to fear not, for I am with you. And God is with us in love, not anger, so our response to God's love must be to patiently share with our brothers and sisters a vision of opportunity for our Church that is present in this moment. ***We must continue to provide a prayerful voice, attentive to the Holy Spirit, through which the Faithful can actively participate in the governance and guidance of the Catholic Church.***

Peace to all,

John Marshall Lee, Past Chairman, VOTF in the Diocese of Bridgeport July 31, 2008