

Our Voice

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LIVOTF HOSTS VERY SUCCESSFUL VOTF NATIONAL CONFERENCE

By Joanne Blair

Members came from every part of the country: California, the Midwest, Pennsylvania, Florida, New England, New York and states in between. A goodly group assembled Friday evening at the Huntington Hilton on Long Island to listen to and discuss reports of the Strategic Action plan. However, the real action began Saturday morning when a steady stream of members crowded into the conference room for breakfast and a day to remember!

After the usual group of introductory speakers, the day began with a bang with **Sister Joan Chittister** who noted



(in all good humor) that she was the object of stringent Vatican surveillance. She got right to the point stressing the importance of having people "awake and involved in their Church." It is necessary that the leadership involves the whole community, including intellectuals "who will raise issues that plague us or protect us." She reminded the audience that today's Church oppresses thinkers and silences speakers even though faith is surely strong enough to face questions.

"People get the leadership they demand" said Chittister, "Let the voices of the reformist faithful be heard." Among those voices she cited the Gumbletons, the Romeros, the Martin Luther Kings, the Mertons, the Bonhoeffers. "If Vatican II fails," she emphasized, "it will be the fault of the leaders of the Church...We need a Church that is just in itself as it calls for justice...We need leadership that challenges and reforms. Join the Revolution so tradition can be saved." The response was loud and clear!

Father Thomas Reese, the other major speaker, was more conciliatory in topics and tone as he spoke on "The Survivors Guide for Thinking Catholics". Commenting that there will always be disagreement in Church teaching, he suggested a method of dealing with it positively: everyone



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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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How to become involved:

Want to join VOTF or start a Parish Voice affiliate?
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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

Very Successful Conference

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should read about the subject so they could distinguish between law and doctrine (e.g. the ban on married priests is law but not doctrine and there have only been two infallible statements in the Church: the Assumption and the Immaculate Conception). Reese emphasized the importance of understanding the historical and cultural background of the Scriptures as well as the fact that some Church documents are open to multiple meanings.

On a lighter note, he described the way native Italians responded to Church authority: they accept it without question and then ignore it (this gave rise to a submitted question - "How do I become Italian?" and the loudest laughter of the day.) Reese then warned the group to concentrate on the essentials: an informed conscience, humility and charity. Overall his talk was one of personal responsibility and an openness to others who thought differently.

The recipients of the Priest of Integrity Awards were amazingly humble in their responses. **Father Joseph Fowler** accepted his award with the brief comment "All people should be eligible for ordination." A pastor, teacher and organizer, he has worked tirelessly to make things better for those in need in eastern Kentucky, Nicaragua, Belize and Costa Rica. He also stood with VOTF members who helped pass Kentucky's HB211 that toughened laws on sexual abuse, commenting that "it was not the Catholic hierarchy nor the clergy nor any other civil or faith group that launched the effort to write and lobby for HB211. The effort came from a group of lay men and women, who understood that neither their Church nor their State was doing enough to stop the sexual exploitation of our children."

Father Donald Cozzens received his award with the comment "Voice of the Faithful is the hope of the Church." A supporter of VOTF from its very beginning, he said to the assembly "We priests need your adult maturity and integrity. The key to the lifting of mandatory celibacy is the way to the re-vitalized Church". Father Cozzens has supported victims of sexual abuse ever since the information was released. Among the books he has written concerning the crisis in the Church are: "Sacred Silence: Denial and the Crisis in the Church", "The Changing Face of the Priesthood," "Dying and Rising: The Priesthood in Peril," "The Faith that Dares to Speak," and his latest, "Freeing Celibacy."



Father Cozzens receives award at 2009 Conference

Jason Berry, a long time writer on the sexual abuse crisis, accepted the Catherine of Siena Award with the comment "What Rome does not get is immense." Berry's books on the sexual abuse crisis and his deep-seated connection to VOTF shows that he does get it. "Lead us not Into Temptation" was published in 2000, 2 full years before the sexual abuse crisis in the U.S. came to light. In 2004 he produced the book "Vows of Silence: The Abuse of Power in the Papacy of John Paul II." The book ends with the following statement about John Paul II: "His tragic naivete left him unable to look inside the Roman Curia, the bishops, the culture of the priesthood with the intelligence he brought to bear in diplomacy."

And with this final presentation the Conference ended and people prepared for Mass in the room in which they had spent the day. I have been to many conferences, local, regional, and national and, after the first in the Hymes Center, this one ranks highly.

There was much to listen to, ample time for discussion and a sense of going forward to "Keep the Faith and Change the Church." Thank you VOTFLI!



OTHER VOICES AROUND THE COUNTRY

By Joanne Blair

Within a few weeks of producing one of VOTF's most successful national conferences **VOTF LI NY** held a regional meeting to give everyone an opportunity to share experiences, insights, suggestions and actions gleaned from the conference. The sharing, which took place at the November 19 meeting, was followed by Marian Roman speaking about "In the Shadow of the Crucifix: Vatican II and the Global Church." Ronan, Research Professor of Catholic Studies in the Center for World Christianity, New York Theological Seminary, is a former president of the Women's Ordination Conference Board and has been active in efforts to renew the Church since the 1970's.

Members of **Greater Bridgeport, CT. VOTF** also heard Marian Roman speak, this time about "Mary Magdala: Preeminent Disciple and First Apostle", at their November meeting. On December 10th they will host Theresa Kane, R.S.M., Mercy College Professor and former president of Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

"Vows of Silence: A Documentary of Sexual Abuse and Deceit" was shown at the November meeting of **VOTF New Jersey**. The film by Jason Berry was based on his book "Vows of Silence: The Abuse of Power in the Papacy of John Paul II".

Coastal Delmarva VOTF featured a report on the National VOTF Conference at their November meeting. Topics were: The Strategic Action Plan, Awards and Speakers, The John Jay Causes and Context Study, Planning for the American Catholic Council and Vigiling as Support for Survivors.

Kathleen Kennedy Townsend spoke at the October meeting of **VOTF of Greater Philadelphia**. She discussed her book titled "Failing America's Faithful: How Today's Churches are Mixing God with Politics and Losing Their Way". Before leaving, she praised the efforts of Voice of the Faithful and challenged the organization in its efforts to "Change the Church".

WAVOTF (Winchester area, MA) continued its policy of weekly meetings. On November 16, Father Jim Keenan discussed "What the Laity Ought to Know," an overview of recent writings of moral theologians. Elia Marnik, a Voices in Action team member spoke on "Networking and Partnerships" on November 23 and the group viewed Part 3 of a DVD presentation entitled "The State of the Laity Today" by William D'Antonio, Father Donald Cozzens and Ed Hahnenberg on November 30.

Statement from VOTF Re: U.S. Supreme Court Announcement On Releasing Child Abuse Documents of Bridgeport Diocese

The United States Supreme Court announced that it had decided to deny the application from the Diocese of Bridgeport for a stay that would keep secret thousands of pages of court documents relating to previously settled cases involving the abuse of children by priests. VOTF's national office and its Bridgeport affiliate urge the diocese to cooperate promptly with the June 2009 ruling of the Connecticut State Supreme Court that virtually all such documents must be made public without delay.

"Voice of the Faithful respectfully insists that Bishop Lori accept the Supreme Court decision and stop blocking the right of Catholics in Connecticut to know what happened," said Dan Bartley, Voice of the Faithful President. "Bishop Lori must stop wasting untold hundreds of thousands of parishioners' dollars to prevent these same parishioners, and the public, from finding out how Lori's predecessors, including recently retired Cardinal Edward Egan, dealt with cases of sexual abuse of children."

In a publication distributed recently at Sunday Masses throughout the Diocese, Bishop Lori once again proclaimed his "commitment to transparency regarding clergy sexual abuse cases." It is now time for the bishop to stop stonewalling, and honor that commitment to transparency.

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"This is not a case about the Diocese's First Amendment right to choose its ministers and determine their suitability and assignments. Rather, it is a case about the failure of the Diocese to supervise properly its priests and take appropriate action to protect innocent children from priests that it knew to be sexual predators," said Dan Sullivan, an attorney who is co-chair of the VOTF affiliate in the Diocese of Bridgeport.

FATHER TOM DOYLE COUNTERS VATICAN ATTACK ON CRITICS OF ITS HANDLING OF SEXUAL ABUSE CASES

By Joanne P. Blair

Back in September the Vatican lashed out on criticism of its handling of the sexual abuse crisis. The defiant and provocative statement, issued by Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, the Vatican's permanent observer to the UN followed a meeting of the UN human rights council in Geneva. Representatives of other religions were dismayed by the Holy See's attempt to point the finger at other faiths. (Info from The Guardian, UK).

Within a month after the accusations were made, Thomas J. Doyle, J.C.D., C.A.D.C., issued his own comments on the situation. Following are excerpts from his response:

"The report contains blatantly inaccurate information and reflects a level of research that is amateurish at best. There is a great deal of up-to-date data yet your writer chose secondary sources based on out of date information which seriously damages the credibility of the statement. Every paragraph contains erroneous information. The most reliable research data presents two facets of the problem: sexually dysfunctional clerics who have sexually abused minors consisting of at least 6% of the clergy population in the U.S., and, more important, the documented evidence that at least 66.6% of the bishops in the U.S have, at one time or another, covered up at least one, and in most cases, several instances of known sexual abuse by clerics which is criminal behavior in both Canon Law and

civil law."

"The fact that there is sexual abuse of minors in other professions is important but irrelevant to the issue. The Catholic Church has a role in society that is radically different from any other private or public institution. The Church holds itself out as the source of authentic moral teaching. It asks that all its bishops and priests be accorded complete trust and respect. It has betrayed this trust countless times through sexual abuse of the most vulnerable of its members and, when called to account, has responded in a defensive and dishonest manner. As to the Church cleaning its own house, I am quite certain that you would want to know that the efforts of the U.S. bishops are looked upon with skepticism by many. The victims have approached the civil courts for many years only because they have consistently received no pastoral support and no justice from the Church's leadership. More important, the bishops' organizational responses and their profuse public statements are rendered not only meaningless but insulting in light of the fact that many continue to place known sexually abusing clerics back into the ministry. Others refuse to inform the public of the identity of credibly accused clerics and many others continue to punish victims through abusive court proceedings."

"The statement issued in your name contains information that is inaccurate. The more important problem for the Holy See and for the official Church, however, is the tone of the statement. It reflects an adolescent level of emotional response. As such it defeats its own purpose. Rather than lend any credibility to the response of the Holy See and the hierarchy to the vast problem of clergy sexual abuse, it further erodes what little credibility might have been left.

Fire your writers. They make you look uninformed and callous."

Sincerely in Christ,
Thomas Doyle, J.C.D., C.A.C.D.



KNOCK AND IT SHALL BE OPEN UNTO YOU: BUT ONLY IF YOU ARE A TRADITIONALIST!

By Msgr. Harry J. Byrne, J.C.D. (For more of Msgr. Byrne's articles, go to his website - harryjbyrne@blogspot.com)

Vatican officials have established special relationships with two religious entities, presently marching with no papal flags out front: Society of St. Pius X - the Lefebvrists - which, totally rejecting the prose and poetry of Vatican II, departed the papal fold, and the Traditional Anglican Communion, whose members, alienated by their Mother Church's ordination of women and openly gay individuals, have long requested entry into the traditional, safely patriarchal harbor of the Roman Church.

Married Anglican priests have been entering the Roman Church since 1980 as individuals and have been able to be ordained Catholic priests while remaining married, courtesy of a special dispensation from the traditional celibacy requirement. Now, whole groups, parishes, and dioceses may enter, while retaining Anglican liturgical and cultural accoutrements.

Much could be said about these two landmark initiatives. I wish to offer these three considerations:

1) The official meeting of Vatican and Lefebvrists followed the recent removal of the excommunications of four Lefebvrists, one of whom has denied the existence of the Holocaust. The Apostolic Constitution, shaping new relationships, lists a number of topics for negotiation. One of these is "Vatican Council II", the collegial work of the world's bishops under John XXIII and Paul VI. My goodness! Has this initiation of the tradition-emphasizing Benedict VI been undertaken unilaterally by B16 and his curia or has there been consultation with diocesan bishops, within whose territories the contemplated new "St. Pius X prelatures", with their own seminaries and bishops, will be located? What aspects of Vatican II would B16 consider negotiable with the Lefebvrists? What aspects of Vatican II are vulnerable? Hmmm?

2) To situate incoming traditional Anglican parishes and dioceses within the Roman Church structure, a system of "ordinariates" is being contemplated. These, like the new Lefebvrist structures, will be located within our traditional dioceses under their bishops? Here, too, the question should be asked, do our traditional bishops have, or have they had, any collegial, consultative role in the on-going process? Or is it a pope and curia-based unilateral operation? Where do I go on Sunday? My beloved parish church with its embrace of all, like the first Pentecost Sunday, with its New York mix of Arabs, Cretes, Medes and Elamites and dark Sudanese with rings in their ears - remember that writer who said about our Church, "Here comes everybody"? Or do I go a few blocks away to the LeFebvre Mass in the Latin of celebrants in fiddleback vestments? Or to the nearby Anglican Traditional Church, where the priest hopefully may have the Wasp lockjaw accent and an ermine-trimmed chasuble? Both of these last two choices, absent altar girls, carry the assurance that women will never cross the moat and breach the sanctuary gate. What happens to the notion of a community of faith? Benedict, have these two initiatives been thought through? And by whom? A good blueprint for ecumenism can be found in Vatican II without making the Church a twisted pretzel! That design has been worked out by the world's bishops!

3) Finally, new dialogue to build bridges is refreshing and welcome. But must it only be with those outside the Church who, looking backwards, seek the traditional and women-diminishing atmosphere of our Roman Church? Great numbers of Catholics, who participate in Mass and the sacraments, who contribute to their parishes and wider institutional causes, have long sought and are seeking dialogue with our hierarchy. These faithful are looking forward to positive developments, not like those looking backward to what has been tried, and frankly, is not doing well. They are in organizations like VOICE OF THE FAITHFUL, CALL TO ACTION, WE ARE CHURCH, and others. But most bishops and pastors, looking over their shoulders towards Rome, have turned them away. New ideas and initiatives that could come from our own faithful might well help change some of the things that are moving people



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AROUND THE CHURCH - NEWS IN BRIEF

By Joanne Blair

First of all, a **Tale of Two Bishops**. In Las Cruces, N.M., **Bishop Ricardo Ramirez is widely recognized as a skilled pastoral leader** who has great rapport with the people of his diocese, which is among the poorest in the country. He tells how the "gift of the lay people" is bearing fruit in the kind of activities they conduct alongside the clergy and describes a "quasi-parish" which was run by a nun, then a laywoman and, for the past four years, a layman. Ramirez noted that the American Catholic Church has done a good job in welcoming the stranger. ((Info from NCR's "Emerging Church" Series)

In the meantime, **Bishop R. Walker Nickless of Sioux City is busy denigrating the "spirit of Vatican II."** In a new pastoral letter he states, "The hermeneutic of discontinuity risks ending in a split between the pre-conciliar Church and the post-conciliar Church." It asserts that "the texts of the Council as such do not express the true spirit of the Council. The so-called 'spirit' of the Council has no authoritative interpretation. It is a ghost or demon that must be exorcized if we are to proceed with the Lord's work."

GOOD NEWS. The American Catholic Council is a fairly new organization composed of Catholic groups; VOTF was one of its earliest members. The ACC, as it is known, was founded to bring Catholic groups together to work on church issues. They are now in the process of scheduling listening sessions all over the country - all are welcome.

AND, plans are underway for a massive Pentecostal gathering in Detroit in 2011 - somewhat like the first national Call to Action meeting (although this was called by priests who worked together with the laity). The meeting will be held on Pentecost weekend, June 9-11. Ambitious plans have been underway for a while, including a visit by Hans Kung. More information will follow.



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away from our Church. It would be a great idea for Rome and individual bishops to call for convocations of these faithful people. Members of our communities of religious women could get together with the Vatican big hats for a chat, a discussion, a joint study. Sorry, sisters! No way! We chat with dissatisfied Anglicans and angry Lefebvrists. Not with you, faithful Catholics. You are on our turf. Under our control. No conversation, no discussion. We have an investigation! The ball game was over before the first pitch! (*What about the repercussions if and when this actually comes into being?*)

The Question Never Asked of a Nun

By John Chuchman

The question never asked of a nun while

Feeding a Homeless Person,

Caring for a Rape Victim,

Visiting a Prisoner,

Nursing a Sick Person,

Teaching a Child,

Consoling a Griever,

Keeping a Parish Alive,

Counseling One Confused,

Driving an Elderly to Shopping,

Clothing a Destitute,

Attending a Special Needs Person,

Helping Heal a Busted Relationship,

Comforting One Dying, and

Being Christ to All,

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Are you approved by the Vatican?