

## June 8, 2007 -VOTF disputes report donations falling off

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By FRANCIS X. FAY Jr. , Hour Senior Staff Writer

NORWALK — Voice of the Faithful in the Bridgeport Diocese disparages the report that gained recent national dissemination indicating the national organization is losing financial support.

Joseph O'Callaghan of Norwalk told the members gathered in the First Congregational Church on the Green on Thursday night that the problems are merely the "growing pains" of a young organization.

"We're doing very well here on the local level and I'm sure that is reflected in many other local chapters across the country."

In fact, the report of Treasurer Marilyn Kirchner of Weston showed a healthy balance of \$22,500 for the local VOTF chapter.

A report on VOTF successes in Fairfield County was also heartening to the 30 members attending the first monthly meeting since the chapter's highly effective April convocation at Fairfield University.

The chapter moved forward during the year on each of the three major areas to which it is dedicated: supporting those who have been abused, supporting priests of integrity and shaping structural change within the church.

The chapter devoted an informative program during the year to a look at the abused through the perspective of an art therapist experienced with perpetrators, and a lawyer whose sister was abused and subsequently committed suicide. The chapter has also taken strong positions against the Bridgeport Diocese practice of suppressing documents detailing the role of the clerical hierarchy in the abuse cases.

As for supporting priests of integrity, the chapter discovered in a study that pastors have a limited role in making financial decisions about the parishes they lead. The chapter wrote a letter of appreciation to the Rev. Michael Madden of St. John Parish in Darien thanking him for raising important financial issues that has led to audit of that parishes finances and led to the ouster of the errant pastor. In addition, the chapter has highlighted the eight parish websites in the diocese containing detailed financial information and has written the pastors of those parishes letters of appreciation.

Regarding the reshaping effort to give the laity a greater voice in church operations, the chapter presented an in-depth study of the value of property owned by the 87 parishes in the diocese as well as the diocese itself, as study which raised many questions requiring further study. The study has provided the chapter with a detailed list of all church property in the diocese. It has also provided greater knowledge about the financial structure of the church and the authority given the bishop's office as the final determinant in all parish properties.

"We are pleased that has elicited from Bishop (William) Lori a request to all parishes for a parish financial council and a listing of the contact person in parish bulletins," the chapter reports.

The chapter believes that journalists in Fairfield County look to VOTF members as reliable sources because of solid presentation of positions on church governance and heirarchical accountability. It notes the many opinion pieces and letters from board members in to editorials in the Fairfield County Catholic, the diocesan newspaper.

The members re-elected John Marshall Lee of Bridgeport to a second one-year term as president and Daniel Sullivan of New Canaan also to a second one-year term as vice president. Kirchner was re-elected to a second one-year term as

treasurer, while Margaret Hickey of Norwalk was re-elected corresponding secretary for a fifth one-year term and James Alvord of Norwalk, regional VOTF coordinator, was elected to a first term as recording secretary.

The group will next meet for a picnic July 17 at the Fayerweather Yacht Club in Bridgeport. Several members are planning to attend the national convocation in Oct. 19-21 in Providence when some 1,500 are expected to convene from across the country.