

# Our Voice

An E-Newsletter for Those Interested and Involved in The Voice of The Faithful • Connecticut  
April 2008 Issue Number 24

## CATHOLICS REACT TO POPE'S COMMENTS ON SCANDAL

By Elizabeth Hamilton, Hartford Courant Staff Writer (Reprinted with permission of author)

When Jayne O'Donnell sat down to listen to Pope Benedict XVI discuss the sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church Wednesday evening, she flashed back to a moment last May, standing in line while waiting to enter the Sistine Chapel.

Through the windows, she and her husband, Edward, could see the ancient, majestic buildings of Vatican City spread around them. They stood there in a kind of awed silence until Edward nudged her.

"See what you're up against?" he said, referring to O'Donnell's attempts to make church leaders in the Hartford archdiocese accountable for the abuse of children by priests.

The truth of that statement is certainly not lost on O'Donnell this week as she and other Connecticut Catholics closely follow Benedict's first visit to the United States as pope, waiting with varying degrees of anxiety and interest to hear how the 81-year-old pontiff would respond to the scandal that has produced thousands of victims and cost the church more than \$2 billion in settlements.

If anyone feared that the pope would ignore the scandal, they were wrong. Benedict has raised the issue early and often, speaking of it on the plane trip from Rome, while addressing his American bishops Wednesday evening and again Thursday during a Mass attended by 46,000 people at Washington Nationals stadium. He also held an impromptu meeting with survivors of sexual abuse Thursday.

But as O'Donnell and others have observed, Benedict's statements about the scandal have not left them with much confidence that the pope --while expressing profound shame and sorrow about the abuse -- is willing to take the steps they believe are necessary for the church and its people to heal.

continued on page 2

## 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.*

### AFFILIATE FACILITATORS:

#### Downtown Hartford

Doris Bourque: [dorisbourque@cox.net](mailto:dorisbourque@cox.net)

#### Greater West Hartford

Bill Carroll: [tbc7288@aol.com](mailto:tbc7288@aol.com)

#### Greater Farmington Valley

Dave Blume: [djbmo@aol.com](mailto:djbmo@aol.com)

### HELPFUL LINKS:

**National VOTF:** [www.votf.org](http://www.votf.org)

**Hartford Regional VOTF:** [www.hrvotf.sytes.net](http://www.hrvotf.sytes.net)

**Bridgeport VOTF:** [www.votfbpt.org](http://www.votfbpt.org)

### How to become involved:

Want to join VOTF or start a Parish Voice affiliate?  
Just email Jayne O'Donnell at [jaynedirish@yahoo.com](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:ejblair@comcast.net)

## CATHOLICS REACT - continued from page 1

At the top of the list are the creation of a worldwide Catholic policy on child sexual abuse and the censure of American prelates who ignored or sought to hide the actions of abusive priests.

"He can't ask for their resignations, but he can censure them and he should," said O'Donnell, who attends St. Timothy's Church in West Hartford and sits on the national board of trustees of Voice of the Faithful (VOTF) -- an organization of mainstream Catholics seeking to change the church culture from within.

The closest the pope came to a public scolding of the 3000 American bishops and nine cardinals sitting before him Wednesday night, however, was the observation that the scandal was "sometimes very badly handled."

Depending on where they sit -- on the altar, in a pew every Sunday, or outside the parish doors -- the pope's comments rang differently for different Catholics. Also different are their beliefs about where the American church resides on the continuum of healing from the scandal, and how much impact this or any pope can have on that process.

For those who were abused by the clergy, the pope's statements about the abuse haven't gone nearly far enough to promote true healing.

"To pay this kind of lip-service to the problem just isn't sincere when we know the church's history has been one of secrecy," said Helen McGonigle, a Brookfield resident who was abused by the Rev. Brendan Smyth when he was posted at Our Lady of Mercy Church in East Greenwich, RI, in the 1960's and 70's.

McGonigle can't even really contemplate the church's overall healing -- she stopped attending Mass in college and is still focused on her own recovery.

David Clohessy, national director of The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), was equally critical.

"The message from the church is clear. Molest a kid and you may be suspended, but cover it up and nothing happens," said Clohessy. "No bishop has ever been disciplined, and if the pope were just to do it once, we think it

would have a tremendous impact. It would send shock waves through the church."

Clohessy said the church is still mid-point on the healing spectrum -- if that. "I was stunned by the results of a ABC-Washington Post poll that said from February '04 to today, the number of Catholics distraught by the church's handling of the crisis jumped by 20 percent," Clohessy said. "That would strongly suggest that even among mainstream Catholics, nevermind lapsed Catholics, the church still has a long way to go."

But for the Rev. Michael Dolan, vocations director for the Archdiocese of Hartford and the priest assigned to Trinity College, the church is further along.

"We've grown in awareness and we've grown in compassion," Dolan said. "I always say that suffering is a great teacher."

Dolan said the church has radically changed the way it screens candidates for the priesthood. "It used to be that you filled out an index card and there were so many in the seminary they couldn't keep track of them all," Dolan said. "Now, we look at everything -- and I mean everything -- in their lives."

Since 2002, when the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops passed the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, each American diocese has been required to provide abuse prevention training for not only its clergy, but anyone who works with children, even in a volunteer capacity.

Each diocese is audited annually to ensure that it is complying with the requirements, and although critics of the church say the church often complies with the letter -- not the spirit -- of the charter, Dolan and others said the church now genuinely tries to prevent abuse.

"If you want to sell cookies in the Catholic Church, you have to go through training," Dolan said. "They even show you how to hug. You hug from the side. It's this really awkward thing and as they were demonstrating it to us, we were like, 'You've got to be kidding.'"

Bridgeport Bishop William Lori, whose diocese has paid out roughly \$34 million so far to abuse victims, said in an interview that he expected Benedict to "recognize the immense steps the church in the United States has taken to deal with this."

continued on page 3

April, 2008

## Reflecting on Benedict XVI's Trip to America

Dear current or formerly active member of Voice of the Faithful in the Hartford Area:

In recent days the secular press and media have been tightly focused on the Pope's visit and the life of the Church in the United States. VOTF has been frequently referenced and cited by the press as a credible Catholic lay organization, born out of the clerical sexual abuse crisis, which has challenged the hierarchy's public stances on survivor issues and the Church's structures of governance. (On April 22, 2008, the Hartford Courant devoted its lead editorial to praise and encourage the work of Voice of the Faithful. To read this piece go to [www.courant.com/opinion](http://www.courant.com/opinion); click on "editorials"; click on "Follow Visit with Deeds.")

What does the press realize about the impact of VOTF's public questions and positions that those of us who have been inside VOTF don't fully appreciate?

In preparation for the Pope's announced visit VOTF did 3 particular things. One, VOTF took out a full page advertisement in the New York Times apprising the lay public of its concerns and hopes for the Church. Two, VOTF gathered over 7,000 signatures for a petition to be presented to the Holy Father. Three, VOTF wrote a letter asking the Pope to make bishops accountable, to make protecting children a top priority, to ensure financial transparency and to include the laity in decisions involving their parishes and dioceses. This adult and responsible dialogue between the laity and the hierarchy, as evidenced by Benedict's actions and remarks, has entered a new stage. We must encourage this spark of change in every way possible. It must not be allowed to die in its first kindling.

Our National VOTF headquarters needs your financial support to keep ahead of its daily operating expenses. The need is urgent. Imagine what it would be like if, for lack of funds, National Voice of the Faithful was silenced. Who would speak for us, individually and collectively, in the national arena? Our local "Voice" is amplified and contributes to the universal dialogue of the church in the United States by the work of National Voice of the Faithful.

Let your monetary donation speak for you.

Donate online by going to: [www.voiceofthefaithful](http://www.voiceofthefaithful)  
Or Mail your check to: Voice of the Faithful, P.O. Box 423, Upper Newton Falls, MA 02464

## Catholics React - continued from page 2

The church has rounded the corner on the issue, Lori said, adding that parishioners don't want to see the church "spinning its wheels" over the clergy abuse scandal.

Christopher Haddad, a 39-year-old father of three, local attorney and the youth minister at St. Thomas the Apostle Church in West Hartford would agree - with some reservations.

"At coffee hour on Sunday morning, the conversation is not dominated by discussions about sexual abuse," Haddad said. "But I think if you ask Catholics how the church handled this, there's still some frustration and unhappiness."

Haddad, a lifelong Catholic, expressed distress that his church would be so strongly associated with clergy abuse.

"I think people are looking at the church with too narrow a prism when all they see is the sexual abuse crisis," Haddad said. "I know the work the church does, and the vast majority of priests are so much better than this."

The Rev. Ted Tumicki who has led the Norwich Diocese's Safe Environment office since 2003, said the church's continuing challenge is to "reach out to those who feel disenfranchised by all of this."

Will Pope Benedict be able to move the church forward in that challenge, though?

Tumicki is hopeful, and cites Benedict's quick action, after being appointed pope in 2005, to grant Norwich Bishop Michael Cote's request the Vatican defrock two accused priests -- Richard T. Buongiorno and Bernard W. Bissonnette. "When the cases came to Rome, he handled them," Tumicki said, "He didn't just sweep them under the rug."

Benedict might be more willing to remove priests but that doesn't mean Catholics should expect profound change in message or behavior from the Vatican, cautioned Andrew Walsh.

continued on page 4

# AROUND THE CHURCH - NEWS IN BRIEF

By Joanne P. Blair

Victims come forward after papal visit...According to Barbara Blaine, president of Chicago SNAP with its 8000 members, her organization has been inundated with calls, including those from people who said they had never told anyone. Some people came forward because the topic was discussed, others because they were angry. Whatever the reason, it is a great opportunity for many survivors to speak out and be heard!

As of mid April, Kentucky has a new law toughening the penalties for sexual abusers. The bill makes virtually all types of sexual offenses against minors felonies which means they have tougher penalties and can be legally prosecuted when the victim comes forward, even decades after the fact. The bill brought together a broad coalition of supporters, including the state's Catholic bishops (!) and the Kentucky Baptist Convention, as well as the Family Foundation of Kentucky. Among the leading supporters was the bill's sponsor, Rep. Jim Wayne (D), whose father had been abused by a priest as a child.

The battle for control of St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish continues and now totals eight excommunications and the suppression of the Church itself. The issue? Ever since the Church was organized in 1880, it has belonged to the parishioners. The Church is remarkably solvent and has accumulated \$3 million in assets. All went well for 105 years or so until Archbishop Burke came to St. Louis and tried to take over ownership of the Church (perhaps he needed money for legal fees in the sexual abuse crisis?). Recently, the current pastor, Father Bozek, came up with a solution. He asked the Archbishop to revoke all canonical penalties, the penalty of interdict, the penalty of excommunication and the suppression of the church, keep it open, supply a priest and give them equal ownership. In return, he would repent and offer himself up for reassignment. And, of course, Burke said NO...and the beat goes on.

**Spread the word.**  
*Invite a friend to the next meeting.*

## Catholics React - continued from page 3

Walsh, associate director of the Leonard Greenberg Center for the Study of Religion in Public Life at Trinity College and an expert on American Catholicism, said there is nothing to suggest that Benedict will take a markedly different route than his predecessor, John Paul II.

"Under John Paul there was a willingness to express great sorrow, but there's also a reluctance to open the disciplinary process to anyone outside the hierarchy," Walsh said. "The notion (on the part of the Vatican) is that you have a sacred institution that is floating in a hostile world, a world dominated by sin, and it must be protected by people with not only the right training, but the right authority, to keep the vessel pure."

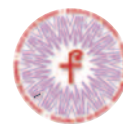
Walsh said most Catholics understand that, as laity, they have no control over what the Vatican says and does. But that doesn't mean it's always easy to swallow.

What's difficult for Americans to accept about this is that in the Catholic tradition, there's no real sense that anybody's opinion about anything matters much," Walsh said. "The notion that you're going to establish legitimacy by consulting the laity, that's just not in the cards."

Tell that to O'Donnell, who said she hasn't been successful, but that doesn't stop her from going back.

"It's like being at the Vatican. It's a little intimidating, but if you think that way you're going to give up," O'Donnell said. "If you don't try, nothing is going to get done."

*(Some comments on the comments... To Father Dolan: 1) those audits are self audits and not everyone is doing them (Bruskewitz) 2) have you ever told a victim that their suffering is a great teacher?... To Bishop Lori: Do you really feel you speak for the people in the pews?)*



# **PROMINENT CATHOLIC CLERGYMEN ADDRESS ISSUES OF FAITH AND POLITICS AND OUTLAWING WAR**

By Joanne Blair

The Reverend Richard McBrien and retired Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, both strong supporters of VOTF, chose hot button issues for their individual presentations.

"FAITH AND POLITICS IN OUR TIME" was the title of McBrien's presentation at the Hotchkiss School, Lakeville CT, on April 11. He noted that religious faith and politics at their best are linked by a desire for peace through justice and are driven by a sense of community and consideration for others. There should always, however, be a clear line between church and state as described in the Vatican II document, "Gaudium et Spes", which noted that 1) The church cannot use the state for its purposes, i.e., it should not have the state mandate prayers in public school. (As a matter of fact, he reminded the audience that the U.S. Supreme Court had declared it unconstitutional to compose official prayers to be used in a religious program.) 2) The state cannot use the church for its purposes, 3) The church must have the freedom to teach and preach and pass judgment on moral matters - but not the right to claim special privileges, 4) There should be no special status for the church, nor should it seek or be accorded it, 5) The church should present a seamless ethic of life approach as accepted by the USCCB, and 6) Overall, the relation between church and state should be one of cooperation for the common good.

He then outlined the differences between civil law, which deals with external facts and enforces what is minimally acceptable and moral law, which governs all of human behavior. He noted that not every element of moral law should be transferred to civil law, and cautioned that it is civil law which must be taken into consideration on the question of church and state.

McBrien was clear on the ground rules for voting, citing the 1994 USCCB statement that there was an absolute ban on clergy endorsement of a particular candidate. When some bishops took to opposing a candidate, the USCCB went further in their 1997 statement which now included a ban on opposing. The clergy have a right to speak on the issues, but not to instruct people how to

vote. Even when making application of these moral issues, Catholics should realize that in specific cases, circumstances can change and people of good will can disagree. (In other words, no hand out pamphlets from the church on for whom to vote.)

At the St. Thomas Aquinas Chapel at UConn, Auxiliary Bishop Emeritus Thomas Gumbleton presented an impassioned speech entitled "OUTLAWING WAR: AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS COME". Beginning with the words of Paul VI to the United Nations in 1965..."Never again war - No, never again!" he gave three major reasons for the abolition of war: 1) It destroys the lives of innocent people, 2) It throws into upheaval the lives of participants, and 3) It leaves a trail of hatred and resentment.

He followed with a vivid description of wars from the time of Augustine, who proposed the Just War Theory, through the bombings of citizens on both sides during World War II. Then he proceeded to remind the group that, in the 1990s, more children were killed in war than were members of the military. During the Iraq sanctions alone, one and a half million people died, mostly children and the elderly. Gumbleton ended his description of war with the facts about the devastation in Iraq with its refugees without housing or money; its 300-400% increase in the cancer rate, 50% of which occurs in children under the age of 5; and with the increase in the rate of serious birth defects by 4 to 6 times the norm, caused by the US use of depleted uranium.

Gumbleton also reminded all present of the effects on the American military, not only the 4000 dead and thousands more wounded but also the extremely high suicide rate among returning veterans. There have already been 8000 suicides up to this point; on the average 120 veterans end their lives each week. Gumbleton's basic message was that if war continues, total disaster awaits.

"We must transform our enemies into friends by love," he told the audience, citing the examples of Nelson Mandela and Gandhi and reminding all that when President Kennedy addressed the UN in 1961, he told all that weapons of mass destruction must be abolished before they abolish us. Two days before the Pope addressed the UN and pointed out that if all the nations worked together and the decisions were not left up to a few countries, there was hope of change, Gumbleton stated directly that the UN could work effectively - if they abandoned the Security Council. The speech ended with a rousing standing ovation - this audience was convinced!

# OTHER VOICES AROUND THE COUNTRY

By Joanne Blair

**WA (Winchester MA Area) VOTF** will host Steve Krueger, one of the original members in the Boston area, on May 5. The following week, the group, which still meets on a weekly basis, will celebrate its 6th anniversary with "reminiscences, special guests and a dessert reception." On June 2, they will gather for a group discussion of Fr. John McGinty's paper "A Future Worth the Wait."

The **Lynn, North Shore and Seacoast Area VOTF Affiliates**, in collaboration with the Department of Theology, Boston College, presented their 2008 Faith Formation Program. On April 6, well known author James Carroll spoke on the topic "Toward a Democratic Catholic Church" and Father James Ronan discussed "Mercy: A Response to a Deeper Calling in the Church in America" on April 27. "We are the Church: Laity and Church Governance" is the final topic of the series. Father Michael Himes will lead the discussion at St. Rose of Lima Parish Hall in Topsfield on May 18.

On May 14 from 7 to 9 p.m., the **Falmouth (MA) Area VOTF** members will gather at the Senior Center to hear Sister

Mary Mazza speak on "Parish Life without a Resident Priest-Pastor." Sister Mary is the Parish Life Director of St. Patrick's Church in Athens, NY, one of twenty such directors in the diocese of Albany. Assisted by volunteers from the parish and a visiting priest, who comes three times a month, she is the one who runs the parish, answering directly to the bishop.

Peggie Thorpe, one of the original founders of VOTF in Boston 2002, will address **Greater Bridgeport CT VOTF** at 7:30 p.m. June 5. The meeting will take place in Norwalk at First Congregational Church on the Green, which has graciously hosted the group for a number of years.

Two VOTF groups in the Northeast will host Bishop Geoffrey Robinson during his American tour. On May 21, **VOTF of Northern New Jersey** will present the program at St. Mark's Lutheran Church, 100 Harter Road, Morristown, at 7 p.m. The following day, Bishop Robinson will be the main speaker at the Regional Meeting of **Long Island (NY) VOTF** at Manhasset at 7 p.m.

---

## **GEOFFREY ROBINSON, RETIRED AUXILIARY BISHOP, WILL SPEAK ON "CONFRONTING POWER AND SEX IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH: RECLAIMING THE SPIRIT OF JESUS."**

By Joanne Blair

In a coast-to-coast whirlwind tour sponsored by many Catholic groups including VOTF, Bishop Robinson will discuss the need for change in the Catholic Church. In his introduction to the book that burst onto the scene in Australia in 2007, requiring a second printing within days of the first, Robinson clearly stated in the introduction "Through the story of sexual abuse and the church's response, I came to the unshakeable belief that within the Catholic Church there absolutely must be profound and enduring change on the two subjects of power and sex." From this conviction came the book, now in its first American printing (available at Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, [www.litpress.org](http://www.litpress.org)).

The book, at times referred to as "an explosive critique," is well written and researched with every source noted in the footnotes at the end of each chapter (which is also followed by a Meditation). It is an eminently readable book, better savored than skimmed, since it offers much food for thought and even more for discussion. Robinson is not writing to tell the reader what to believe but to set out patterns in church history which give us a sense of how we went from the simple "Love God, Love your neighbor" theme of the gospels to a Church of total power vested in the hierarchy.

An exceptionally good source for researching sex and power, he has degrees in philosophy, theology and church law, and was heavily involved in the sex abuse crisis in Australia. In 1994 he was elected by the Australian Bishops to the National Committee for Professional Standards, coordinating the response of the Catholic Church in Australia to revelations of abuse. From 1997 to 2003 he was co-chair of the committee.

# LONG LIVE YOUR BAPTISM!

By John Marshall Lee

The Pope has come! The Pope has come! Long live the Pope!

Living as a leader of a religion with traditions developed over nearly 2,000 years, based on prophecy from earlier times, and seeking to provide spiritual and moral guidance to one billion anointed in countries around the world today is not a simple task for any one human. When the responsibilities of developing and managing the hundreds of thousands of ordained and religious in ministry including temporal needs, are joined with the direction of Church resources in accord with Christ's mission in the world and holding a seat in a special place at the UN, a most unique leadership role is outlined.

The most recent broad gathering of Roman Catholic leaders, Vatican Council II held in Rome almost 50 years ago, contributed much to the Church and enriched the understanding of the Sacrament of Baptism. Certainly deliverance from Original Sin continues to be taught but the anointing created a pathway as well for a young soul to learn and grow over a lifetime, experiencing the gifts of or calls to becoming "priest, prophet, king". That was a different perspective. Priesthood understood in this sense was a call to ministry, to care for one another as needed (as well as ourselves), in a wide variety of ways. Prophet confirmed a necessary role in seeking truth in this life, guided by study and the Holy Spirit, and then speaking it clearly and courageously. King referred to servant leadership as Jesus modeled in "the washing of Peter's feet". Today it may be seen as a call to take an active role in all of our communities with a willingness to follow and/or to lead in different ways or at different times, depending on one's spiritual call. When one finds oneself in a leadership position, it is also a call to prepare for healthy succession and to willingly enter followership, once again, as seasons and needs determine, rather than struggle to maintain organizational power that was never intended to be personal.

Living one's Baptism in the spirit of this anointing is a daily part of life's spiritual journey. It guides us from a historic model for parish Catholics to "pay, pray, obey and stay... in the pew" that has been ingrained for decades in the American Catholic experience. It can challenge an institutional predisposition to command and to commend all authority to itself by Canon Law, an ingrained bureaucratic system, a history of secret processes and fear of sharing authority or power which is foundational to clericalism.

The revelations of youth sexual abuse by clergy, the mismanagement of clergy predators by ordinaries, the demonstrated and continuing lack of Christian compassion for victim-survivors of abuse, and the huge losses of moral authority and financial strength are obvious indicators of serious problems. Looking deeper still, one discovers unwillingness on the part of Bishops to meaningfully open Church processes, records and archives, to become transparent in current behavior where a Bishop speaks for himself and listens to those requesting a meeting (rather than through a spokesperson or avoiding contact or response) and where accountability for behavior (that is criminal or unethical or failure to act in a Christian way) has consequences. What have been the consequences to American Catholic leaders past and present for allowing tens of thousands of youths, known and unknown, to become victims and to suffer on their watch and with their complicity? Has the United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) attempted to quantify how many Baptized members have left the pews feeling betrayed, frustrated and disappointed to seek Christ's message elsewhere? These former Church members may continue to pray, but they are unwilling to stay, pay, and obey leadership, which has lost credibility. What is said about this evangelization in reverse? Who takes responsibility?

And what is the toll on the majority of clergymen, whose vocation has lost esteem in the public eye, yet who labor pastorally as servant leaders and are loved by their communities? Where is their prophetic voice, speaking full truth to the broad community at large? Where do they share their adult American experience, enjoying democratic 'freedoms to' and responsibility for, along with all the people of God as equals working towards a common mission? Finally, what is heard from faithful Catholics laboring as employees of the American church and fulfilling Christian ministry? Why are they afraid to blow whistles? Is fear of economic retaliation by leadership through loss of position or job overriding 'living your Baptism'? Why are these sharing voices that provide perspective and knowledge, heard only after retirement? Do you 'live your Baptism' promise sitting silently in the pew once a week?

Living your Baptism today by each member of the Body of Christ, by all of the people of God, creates a different reality in a wounded world, a changing structure and nature in our Church and a sharing of Church burdens with the Pope and others in following Christ's message. Long live the people of God, guided by the Spirit, in living the gifts of Baptism!

(John Lee is chair of VOTF in the Diocese of Bridgeport and a member of the National Representative Council, Region #1)

# VOTF PRESIDENT'S LETTER TO THE POPE...

Dear Pope Benedict,

We are very pleased that you will be visiting the United States, and we take the opportunity of your visit to introduce ourselves and our work.

While we remain hopeful about our future, we have great concerns about the current condition of our beloved Church,

Voice of the Faithful (VOTF) is a worldwide movement of concerned, mainstream Catholics formed in 2002, in response to the clergy sexual abuse crisis. Our Mission is 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. Our goals are to support survivors of clergy sexual abuse, support priests of integrity, and shape structural change within the Church.

As head of the Universal Church, we invite you to lead this transformation.

Most Catholics know too well the human suffering and financial costs associated with the global sexual abuse crisis. In the United States alone, more than 4,300 priests were alleged to have abused almost 11,000 young people between the years 1950 and 2002. Legal settlements by American dioceses amounted to \$615 million in 2007, and now exceed \$2.3 billion overall. Catholic dioceses have filed for bankruptcy in Alaska, Arizona, California, Iowa, Oregon and Washington. Equally troubling is the fact that some of our bishops contributed to this terrible toll.

Many loyal Catholics are asking how our Church can be a moral beacon when so many bishops who repeatedly transferred known abusers remain in office? We believe that without justice for the abused and accountability from the Bishops, the crisis will continue to plague our Church.

Our Church faces many other serious challenges as well. The declining number of clergy jeopardizes the availability of Eucharist. The laity continue to be excluded from meaningful participation in decision-making. Catholics--particularly the young--are leaving our Church to join other religions, or no religion at all. The hopeful vision of Vatican II remains largely unfulfilled, and deep polarization exists in our church about how to best fulfill our sacred mission.

We are calling on all Catholics to work towards a lasting, transformed Body of Christ that serves all people with compassion, collegiality and cooperation. We believe in collaboration among all members of our Church to achieve this transformation.

We ask you to make all Bishops accountable to the people they serve. To start, please ask for the resignation of those bishops who repeatedly reassigned abusive priests.

Please tell Bishops to stop blocking settlements, to initiate truly independent annual audits and to support revising the laws that govern statutes of limitations which today can serve to block prosecution of known child abusers.

Please make protecting our children a top priority, beginning with the creation of national databases of credibly accused priests. We also ask that you make fair investigation and prompt resolution of allegations against priests a high priority.

Please embrace full lay participation in our Church. Catholic laity are prepared to embrace our responsibilities as baptized Catholics. Please instruct Bishops to strongly encourage the laity to become fully involved in the decisions that impact the life of their parishes and dioceses, including parish closings. If you do this, we are convinced that our parishes will grow and our children and grandchildren will become proud, active members of our Church.

Please make full financial accountability and transparency mandatory. All parishes and dioceses should publish complete annual financial statements and have fully engaged lay-led finance committees that provide independent advice to pastors and Bishops. Please ask the US Conference of Bishops to change optional guidelines to mandatory standards. If you do this, it is likely that theft of parish and diocesan funds would decline and we would be less likely to see surveys indicating that 85% of reporting dioceses have suffered through embezzlements.

Please encourage the noble pursuit of wisdom and truth. Fresh spiritual and theological insights should be openly discussed and evaluated. Please embrace meaningful, positive change in our Church by encouraging forums and other opportunities for Catholics to express and develop their faith and to put their faith into action.

Pope Benedict, please help heal our beloved Church and lead its restoration to the vibrant messenger of the Gospel as it was meant to be.

Respectfully,  
Daniel Bartley, President  
Voice of the Faithful



# BRIDGEPORT VOTF ASKS "WHO OWNS THE CHURCH" AT THEIR SIXTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Who does, indeed "own" the Church??? The intriguing topic of Bridgeport VOTF's 6th annual conference was discussed from two different perspectives. David O'Brien, the keynoter, gave the history of a period in the early 19th century when boards of lay trustees owned parish churches and hired pastors. Conflicts between pastors and people and pastors and bishops eventually led the bishops to demand absolute ownership of parish churches.

The battle over trustees was so intense that the term trustees has a decidedly negative connotation among bishops and clergy today. A prime example today is St. Stanislaus Kostka, a 128-year-old church in St. Louis, which refuses to turn over its ownership to Archbishop Burke. O'Brien, professor emeritus of American church history and former director of the Center for Religion and Ethics at Holy Cross College, recently retired as a member of the Board of Trustees of VOTF.

Paul Lakeland, longtime supporter of VOTF and this annual conference, holds the Aloysius P. Kelley, S.J., chair of Catholic Studies at Fairfield University, where the VOTF Conference has been held for a number of years. He approached the subject from a theological perspective. Lakeland recently discussed his current book "Catholicism at the Crossroads: How the Laity Can Save the Church" at a VOTF meeting at St. Peter Claver Church in West Hartford.

During the final session, speakers from VOTF'S three study groups briefly discussed the issues of Church governance, the role of women in the Church and Church finance. A free and open discussion among speakers and the audience brought the main session to a close as members gathered for Mass in the Fairfield University Chapel.

**Geoffrey Robinson** - continued from page 6

By taking a proactive role in devising processes within the church for the prevention of sexual abuse, he raised the consciousness of Church leaders to their responsibilities for developing appropriate and compassionate pastoral responses to victims. He was also foundation chair of Encompass Australasia, a psychosocial program established in 1997 for Church personnel who were guilty of offenses against children or of adult boundary violation.

Previous to his investment in the sexual abuse crisis and his new book, Robinson was a lecturer in Canon Law, served on the Archdiocesan Marriage Tribunal, and was president of the Canon Law Society, chair of the Sydney Archdiocesan Schools Board and Chairman of the Catholic Education Commission. He has also written two previous books, "A Change of Mind and Heart: The Good News According to Mark" and "Travels in Sacred Places."

In his current US Tour he will speak in Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Northern New Jersey, Long Island NY, Fairfield, CT, Boston, Cleveland, Seattle and San Diego. For those who are interested, Robinson can be heard at the Business School of Fairfield University on Saturday, May 24, from 10 am to noon.



**Spread  
the word.**  
*Invite a friend to the next meeting.*