

Our Voice

An E-Newsletter for Those Interested and Involved in The Voice of The Faithful • Connecticut
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VOTF MEMBERS RESPOND GENEROUSLY AND QUICKLY TO CALL FOR FINANCIAL HELP

(Info from VOTF website)

On July 13 the call went out for financial help from VOTF National to maintain its national office; \$60,000 was needed by July 31st. The announcement was made on the Internet (reflecting the transparency of the organization). Within 48 hours 552 members contributed over \$33,000 (more than half of the goal). But the contributions did not stop there. Within a week they were up to \$63,000 and by press time for "OUR VINEYARD" it was almost \$86,000 and still coming in.

Dan Bartley, president, and Bill Casey, chairman of the board of trustees, spoke to VOTF members (online) "you re-affirmed VOTF's raison d'etre, and renewed our collective commitment to achieve VOTF's foundational mission and goals. And you shared your generosity in the midst of one of the worst economic crises in our nation's history. With contributions still coming in we are in a position to meet operating expenses through the end of September. Speaking on behalf of the Officers, the Board of Trustees and national office staff, we applaud VOTF's collective response as we shed tears of gratitude." And, indeed, contributions did keep coming in, reaching just over \$100,000 by the end of July and insuring the vitality of the organization.

Interestingly, the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights had an immediate response for VOTF which was released on July 14, the day after its announcement of financial problems. It's a "Must Read."

"VOICE IS TOAST - Voice of the Faithful is now preparing its obituary. After lecturing the Catholic Church for years on such matters as financial accountability, the organization is in financial ruins. According to Voice officials, it needs \$60,000 just to pay its summer bills. Good Luck: it is well-known that Voice members are incredibly stingy. To the extent that the Church made necessary reforms, it effectively spelled the demise of Voice. It was always a close cousin to Call to Action, another moribund organization, and now the cat is out of the bag. To think that Voice can exist as a volunteer group is delusional. Quite frankly, Voice is toast."

(This little tirade was issued by Susan Fani, Director of Communications for The Catholic League, ONE day after VOTF announced financial problems. Wrong guess, Susan!)

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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HELPFUL LINKS:

National VOTF: www.votf.org

Hartford Regional VOTF: www.hrvotf.sytes.net

Bridgeport VOTF: 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

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

Time for Bishop Lori to Abandon His Strategy

**A letter to the Editor from
Joseph F. Callaghan, Norwalk**

To the Editor:

Catholics in the Diocese of Bridgeport have every right to ask Bishop William E. Lori to account for the millions of dollars expended on his effort to keep under seal court records relating to priestly sexual abuse and the attendant cover-up by Bishops Walter W. Curtis and Edward M. Egan. In 2001 the Diocese reached out-of-court settlements with the survivors, while requiring them never to speak publicly about the horrors visited upon them when they were children. Since then additional sums have been spent totaling at least \$37.7 million, though the full amount has never been revealed. More money will likely be paid as other cases are settled.

Prior to the settlement in 2001 the Court sealed the depositions of Bishops Curtis and Egan and other records pending a jury trial. As the cases were never presented to a jury, the need for sealing ceased. The New York Times, the Hartford Courant, the Boston Globe and the Washington Post sued to have those documents made public. In 2002 Judge Robert McWeeny of the Waterbury Superior Court, declaring that the records were of great public interest and that "the judicial system should not be party to a cover-up," ordered the seal to be lifted. In 2003 the three-judge Appellate Court ruled in favor of the Diocese on the technicality that the newspapers had not presented their argument in a timely fashion. The State Supreme Court, however, ruled in 2005 that the records should be open and remanded the case to Waterbury Superior Court for disposition. In 2006 Judge Jon Alander rejected the Diocese's plea for continued secrecy. Challenging his impartiality because he served on a committee concerning public access to court documents, the Diocese appealed to the State Supreme Court. By a decisive vote of four justices to one, the Court rejected the Diocese's argument in May 2009.

In a last ditch effort to delay publication, the Diocese asked to have the matter heard by all seven justices of the State Supreme Court. Now that the Court has rejected that argument the Diocese has asked that the release of the documents be stayed while they appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court to review the case.

The cost of this litigation extending over a period of eight years must be extraordinary. However, one looks in vain in the Diocesan annual financial reports for any reference to moneys spent in this way. At the time of the initial financial settlements with the survivors, the Diocese stated that the money was covered by insurance. There was no suggestion, however, that the people in the pews paid the insurance premiums or that the premiums had risen because of sexual abuse.

Where does the money to pay lawyer's fees incurred in this effort to stonewall and delay the inevitable come from? Some of it is probably derived from taxes (the cathedraticum and the school subsidy) levied by the bishop at every parish offertory collection. That amount is approximately 15%. Parishioners also should ask how much of the Annual Bishops Appeal is diverted to this purpose.

The Diocese argues that the newspapers have no legitimate interest in publication of these documents. That ignores the right of the Catholic people to an accounting of the conduct of their leaders, who present themselves as shepherds, guiding and protecting the flock. Priest predators sexually abused innocent children in our parishes and schools and in doing so committed the most heinous of crimes. Bishops, knowing what they had done, transferred them from parish to parish without warning either pastors or people. In doing so, the bishops abetted criminals and criminal activity. The Diocese's intent is to delay as long as possible the reckoning owed to the Catholic people.

(Joseph Callaghan is co-founder of VOTF of Greater Bridgeport. He is Professor Emeritus of Medieval Spanish Studies at Fordham University where he was also a director of the Center for Medieval Studies. During his 40 years of teaching he taught both undergraduate and graduate students.)

**Spread the
Word**

OTHER VOICES AROUND THE COUNTRY
By Joanne Blair

Internationally known speaker, Roger Haight, S.J., will explain two views of the "Uniqueness of Jesus (all of which are contested)) at the September meeting of **VOTF New Jersey**. In this way Father Haight will be introducing and discussing some of the most challenging questions in Christian Theology today. The meeting will be held on Tuesday, September 22, at 7:30 p.m.

The **VOTF-LI** site features a reminder that they are hosting the National VOTF Conference from October 30-31, at the Huntington Hilton, Melville, N.Y. Sister Joan Chittister and Father Thomas Reese are the featured speakers. (More info in the article in this issue of Our Voice.)

WA (Winchester Area) VOTF has scheduled a special "Liturgy of Repentance for Irish Victims of Sexual Abuse." It will take place on September 21. (For additional information call 617-543-1922.)

Another weekly VOTF group has come to light. All concerned Catholics, clergy and laity, are welcome to join Voice of the Faithful at their weekly meeting every Monday from 7:30 to 9 p.m. at St. John the Evangelist Church, 115 Middlesex Street, **North Chelmsford, MA**. (For further info contact: Westford/Chelmsford VOTF@yahoo.com)

VOTF Bridgeport announces that upcoming meetings will be held on the second Thursday of the month at the First Congregational Church on the Green, Norwalk, CT. The first meeting takes place on September 10; more info to follow.



CALLING ALL VOTF MEMBERS TO "MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD" AT THE 2009 NATIONAL CONFERENCE

By Joanne P. Blair (Info from VOTF website)

The 2009 Conference is scheduled to get underway at the Hilton Long Island/Huntington in Melville, N.Y. at 7:30 p.m. Friday, October 30 and will close with a Mass at 5 p.m. the following day. The informal program on Friday evening will set the stage for a discussion of issues affecting today's Church. Among them are "Reform Through Local Action" and "Update on the American Catholic Council."

The highlight on Saturday are the presentations by two well known and well appreciated speakers, Sr. Joan Chittister, O.S.B. and Rev. Thomas Reese, S.J. Sr. Chittister will speak on "Leadership for Creative Change." Currently she is co-chair of the Global Peace Initiative and the Network of Spiritual Progressives. Among her many awards are the U.S. Catholic Award for Furthering the Cause of Women in the Church and the Hans Kung Award for the Rights of Catholics in the Church.

Father Reese chose the title "Survival Guide for Thinking Catholics", a truly interesting and most appropriate topic. A former editor of America Magazine, he is currently a senior fellow at the Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown University where his focus is religion and public policy. A widely recognized expert on the U.S. Catholic church, he is frequently cited by journalists.

**Question for readers
IS the Church
post scandal and post crisis?**

**Please send your opinions to
ejblair@comcast.net for publication
in the next issue of Our Voice.)**

B16 NOW A B29 AND DROPS A BOMB!

By Msgr. Harry Byrne, J.D.C.

At a previous posting, I commented on President Obama's statement when signing his directive on stem cell research: "We make scientific decisions based on facts, not ideology." I observed that decisions of every kind were based not only on facts, but on values and principles that have developed out of our human experience. Furthermore, decisions purportedly based on facts alone, invariably are selected and placed in a context according to an agenda or ideology of the decision maker. Obama cannot insist that facts alone can shape decisions. But he was right on target when he pointed out that exaggerated dependence on ideology can ignore, deny, or contradict the facts.

Regrettably, Pope Benedict XVI provided a graphic example of how his ideology denied and even contradicted the facts. On his spring flight from Rome to Africa, he was questioned about the legitimacy of condom use to prevent AIDS. He responded by stating that condom use, not only did not prevent AIDS but actually increased its risk. It was as though B16 has become a B29 as the bomb he had dropped exploded in a storm of protest from the scientific, media, Catholic, and non-Catholic populist ranks. Immersed in his long and foursquare opposition to condom use for what he judged were moral reasons, he was found to be, not only denying facts, but actually twisting them to support his position. The storm blew back to the Vatican, where damage control efforts hurriedly got underway, reaching even to some twisting in Vatican editing and translation of the pope's remarks.

This phenomenon is encountered frequently in human affairs. It is not unknown that research scientists can be so convinced of a conclusion that they reject or distort incompatible facts. It has not been unknown in the history of our Church, most notably when pope and Vatican curia accused Galileo of heresy for denying that the sun revolved around the earth. After all, they said, the Bible tells of how the sun stood still to allow Joshua more daylight to fight to capture Jericho. Scientific facts from Galileo's telescope were rejected for a misplaced deductive reasoning from a misunderstood biblical passage.

Denial of facts by force of ideology is unfortunately too commonplace in our Church. In the condom dust-up, B16 insists that the African tribes practice sexual abstinence as the only effective way to combat AIDS. The pope has not even been able to succeed in having the African clergy successfully walk on the hot stones of celibacy. Remember the scandal of a decade ago when the religious supervisors of nuns in Africa demanded that Rome do something about priests sexually abusing and even raping members of their congregations of nuns! Is Benedict not living in an unreal world when he dismisses scientific facts to support his moral view about condoms? The much-needed reform in our beloved Church will come only when those in charge accord experiential reality its due recognition and acceptance instead of worshipping before the constructs of their own deductive processes. Like "Jesus was a man; therefore only men can become priests." Please! (Msgr. Byrne is a retired priest in his late eighties who continues to express his opinions. To read more of them type in "Archangel" to access his website; to reach him directly, email larchstar@aol.com)

Fodder for Traditionalists

By John Chuchman

The House Church was the beginning of Church.

It provided space for Preaching the Word, for Worship, for social and Eucharistic table sharing.

The House Church provided equal opportunity for women; the house traditionally was considered women's sphere and women were not excluded from activities in the house and in the House Church.

Women played an important part in the founding, in the sustaining, in the promoting of House Churches.

The earliest Christian manuscripts give us strong historical evidence for co-equal roles of women and men in infant Church.

There are no distinctions between... male and female, all are in Christ, Jesus.

So, indeed, be a traditionalist and forsake the hierarchical discrimination against women.

(You can reach the author at poetman@torchlake.com)

OBEDIENCE TO GOD... OR THE BISHOPS?

By Joanne P. Blair

Whom are we supposed to follow in obedience?...God or the Bishops? This question emerged after I read Father McBrien's well wrought article in NCR about the visitation of nuns. He noted that "One of the most disturbing aspects of this 'visitation' is the requirement that each of the visitors will be required to make a public profession of faith and oath of fidelity to the Apostolic See."

In 1989 the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith published a profession of faith which stated "Moreover, I adhere with religious submission of will and intellect to the teachings which either the Roman pontiff or the College of Bishops enunciate when they exercise their authentic magisterium, even if they do not intend to proclaim these teachings by a definitive act." The Congregation also imposed an "Oath of Fidelity on Assuming an Office to be exercised in the Name of the Church" which reads, in part, "With Christian obedience I shall follow what the bishops, as authentic doctors and teachers of the faith, declare, or what they, as those who govern the Church, establish."

Somehow, I find myself leery of submission of will and intellect to anyone except the One True God...particularly to bishops who turned the other way while priests were abusing children. I remember when then Bishop George let Fr. Daniel McCormack stay on for 4 years after a school principal reported his abuse of children. (She was fired; McCormack had several more years to continue the abuse.) I also thought it astounding that in all of these statements there is no mention of submission to the Creator of us all; all submission seems to belong to the hierarchy. What would Jesus say?

(Comments are welcome and will be posted in the next Our Voice.)



Calling all Members to VOTF'S Strategic Plan

(Info from VOTF National website)

Here is a new way to be the "Voice of the Faithful": the Strategic Plan, an action-based way of working with specific skills to use all the people power of VOTF members. Five separate platforms (each going in a different direction) have been set up, leaving a broad number of choices for members. Briefly, the platforms are:

Local/Diocese Action to Achieve Best Practices platform is a very practical grassroots approach to Church reform that emphasizes action on the lower level (parish and diocese). Local successes will build momentum.

Reform Actions to Protect Children and Support Survivors is a platform specific to VOTF's goal of supporting survivors of clergy sexual abuse. Activities here would encourage members passionate about supporting survivors and the protection of children to work together to achieve success.

Universal Church Reform platform focuses on the broader Church through issues that affect the entire people of God -- for example, mandatory celibacy and its impact on priests and laity, the role of women in the Church, and the process by which bishops and pastors are elected. Facilitating national dialogue on such issues is essential and must involve well-executed, often creative external communications.

Partnerships and Networking addresses the need to begin working with other organizations to expand our circle of influence on issues where we share common ground. When appropriate, resource and insight sharing can help us combine efforts to develop critical mass on topics and thus engage a broader voice. Examples of this platform include the American Catholic Council initiative, developing active relationships with religious orders, ESCCB, NRB, OCYB, National Association of Lay Ministers, National Federation of Priests Councils, Catholic Theological Society, Academia, Catholic publications, as well as other reform minded organizations, thus executing a national process of education and dialogue, national Town Hall meetings and development of coordinated, articulate teams that can effect change on all levels.

continued on page 6

AROUND THE CHURCH - NEWS IN BRIEF

By Joanne Blair

Marci Hamilton, one of the U.S.'s leading church/state scholars who has been at the side of victims of clergy abuse from the beginning of its exposure, has revealed a Catholic Church movement against sexual abuse victims. The New York Catholic Conference has taken a strong stance against that state's proposed Child Victims Act (CVA) which would extend the statute of limitations for child sexual abuse victims by five years. It would also open a window for all past victims to be able to go to court for one year despite the currently expired statute of limitations on their claims.

The New York Catholic Conference (the lobby for the Roman Catholic bishops), along with some "ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups", is the CVA's most active opponent, hiring "top dollar seasoned lobbyists" to try to kill the bill "through one devious approach after another". Bishop DiMarzio of Brooklyn threatened to close parishes and schools in his district and organized two busloads of people to protest the act. (Does anyone know how the Church always manages to find money for "top dollar seasoned lobbyists"?)

According to Hamilton, "If the Conference were not pouring hundreds of thousands of dollars into lobbying...the CVA would have been law long ago. And today we would know the identities of hundreds of New York child predators who are instead, enjoying the anonymity -- and protection -- offered them by state law. Fewer children would be subject to abuse right now. Instead the Conference and DiMarzio...have become the sworn enemies of New York's children and the truth." (Info from Hamilton's article in Findlaw.)

More bad news about a bishop: in this case Auxiliary Bishop Emeritus Raymond E. Geodert, made the news in the Chicago Sun-Times. Although he acknowledged knowing 25 priests who had broken the law by sexually abusing children, he did not report them.

"I knew the civil law considered it a crime... But I'm not a civil lawyer... I simply would not talk about it to anyone except those who had a right to know because of their position in the diocese."

Strategic Plan - continued from page 5

Spiritual and communal growth is the platform that addresses the need for us all to remain "attentive to the Spirit" as our mission statement says. Ours is a long and difficult struggle, and we need God's wisdom and guidance to support us. Examples of this platform include teams that arrange high quality retreats and social gatherings and remind us of our connection to the Spirit and one another.

Many of the strategic plan activities are underway, hopefully to be expanded and managed efficiently and objectively. VOTF National is looking for five to seven capable volunteers with each core team responsible for recruiting, organizing, fine-tuning and prioritizing activities in each platform.

VOTF National acknowledges that development activities have suffered because of the inability to define themselves and execute responses in a timely manner. In producing the Papal ad, they proved that they could gain support for a specific task if they focused on a clear objective and called for help! At this point they feel the Strategic Plan "will create a new way of looking at the organization by embracing the many overlooked talents and abilities of our membership and offering them an opportunity to be a vital ingredient of our future growth and success."

Barbara Dorris, SNAP outreach director said the depositions showed a policy of moving abusive priests from one parish to another without warning and without adequately monitoring abusive priests. "The deposition and documents show how deeply ingrained secrecy, deceit and recklessness are in this diocese." (Further information can be found at bishopaccountability.org).

