

The June 2003 issue of "St. Anthony Messenger" is titled "Crisis in the Church."
This special edition of VOTF - News, is from that single issue of the Messenger.
Of special interest to VOTF - Bridgeport readers are some excerpts.

Voice of the Faithful
'Keep the Faith, Change the Church'

By John Bookser Feister
St. Anthony Messenger

What started in a Massachusetts parish claims more than 30,000 members nationally a year later...

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Eight bishops have come out publicly against Voice of the Faithful, and many pastors in other dioceses will not allow Voice affiliates to use Church facilities. Bishop William E. Lori of Bridgeport described the group as dissenters, telling reporters at the USCCB meeting last November that their "Change the Church" motto is problematic. Archbishop John J. Myers of Newark called the group "anti-Church and, ultimately, anti-Catholic."

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Along with other VOTF members, Krueger (VOTF Executive Director) is puzzled and taken aback by some bishops' distrust of the organization. He cites his own membership polls in defense against the claim of being anti-Catholic: "About 80 percent of our members consider themselves to be very active in their parishes." Those drawn to VOTF are those "heavily invested in their faith," he adds.

The charge of dissidence raises his hackles: "There's almost a cruelty to that statement. Not only does it put a smear on local Catholics who are in Voice of the Faithful, it's almost a threat against any Catholic who has a question about the Church and wants an answer!"

Rather than being divisive, as some of VOTF's critics claim, Krueger insists that his organization is a voice of unity.

Bishop Lori, who banned VOTF, speaks of this unity, too, using the term communion, which he told reporters at the bishops' meeting in November is "not about pushing an agenda, but opening our hearts to a truth which sets us free." His objection to the organization is specific to his diocese, he said, not beyond. Rather than "Change the Church," he said, "it should be, 'We'd like to probe the teaching more deeply.'"

Krueger insists that the crisis itself—not the victims and their supporters or the media—has been tearing the Church apart. "In order to get past this crisis," he says, "there has to be healing. And as long as there is no healing, there will be an open wound. In order for there to be healing, there needs to be reconciliation; in order for there to be reconciliation, there needs to be truth. If we take a look around the Catholic Church and say, 'Who in the Church is acknowledging that this has to take place?' we find that the bishops are in a position, that, for whatever reason, they want to keep the truth behind chancery walls."

He concludes that some bishops have banned VOTF out of fear. First of all, seeing laypeople come together in a new way signals change. "Everyone is afraid of change," says Krueger. "We're asking for things like accountability and transparency. It's reasonable to assume that this could change the order of a bishop's life." Some bishops, particularly in the Northeast, he says, "were not able to view us in the truth of who we are. We were banned before they even met with us!"

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