

Our Voice

An E-Newsletter for Those Interested and Involved in The Voice of The Faithful • Connecticut
November/December 2007 Issue Number 21

CONVENTION PRESENTERS EMPHASIZE NEED FOR VOICE OF THE FAITHFUL

By Joanne P. Blair

Speakers at the National VOTF Convention let the group know that their continuing voice was an essential one in today's Church. Beginning with Father Richard McBrien, an old friend and advocate who was keynote speaker, the message was clear. **"Voice of the Faithful has indeed accomplished much during its first five years, but it can accomplish even more in the years ahead, if it has the will and the staying power."** He further stated that "Voice of the Faithful should not attempt to duplicate the work of other fine lay organizations;" rather its agenda "should be limited to the sexual abuse crisis and to issues directly related to it." He then emphasized that many of VOTF's current actions are truly part of their original mission. These include questioning clerical celibacy, calling for accountability from bishops who covered up abuse (thus exposing youngsters to further abuse), supporting the extension of Statutes of Limitations and questioning the whole process by which bishops are selected and promoted.

McBrien left the group with this message: "Keep hope alive, and your imaginations with it! And never forget the words of Paul...I planted it, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth. Therefore, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything but only God who causes the growth."

Internationally known author, speaker, doer and general dynamo Edwina Gately reminded all present that grounding ourselves in God is primary and that the voice of God, once we hear it, "is not to be negotiated with." She was emphatic in her statement that "True transformation, true change comes not from encyclicals and legislation...but passion and we should all hear the broken hearts." **"Voice of the Faithful is about making healing rooms in this broken Church"**, Gately stated, reminding us all that "Voices that flow from integrity are not always welcome" and "the Voice of the Faithful must be the voice of integrity."

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VOTF™ Mission Statement

To provide a prayerful voice, attentive to the Spirit, through which the Faithful can actively participate in the governance and guidance of the Catholic Church.

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THE AMERICAN CATHOLIC: www.taconline.org

How to become involved:

Want to join VOTF or start a Parish Voice affiliate?
Just email Jayne O'Donnell at jaynedirish@yahoo.com

WE NEED YOUR HELP

Need someone to go through approximately 200 names and cull names that are NOT on an affiliate list. If you can spare an hour, email Jayne O'Donnell at jaynedirish@yahoo.com

WANTED: WRITERS, IDEAS, COMMENTS, SUGGESTIONS...write up your affiliate meeting or program..send your ideas, comments, suggestions, to Joanne Blair, Editor, at ejblair@comcast.net

Father Donald Cozzens had the most personalized and positive statement directly for VOTF. "In these difficult times, Voice of the Faithful gives me hope--hope for a priesthood in crisis and a church in crisis. **More than my brother priests, more than our church leaders, you members of the faithful give me hope.** You give me hope because you are not afraid to read the signs of the times...Your voice is in harmony with the voice of the Second Vatican Council which affirmed your right and duty to speak from your experience. The same Council also reminded the faithful that the Church is always in need of renewal and reform."

In some of the most poignant moments of the convention (along with the session on survivors) three **Priest of Integrity Awards** were presented to Fathers Richard Reissman, Steve Stanbury and Kenneth Lasch. **Only Reissman was able to attend and he was visibly moved by the award. He described years of rejection and ostracism by both the bishop and his fellow priests.** It did not, however, stop this committed leader who had marched in Selma. He urged the Delaware Legislature to make monumental changes in their Statute of Limitation; the new statute is considered the strongest in the nation.

Stanbury has also spoken out in favor of survivors and lay Catholics, including addressing the legislature regarding victim's rights. Lasch, who heard the presentation of his award on a cell phone, said his inability to attend was due to a bout with Sub-Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Lasch was at Mendham, NJ, when the crisis broke there; he immediately reached out to the victims and has remained their strong supporter.

The session with survivors was equally moving. A man who had been molested for a period of time in his youth had managed to keep it a secret until 2002 because of his shame. By that time he had married, raised a family of four, now grown, children with a number of grandchildren, had a good job and was a productive member of society. Not even his wife, whom he had married when he was 21 and she was still a teenager, knew his secret. It wasn't until the Boston Globe broke the sexual abuse crisis wide open while he and his wife were listening to TV that he told her his secret. They cried together for hours at the time; October 20, 2007, was the first time he told his story publicly. During the Q & A period the question was asked about how survivors who were doing fine in

their family and work lives feel. A survivor in the audience interjected his response. He noted that he was successful in both his business and family lives, as were the speaker and the moderator; still, every day he wrestled with his abuse, only to wake up the next morning and do so again. It truly shaped his life!

Among the many afternoon Breakout Sessions were those which provided a kaleidoscope of vignettes (both positive and negative) of the American Church in action throughout the country. Members of parishes slated for closing who had protested by taking over their church on a 24/7 basis reminded the audience that four of these vigils are still in progress. This includes a parish in East Boston which has held on for three years.

A speaker from St Albert's of Weymouth described her congregation as "floored and "desolate" when they were told that their very vibrant, fully functioning church was closing. They went into immediate action, writing letters, calling everyone they could think of, inviting the bishop for discussion, all to no avail. As a last resort, they wrote to the Archbishop who upheld the decision to close. That ended "process". The parishioners voted to fight, the Parish Council decided to go into vigil immediately and the parish filed a civil suit stating that the trustee could not authorize the use of their funds, which were ultimately frozen. In the meantime, supported by VOTF, the local community and the media, the parishioners "ran functions as best we could." After 10 months of suspension, St Albert's is again a fully functioning Church!

Another church in Boston had their pastor removed for financial improprieties (money which had been okayed by the parishioners for several previous pastors without a blip). In the meantime, the diocese sent as a replacement the priest who was spokesperson for the archdiocese during the sexual abuse crisis, the worst possible choice for the community. **Emboldened by St. Albert's success, they marshaled a huge march on the chancery.** The old pastor continued in his new assignment in an academic setting, the new pastor left of his own accord and the chancery replaced him with someone more acceptable.

The diocese of Venice, Florida, had a sadder tale. After 5 years of good governance by their former bishop, he retired and was replaced with a new ultra conservative leader.

CALENDAR

BRIDGEPORT AREA VOTF

Will Feature

LESLIE LOTHSTEIN

DIRECTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY
INSTITUTE OF LIVING

**First Church Congregational
148 Beach Road, Fairfield CT
8 PM Thursday, January 10**

(Dr. Lothstein has had extensive experience counseling clergy sexual abusers and has also had interactions with the USCCB.)

WORDS OF WISDOM

Spoken by **Oscar Romero**, Martyred Bishop

THE VIOLENCE we preach is not
the violence of the sword,
the violence of hatred.

It is the violence of love,
of brotherhood,
the violence that wills to beat weapons
into sickles for work.

November 27, 1977

God's reign is already present on earth in mystery.
When the Lord comes, it will be brought to perfection.

That is the hope that inspires Christians.
We know that every effort to better society,
especially when injustice and sin are so ingrained,
is an effort that God blesses,
that God wants,
that God demands of us.

March 11, 1980...spoken moments before his assassination in a San Salvador hospital

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That bishop began by installing kneelers in the church, banning all of the speakers they had scheduled for the coming year, and deep-sixing a plan by Franciscan nuns to establish a residence for the elderly.

At the other end of the country a diocese is rejoicing. Their new Cardinal (Niederauer) met with and welcomed VOTF representatives, appointed his own representatives to meet with the group on a regular basis, and participated in their latest lay synod, which was a huge success.

Ultimately, it is parish closings and the lack of priests which has had the greatest effect on a number of the faithful. To help deal with the situation Parish Life Coordinators have been appointed for 600 parishes in the country. This number stunned those in the audience who had never heard of a Parish Life Coordinator (often a woman) who oversees all parish activities except the celebration of the Mass, which is still the priest's bailiwick. Coordinators are working well in some of the parishes. A particular success is the diocese of Albany which has been very successful in adapting to the shortage of priests, primarily because its bishop works very well with the laity.

But the most unusual anecdote of the day was that of a small parish in the Berkshires. When their pastor died and the parish was due to be closed, the laity simply took over all the work of running the parish and these were not deacons nor coordinators nor lay ministers, just regular people. They even provided their own priests, who come from Weston Priory each Saturday, staying with one family, having breakfast with another and then staying to say Mass. Once a month one of the priests meets with them to discuss parish issues. This has worked well for several years. Perhaps the lesson here is that, given latitude to deal with the problem, the people of the parish may come up with the most appropriate solution for them.



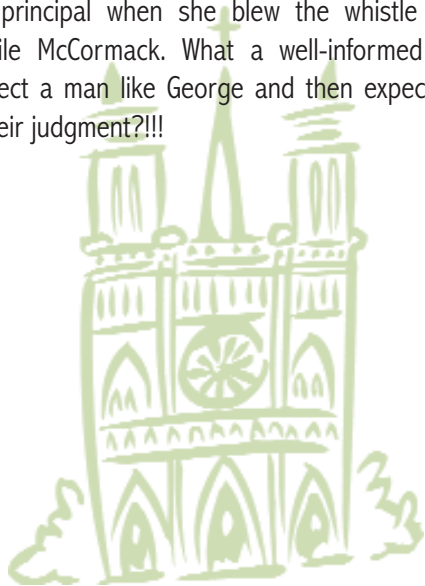
A Reader's Comment

WHAT'S NEXT – BEING TOLD WHEN TO INHALE AND EXHALE?

By Casey Serra

I suppose by now that everyone has read the news that the bishops are going to tell us how to vote. As I recall the good sisters and brothers telling me throughout elementary school, high school and college, I was getting a "good Catholic education so that I would be able to think for myself and ferret out good information so that I could make a sound rational decision". Well I guess the bishops know better. They have put on their pomposity and announced that THEY would tell us how to vote because, apparently, we can't decide such things for ourselves and because it would have "an impact...on the individual's salvation." Further these pompous old men state that if I want to gather more information, I must use the sources THEY tell me to use.

Mind you, this is the same group who spend MILLIONS of parishioner's dollars to hire lawyers to discredit sexually abused accusers. This is the same group whose members declare bankruptcy in order to avoid airing the dirty linen in a court of law. This is the same group who spend MILLIONS of parishioner's dollars to hire lobbyists to fight against any extension of a statute of limitations. This is the same group who recently elected as their president Cardinal George, a man who has completely failed to protect the children of Chicago from the pedophile McCormack. While Cardinal George protected McCormack, he was busy molesting at least two more boys. This is the same Cardinal George who fired a school principal when she blew the whistle on the pedophile McCormack. What a well-informed group! They elect a man like George and then expect me to trust their judgment?!!!



VOICE OF THE FAITHFUL PRAISES ARCHDIOCESE FOR TRANSPARENCY

VOTF National Press Release November 20, 2007

The recently published report by Parish Reconfiguration Fund Oversight Committee (PRFOC) of the Archdiocese of Boston vividly demonstrates how lay oversight of the financial affairs of the Church can make a significant difference. "I am especially delighted to see the hard work of this committee come to fruition, with such thoroughness and candor. I am also pleased that the archdiocese had the courage to publish the report in its entirety, in spite of the criticism," said Sheila Connors Grove, Board member of the Boston Area Voice of the Faithful Council (BAVOTFC). "This is the transparency that is so sorely needed. It is a good step! We commend Cardinal O'Malley."

The lay panel, chaired by former Voice of the Faithful (VOTF) Board Chair David Castaldi, reviewed the handling of the \$66 million acquired by the archdiocese through the sale of closed church buildings and the seizure of the funds of these closed parishes. The committee's report, published in a recent edition of the archdiocese's newspaper, The Pilot, was particularly frank in its criticism of archdiocesan management, especially its former officials, Vicar General Bishop Richard Lennon and Chancellor David Smith.

Despite such obstacles - along with delays in providing information and reluctance by some Chancery officials to adopt the committee's recommendations - the committee was able to determine that there was no evidence of misappropriation in the transactions it reviewed.

"Full disclosure and cooperation from the beginning would have led to the best result," Ms. Grove said. "But the willingness to acknowledge the weaknesses of the previous process is certainly a step forward."

BAVOTFC leaders also noted that the committee found a distinct difference between those parishes whose members objected to the reconfiguration process and those that did not. Protesting parishes were listened to.

AROUND THE CHURCH NEWS IN BRIEF

By Joanne Blair

Dutch Dominicans have produced a booklet that has caused a strong reaction in the Dutch Church. The document, which was sent to every parish, indicates that the Church of the Future may have to allow "inspired members of the community" (i.e., laypersons) to serve Mass in this country where the number of priests continues to decline precipitously. Based on the statements of Vatican II, it is an attempt to renew discussion on the subject and is not a dogmatic declaration. According to the UK Tablet "what is happening at grassroots level in the Netherlands is in accordance with the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. The Council stated that the people themselves and their salvation are the goals of the Church." (Info from the UK Tablet)

David Clohessy, national director of SNAP (Support Network for those Abused by Priests) has received the Lifetime Achievement in Advocacy from the Institute on Violence, Abuse, and Trauma. Clohessy, who is married and the father of two sons, has been working with abuse victims since the 1980s. (Info from the St. Louis Dispatch)

A new Catholic school charging \$25,000 tuition has opened in a renovated parish school in Greenwich Village. The Academy of St. Joseph, as it is named, currently has two students, one in kindergarten and one in pre-K and a six person staff. Cardinal Egan has declared his support for this academy and the possible conversion of other parish schools to this model "because there are parents who want them and we are losing their children to non-Catholic academy schools." Members of several religious orders wondered why the archdiocese was creating an academy type school when that kind of educational option exists in the city's independent Catholic schools. (Info from the New York Times)

The Archdiocese of Washington plans to convert seven D.C. Catholic schools to charter schools, angering parents, students and teachers. The schools are elementary schools with mostly African American students in the city's poorest neighborhoods. The Archdiocese decided it could no longer fund the \$4 million

dollar combined operating deficits (which it will pay this year). Black Catholics United said in a statement that the disappointing decision "raised questions as to whether there remains a place in the Archdiocese of Washington for African American Catholics."

Meanwhile, in St. Louis, **Archbishop Raymond Burke is still warring with the St. Stanislaus Kostka board,** this time by threatening the two newly elected members that they faced excommunication if they joined the Church's leadership. According to one letter he wrote to Stan Rozanski, "you also have placed in danger the eternal salvation of your soul and you have inflicted a severe wound to the communion of the Roman Catholic Church." He also told the second member, Beatrice Krauze, to get a canon lawyer to represent her. Both members called Father Tom Doyle, who is handling the appeal of the earlier excommunications to the Vatican; Burke rejected the choice of Doyle and assigned Msgr. Mark Trivituso, head of the church's state appellate court to represent them...and the beat goes on.

Members of VOTF and SNAP joined together to protest against Bishop Murphy, Rockville Diocese, for using the pulpit to speak out against legislation that would give victims of childhood sexual abuse more time to file lawsuits and seek criminal prosecution. At the annual Red Mass for attorneys in Suffolk County he questioned whether that legislation was intended "to profit lawyers more than victims." VOTF and SNAP members handed out pamphlets criticizing Murphy for his opposition to the bill outside St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church in Garden City. "He was mixing church and state in a house of God" said one of the protestors. (Info from Newsday.com)

Another view was presented by Attorney Charles Molineau who spoke at the Society of Catholic Social Scientists Annual Meeting on the topic "The Abuse-and-Cover-up Scandal: The Church Should Not Oppose Extending Statutes of Limitation." In his introduction he noted that "The mission of the Catholic Church is evangelization...The Church has had a continuing evangelization disaster, a public relations disaster, on its hands since 2002...partly the result of the inversion of episcopal priorities: placing concern for property and the institutional Church ahead of concern for souls. The present public opposition, by most dioceses, to extending statutes of limitation continues the same mind-set and exposes the institutional church to the charge of hypocrisy. It should end."

OTHER VOICES AROUND THE COUNTRY

By Joanne Blair

WAVOTF (Winchester Area MA) will present member Richard Buck discussing his thesis entitled "The Role of the Laity in the Church" at their January 28 meeting.

On December 6, **VOTF Bridgeport CT** hosts Angela Bonavoglia, award winning journalist and author of "Good Catholic Girls: Women Leading the Fight to Change the Church." Leslie Lothstein, Ph.D., Psychology Director of the Institute of Living, will address the group on January 10. Lothstein who, along with his colleagues, has treated over 600 priests, notes that "Your spiritual life is the most important part of your life, because it connects you to the deepest part of yourself, and if you feel your soul has been murdered, how are you going to relate to other people, how are you going to love?"

Coastal Delmarva VOTF also focused on the sexual abuse crisis at their November 28 meeting. Father Quinn Connors, O. Carm., who has served as a member of the clinical staff at St. Luke Institute, which treats psychological and spiritual problems of men and women religious and clergy, addressed the group.

"The Real Costs of the Sexual Abuse Crisis in the Catholic Church" was the title of a conference presented by **VOTF OF Palm Beach County** on November 10. Father Tom Doyle and

Jason Berry were the presenters. Despite being immersed in the crisis for decades, both men remain devout. Berry commented "I have held on to the gift we were taught we receive. I have struggled with it, but here I am." Doyle added "I had to probe my own soul and say what is it I believe? Now I believe I've been liberated from the control the institutional church has on me."

Twin Cities VOTF (Minneapolis/St.Paul, MN) sponsored a healing service on November 2 for victims of sexual abuse, their relatives and anyone affected by such abuse at the Klas Center at Hamline University, St. Paul.

Carmine Galasso discussed "Crosses: Portraits of Clergy Abuse" at the November 19 meeting of the **Westchester VOTF**. The group met at the Larchmont Avenue Presbyterian Church.

On a different note, Father Brian Hehir, past president and CEO of Boston Charities, discussed the work of Catholic Charities and social challenges at St. Rose of Lima, Topsfield, MA on November 18. Father Hehir spoke as part of the Faith Formation series presented by VOTF.

(Clearly, VOTF members still take their call to support survivors of clergy sexual abuse very seriously)

GERALD RENNER WILL BE MISSED

(Info from VOTF National website)

Gerald Renner co-authored with Jason Berry a book that literally reached the Vatican in its dogged tracking of clergy sexual abuse. "Vows of Silence" remains on the short list of books that document as well as humanize the horrific dimensions of seeking justice when one door after another is shut. Gerald died on October 24. Both he and Jason were familiar faces at many a VOTF and survivor support meeting. Voice of the Faithful extends our condolences to his family, friends and colleagues.

Spread the Word

Invite a friend to the next meeting.

EXCERPTS FROM FATHER LASCH'S STATEMENT ON RECEIVING PRIEST OF INTEGRITY AWARD

Father Kenneth Lasch, one of the three Priests of Integrity who were honored, explains why he was unable to be present at the VOTF conference...

I would be addressing these words to you in person today but for the fact that I myself at the tender age of 70 have found it necessary to be engaged in therapy for what I will call sub-post traumatic stress syndrome. Twenty-two years is a long time even for someone as experienced and defiant as I to face a wall of silence interrupted only by periodic stonewalling and excuses by those who had the power to heal but chose instead to use that power to re-victimize those whose wounds were still raw by prevarication and equivocation.

And how he came to be a supporter of abuse victims...

On March 21st, 1985, my life as a Roman Catholic priest, pastor and human being changed forever. It was the day on which Mark Serrano revealed that he had been molested and raped by one of my predecessors, James Hanley, in the very same rooms I then occupied as the pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Mendham, New Jersey.

Shortly after Mark's disclosure, I made a preferential option for victims of sexual abuse by clergy or religious. In essence, I made a commitment to Mark and through Mark to all victims of sexual abuse that I would stand with them publicly and privately and would never act in their name or on their behalf without consulting them.

Moreover, I committed myself to data-based decisions as opposed to power-based decisions. By that I mean that all my decisions and actions would be based on hard and soft data rather than on force or fear or power. Church leaders tend to use force, fear and power rather than data and positive affirmation to enforce their teachings and decisions about the wellbeing of Catholics... They have deleted the ancient notion of 'sensus fidelium' from their theological lexicon.

And ended with hope for the future...

I dream of that day when our bishops will speak as vehemently against the slaughter of the soul of those who have been sexually abused by a priest or religious as they do about the death of a child in the womb.

I dream of that day when bishops, priests, deacons, religious and lay people will once again consider their common baptismal call to be one people of God, sharing in the joys and pains of the entire Body of Christ, indeed of the world, as the most significant sign that Christ is indeed alive. I dream of that day when transparency will replace secrecy, when truth will be honored not by exception but by rule, when integrity will be the umbrella virtue that authenticates the gospel without equivocation.

Until that day, my words remain firm: "There will be no forgiveness and healing until there is justice; no justice until there is the full disclosure of truth; no disclosure of truth until there is full accountability."

We are not there yet but we must not let hope die.

I am deeply grateful for and humbled by the honor you have conferred on me.

VOICE OF THE FAITHFUL PRAISES

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"To me, this clearly signals that when the laity speak up, there's a better chance they will be heard," said Ms. Grove, "even when some responses are too little or too late."

Also notable was the change in the effectiveness of the committee with the new archdiocesan leadership. The report underscores their commitment to "create a culture of service to parish communities and to increase transparency in archdiocesan business dealings." This is a very promising sign. The report concludes by saying the committee "hopes that Cardinal O'Malley will increasingly draw upon the gifts and talents of the laity to assist in the financial and administrative affairs of the Church."

"This is what Voice of the Faithful has been looking for since its founding. This committee's work offers us hope. Perhaps trust will be possible again," says Sheila Grove. "We are proud of David Castaldi in his leadership role as Chair of the committee. As an involved, committed Catholic, he demonstrated the very best of VOTF."

What Does Justice Look Like in 2007 to Adult Fairfield County Catholics?

By John Marshall Lee, Coordinator VOTF in the Diocese of Bridgeport

The Federal Court sentencing date for Reverend Michael Jude Fay, an American Catholic priest of the Diocese of Bridgeport, is scheduled a few days from now. Yesterday, someone asked me how I might advise Judge Janet Bond Arterton were she to seek my counsel on the punishment of this Roman Catholic priest who after 12 years as pastor of St. John Parish in Darien, CT left in disgrace in spring 2006 when an audit revealed that he was providing himself with an expensive way of living provided by the contributions of the people in the pews.

Mind you, Arterton hasn't asked me and I do not expect that she will though someone else actually did. I find that curious and inquiring people of God ask questions. Catholicism is faith based but has also featured great thinkers who have used observation, study, questioning, dialogue and reasoning to illuminate their practice as Catholics in this world. Should we expect less of ourselves today as an educated public in the pews?

This fall Father Fay, who has suffered from cancer for several years, pleaded guilty to one count of interstate transportation of money. Early media reports of embezzlement and fraud, crimes that might have been prosecuted in state court became a federal charge after plea bargaining. Darien parishioners and other Catholics can be forgiven if they felt that the misuse of church funds to the extent of \$1, 200,000 over years 2001-2006 was a crime against them. However, they have since learned that they do not own their parish church or have any legal interest in the funds they contributed to their parish nor do they have any legal standing when these matters are considered. The bishop controls all diocesan properties and funds.

The Catholic Church seems unique among major religions in appropriating all handling of money and property to the ordained. But that is what the institutional Church directs under canon law. It is not clear what seminary course provides future priests with the info and expertise for handling finances of such magnitude. Neither do I know the priests and bishops who have advanced credentials in economics or finance. Doubtless there are some. But canon law provides such financial power regardless of desire or qualification.

When the first stories appeared in 2006 about St. John Church and alleged misuse of church funds by Father Fay, Bishop Lori ordered an independent audit. I am curious why

the requested audit only went back to 2001 (when Bishop Lori was appointed Ordinary) rather than the date years earlier when Fay first came to St. John as pastor. Was there evidence that Father Fay's criminal behavior began only after Bishop Egan's departure? Or is there a previous review of that time that failed to show any wrongdoing? Does anyone suspect that Father Fay's failure to "live a simple life" was of longer duration and therefore was more expensive to the community than has been revealed?

As the story faded from the front pages during the past year people speculated whether there would be any legal charges. They were also curious about the recovery of funds and where such money would be credited. They inquired about Father Fay's location, status as a priest, and what would happen to him in light of the multiple public allegations of wrongdoing. Father Fay's letter to parish supporters this past spring asking for assistance with over \$100,000 of legal expenses indicated that there was ongoing legal activity.

When the U S District Court in New Haven recently faced Father Fay, it was not for a public trial but rather for accepting his guilty plea for the record. Father Fay publicly accepted responsibility for felonious behavior in his handling of church funds. The plea bargain resolved matters quietly and out of public view. The final step of the judicial process is the upcoming sentencing.

With respect to Father Fay, most people hope that he is able to deal with his medical challenges successfully. They recognize that he is human as are the rest of the people of God and that, as such, he was prone to error. However, as a man trained and ordained to a ministry and life that publicly put him "in the footsteps of Christ", much was expected by the community. Even Bishop Lori had appointed him as the sole clergyman to the Sexual Misconduct Review Board in the Diocese of Bridgeport to work on the 2002 Dallas Charter providing a safe environment to children and youth. Respect was given to Father Fay as a man of God almost automatically, though it was not necessarily earned by his activities. Today that automatic trust, respect, and moral authority for Catholic priests from the faithful has been seriously undermined by Fay's behavior, as well as that of others who failed in modeling the Christ of scripture.

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And questions about basic economic issues in Catholic Church life continue to arise. What does a Catholic priest earn? To what non-taxable support in the form of housing, auto expense, or other benefits is he entitled? If age 75 is the normal retirement age in the Diocese of Bridgeport, why are there no vested benefits after 20 or 30 years of service as is common to pension plans? What available benefits are paid for by the priest? By the parish? Or by the diocese, whose bishop commands the obedience of priests in his area? If a priest becomes not healthy, physically or otherwise, in justice, how is he supported by the bishop? And finally, the bishop has commended that his priests pursue 'a simple life' but where has Bishop Lori publicly spoken to that and defined it for his priests, for the people in the pews, and most especially for the parish finance council members who consult for the benefit of the community?

Our times demand a greater practical knowledge and active participation in the affairs of our local Church communities by the people in the pews. A bishop and fewer than 200 active priests with average age 65 should not be expected to operate alone. Church structure and governance have undeniably undergone many changes over 2,000 years. Were our current governance practice to feature more open, accountable and transparent practices, the people of God would be a much stronger community for it.

As an American adult I expect that Father Fay will surrender himself to the judgment of the court system enforcing "Caesar's laws" at his sentencing. There is a spiritual opportunity present in this. I recall the saying, "It is not what happens to you that is important, but rather what you do about what happens to you." A court enforced "simple life" may facilitate reconciliation and rendering unto God that which is due on the part of Father Michael Jude Fay. I personally hope that he has sufficient time from the sentence imposed to heal in all aspects. Making the parish whole for its financial loss is a matter of diocesan stewardship including possible insurance coverage or legal action and that may require more time. And for the individual Catholic in the community at large there is an invitation as all of this plays out to grow up and fully embrace an adult role as an educated and responsible American Catholic: to question, to study, to consider and to prayerfully reflect on what you are called to accomplish in your life.



from Associated Press files

Rev. Michael Jude Fay, 56, former pastor of St. John's Roman Catholic Church in Darien, Conn., leaves U.S. District Court in New Haven, Conn., Wednesday, Sept. 12, 2007.

Fay pleaded guilty to one count of interstate transportation of money obtained by fraud. When sentenced, Fay faces a term of ten years imprisonment and will be required to pay restitution to his victims.

Fay shopped at Bergdorf Goodman, Saks Fifth Avenue and Nordstrom, drove a Jaguar, attended a sports club, bought jewelry from Cartier, spent \$130,000 for limo rides for himself and his mother, and stayed at hotels such as the Ritz Carlton, Hotel De Paris and the Four Seasons, according to an investigative report released last year by the Bridgeport Diocese. He spent tens of thousands of dollars on home furnishings and meals and more than \$20,000 to mark the 25th anniversary of his ordination, the report said.

He also bought a condominium in Florida with another man. Federal investigators said Fay also spent money to buy a condominium in Philadelphia.

Fay and his attorney, Lawrence Hopkins, declined to comment outside court. In the hearing, Fay said he had undergone chemotherapy for prostate cancer but the treatment was not working.

He was released on a \$50,000 bond; sentencing is set for Dec. 4.

The diocese thanked federal authorities for investigating the case.

"We pray that today's announcement will help the Saint John Parish community put a sad chapter of its history behind it and finalize the healing process," the diocese said in a statement.

Fay remains unauthorized to function as a priest, church officials said. The parish has received restitution in the form of cash, real estate, and personal property worth about a few hundred thousand dollars, church officials said.

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