

**VOICE OF THE FAITHFUL
IN THE DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT
Annual Report-July 2006-June 2007**

The public scandal involving sexual abuse by clergy of youth and the episcopal mismanagement that allowed it to continue for decades in the US (and unfortunately throughout many other countries) spread across the print media acknowledged by the US Council of Catholic Bishops in June, 2002, caused many able and adult faithful Catholics to gather together in groups to work on and heal that which had caused so much pain, suffering, loss of moral authority and financial cost.

During this year VOTF in the Diocese of Bridgeport continued to locally honor the original goals of VOTF, namely:

- To support those who have been abused
- To support priests of integrity
- To shape structural change within the Church

We planned and held regular programs once again for the purpose of learning and listening to inform and educate faithful Catholics to the practical stance of living their spiritual call 24/7 in this time and place, in the face of church leadership:

- that refuses to meet with them;
- that will not enter dialogue nor explain its ban of VOTF from Diocesan Church property;
- that allows spokespersons with a “bully pulpit” to make statements in the press that are less than true;
- where significant church funds are spent on legal expenses to prevent legal records authorized for release by the CT Courts;
- where it appears there are no consequences as we would understand them that come to clergy who have failed in their roles, and when financial settlements are complete, the whereabouts of alleged sexual abusers are secret; How does this create a safe environment?

Additionally we looked to speakers and writers in the wonderful theological tradition of the universal Roman Catholic Church who could provide an understanding of how clergy leadership might practice openness, accountability and transparency in the governance processes locally and beyond.

Letters to the Bishop- I wrote to Bishop William Lori on several occasions during the year requesting a meeting as well as explanation for VOTF’s outcast status. All but one letter was ignored. In August the Bishop offered a meeting with his Chancellor Nancy Matthews and Sister Alejendra Keen. As a courtesy I met with them on September 26, but inquiry into the role of evangelization among the many cradle Catholics who for years paid, prayed, obeyed and finally stayed away because of what they saw as the hypocritical, secret and expensive behavior of leadership and how such breach might be healed was not acknowledged. A letter in early December, upon the authorization of Judge Aymond to open the sealed court documents from the Cardinal Egan era, encouraged Bishop Lori to provide this gift to the Diocese. It was ignored.

Study Group: In September a broad interest in the subject of Financial Accountability in the Church as it affects the Diocese, each parish and individual Catholics as supporters was reached. It took several months to gain focus on this subject so that we could provide new information to diocesan Catholics. Vice Chairman Dan Sullivan coordinated about 10 volunteer researchers over a five month span to create a report on the nearly \$1Billion of land and buildings that Bishop Lori legally controls. This sum makes no reference to any other types of assets and contrasts mightily to the small actual amount of financial support from the Diocese to good and merciful works as called for by Christ. Questions occur when the avowed purpose of the Church and the actual use of the funds and assets available are compared.

Board Meetings: Monthly meetings were held at the Weston Grange and both attendance and participation was good

Programs-Speakers-:

SEPTEMBER: September 7- Paul Lakeland addressed our group on financial accountability and canon law. On September 28 we had an open member meeting to open up the subject further and to brainstorm, listen and look at parish, diocesan, and personal avenues for approach.

NOVEMBER: Robert Blair Kaiser a writer and Catholic activist spoke about Americanizing our church based on history of the early church in the US and upon an able and willing Catholic laity. He participates in a group called Take Back Our Church.

DECEMBER: Robert J. Willis author and psychologist spoke about the *Catholic Church in America* and the potential for accountability and democratic practices within our church through the embrace of servant leadership.

FEBRUARY: Dr. Amy Hamel-Zabin, clinical psychologist in Greenwich who uses music as a therapeutic tool and author of Conversations with a Pedophile, spoke on experiences with sexual abusers as well as those who had been abused. As a teenager she grew up in the Texas parish served by a famous clergy abuser, Father Rudy Kos. She was joined by Helen McGonigle, an attorney from Brookfield who had current and personal litigation experience relative to youth sexual abuse.

MARCH: Theresa Kane, RSM looked to the Church in the 21st Century as a community of equals and disciples. "Stirrings of the Spirit" created part of a "procession of movement of protesters and prophets." Participating in the creation of these communities, and not institutions was the important lesson. She spoke to women calling them to be authors and directors of their own lives.

APRIL-Conference: FOLLOW THE MONEY: Financial Accountability in the Catholic Church-Speakers Mary Pat Fox, President VOTF reported on happenings across the country; Joseph O'Callaghan talked about *The Money Trail: Financial Management and Mismanagement in the Diocese of Bridgeport*; Dan Sullivan presented *The Edifice Complex: A Report on Church Property in the Diocese of Bridgeport*; and John Lee talked about how lay persons can assist pastor and Bishop in responsible fashion.

OTHER ACTIVITY: In April 2006 the first inkling of major financial abuse surfaced in St. John parish in Darien. Investigations by the Bishop reported in the secular press talked of embezzlement of nearly \$1.4 Million over 5-6years of Bishop Lori's tenure. We reached out to the community with ads asking, DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR MONEY IS? , and invited those interested to attend our meetings. The Bishop termed it "extravagant" but did not indicate the boundary of a simple pastoral life in Fairfield County. Complications appeared as Father Michael Madden along with the parish bookkeeper were whistleblowers without fame. By summer Father Madden resigned from the parish and indicated that he was considering departure from the priesthood. VOTF reached out to those members of the parish who were shocked by the financial as well as the lifestyle revelations of their pastor. VOTF wrote to Father Michael Madden appreciating his behavior as a priest with integrity.

Financial scandal appeared in Greenwich as well in early 2007 when Father Moynihan of St. Mary parish was revealed to have more than one account in the range of \$500,000 that was not according to Diocesan guidelines. The pastor was removed from his position and was not reassigned though it did not appear that criminal activity was involved.

Catholics in the Diocese also questioned diocesan transparency and accountability on the transfer of St. Joseph Manor in Trumbull and two other senior diocesan programs. We made contact with group leadership at one of our meetings and offered support as the story critiqued the sale of three nursing home operations with long term leases for undisclosed sums and the lowering standard of care which accompanied the changes. Specific reference was made to St. Joseph's in Trumbull that had been served by the Carmelite sisters for over 40 years with tremendous community financial support as well.

A pastor in a local parish terminated the opportunity for girls as altar servers. Two members wrote letters to the editor to decry this action that would reserve flowers and linens for the young girls and allow the priest "to bond" with young boys for the purpose of encouraging vocations.

Three major ads were prepared, run, and financed locally in county papers to support our conference and meetings and the outpouring of publicity from the above events. These included two sets of 10 questions on Diocesan accountability. We also hit the topic of slander occasioned by the response in the diocesan newspaper, *Fairfield County Catholic*.

The Voice of Compassion fund granted \$12,000 and distributed 100% of the money raised to Daughters of Charity Nursery School, Thomas Merton House and Shepherd's, all of Bridgeport; Dorothy Day Center of Danbury; Christian Counseling Center, Manna House of Hospitality and Notre Dame Convalescent Home of Norwalk; Sexual Assault Crisis and Education Center of Stamford and Paulist Program for Dialogue and Reconciliation of Washington, DC

A new Board was elected at the Annual Meeting and a process for staggered terms was incorporated.

A summer outing at Fayerweather YC in Bridgeport CT was planned to introduce more people in the eastern part of the Diocese to our group.

We initiate and close all gatherings with prayer. Our hope is that we may slowly find our way as people of God guided by the Holy Spirit on this spiritual journey.

John Marshall Lee, Chairman, VOTF in the Diocese of Bridgeport 9/10/07