

## PRESS RELEASE

### VOTF TO ASK AT CONFERENCE: “WHO OWNS OUR CHURCH ?”

“Who Owns Our Church?” will be the topic of a conference at Fairfield University on Saturday, April 26, 2008 sponsored by Voice of the Faithful in the Diocese of Bridgeport and The Aloysius P. Kelley, S.J., Chair of Catholic Studies.

David O’Brien, the keynoter, will speak on: “Who Owns Our Church? Trustees and Trusteeism in the American Church.” In the early nineteenth century boards of lay trustees owned parish churches and hired pastors. Conflicts between pastors and people, pastors and bishops eventually led the bishops to demand absolute ownership of parish churches. The battle over trustees was so intense that the term “trusteeism” has a decidedly negative connotation among bishops and clergy today. In the State of Connecticut ownership is now vested in the parish corporation consisting of the bishop, the vicar-general, the pastor, and two lay trustees appointed by the clerical members.

David O’Brien, professor emeritus of American Church History and former director of the Center for Religion and Ethics at the College of the Holy Cross, recently retired as a member of the Board of Trustees of Voice of the Faithful. His many books include: *Public Catholicism* (1996); *From the Heart of the American Church: Catholic Higher Education and American Culture* (1994); *Isaac Hecker, an American Catholic* (1992); *The Renewal of American Catholicism* (1972); and *American Catholics and Social Reform: The New Deal Years* (1968).

In addition to Professor O’Brien, Paul Lakeland, who holds the Aloysius P. Kelley, S.J., Chair of Catholic Studies at Fairfield University, will speak on “Who Owns Our Church? A Theological Perspective.” Professor Lakeland, a long-time supporter of Voice of the Faithful, is well known as the author of the seminal book, *The Liberation of the Laity* (2003), and *Catholicism at the Crossroads: How the Laity Can Save the Church* (2007).

Finally, speakers representing VOTF’s three study groups will briefly address the issues of Church governance, the role of women in the Church, and Church finance. A free and open discussion of these matters by the speakers and the audience will follow.

The conference will open at 9:30 a.m. and conclude with mass at 4 p.m. All sessions will be held in the Oak Room of the Barone Campus Center. For further details and information about registration please see [www.votfbpt.org](http://www.votfbpt.org).