

## VOTF- Bridgeport General Meeting

### Minutes

March 5, 2009

Dan Sullivan, co-chair, called the meeting to order. The opening prayer, introduced by Marge Hickey, followed.

Announcements included: the treasurer's report by Marilyn Kirchner who noted that the Voice of Compassion fund stood at \$9195, and a reminder that our annual conference will be held on March 28.

Joe O'Callaghan introduced the speaker, Sister Judith Kubicki, Associate Professor of Theology at Fordham University, and a Sister of St. Francis. Her topic was "The Presence of Christ in the Gathered Assembly."

Sr. Kubicki began her talk by discussing ways in which the Church understands the congregation as the Body of Christ. She referred to the documents of Vatican II as stating that Christ is always present in the Church, especially during liturgical celebrations, and it is in these celebrations that the congregation has the opportunity to encounter the risen Christ in the assembly. Furthermore, it is in the unity of the assembly that the Body of Christ is found. This essential awareness is instrumental in cultivating a sacramental worldview that further encourages the People of God to fully understand themselves as members of the Church. In turn, this awareness allows the assembly to reject the modern mindset that views the person as autonomous and purely rational. It is in the failure of the intellect to solve the problem of bringing order out of chaos that led to the appreciation of emotions and intuition as ways to find truth in the postmodern world.

This sacramental focus, where we respond to God's revelation in human experience, can best be expressed in worship where the assembly is open to the sacred and holy in creation, and where meaning is found in the interplay of religious symbols and ritual. It is a way of seeing the world and looking at life through the framework of the celebration of the Eucharist, where the invisible divine presence becomes present through the created reality of the sacrament. But, Sister Kubicki said, sacramentality has an earthly dimension that allows us to experience God's presence and God's absence, and that serves as a promise of what will be revealed in the fullness of eternity. The cultivation of our openness to God's presence in us and our world is one way in which we respond to God's invitation to us as a result of our baptism. Our receptivity is dependent on our senses, since our bodies are the location of our experience of God. Liturgy, therefore, becomes the locus for our experience of Christ among us.

It is Christ's presence in the assembly that enables us to see Church as sacrament. This symbolic consciousness of the Risen Christ is the primary goal of liturgy. St.

Augustine said that one must be a member of the Body of Christ in order to make the Eucharist real: "Be what you can see, and receive what you believe." During the Middle Ages, there existed a theological distortion concerning the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The Eucharist was adored, thus allowing symbol and reality to be confused, and creating a negative implication for liturgy and ritual. Sr. Kubicki said that how symbols are celebrated can mediate or obscure them to the assembly. The power of ritual symbols is in their ability to show theological meaning. It is important that rituals enhance the assembly's ability to experience itself as gathered in the presence of Christ. And it is in the faithful and repetitive experience of ritual that we build an anticipatory presence of Christ in the assembly. Thus, Christ's presence in us becomes a pre-witness of God in the world.

The question and answer period reflected the gathering's appreciation for Sr. Kubicki's presentation. Most questions revolved around how parishes could implement the liturgical improvements that her talk suggested. Sister responded that implementation will be a slow process that most likely will occur on the parish level first.

Dan Sullivan brought the meeting to a close by thanking Sr. Kubicki for the interesting and thoughtful presentation and announcing the Annual Conference at Fairfield University on March 28.

Submitted by: Jamie Dance, for Peg Mooney, Recording Secretary