

Our Voice

An E-Newsletter for Those Interested and Involved in The Voice of The Faithful • Connecticut
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BARTLEY UNVEILS FIVE-PRONGED VOTF NATIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN

By Joanne Blair

Newly elected VOTF President Dan Bartley addressed members of Greater Bridgeport VOTF with both enthusiasm and hope as he explained the National VOTF overall theme, "Transforming Our Church." He noted that VOTF was once again in the position of moving forward. The full-page ad featured in newspapers across the country, with its direct questions to Pope Paul XVI regarding the sexual abuse crisis, brought VOTF a national audience.

Members at the national office gathered information, looked at strengths and weaknesses and, ultimately, developed a strategic plan. Although there is a large and talented membership, they noted a high degree of apathy and an uncertainty about where VOTF is headed, along with a very inefficiently run organization on the national level. Using comments from members, responses to surveys and any other available method, VOTF National scrutinized the ideas of the membership and came with a plan to define the organization by its actions.

A five-point platform, designed to give members a wide choice, made up the ultimate strategic plan and included

- 1) Local action programs whereby members can write articles for local newspapers, set up finance councils in their parish, etc.
- 2) Reform actions focusing on survivor support and child protections - primarily through legislative reform. Marci Hamilton, a well-known attorney involved in the crisis since the beginning, wrote the "How to" plan.
- 3) Universal Church Reform, which will include a national approach to Church issues such as mandatory celibacy, election of bishops, etc.
- 4) Partnering and Networking by reaching out to other Catholic organizations for dialogue and, perhaps, action. Bartley noted that these would range from very conservative to very liberal with all degrees in between.
- 5) Spiritual and Community building which would include everything from retreats to picnics.

NOTE: Members are encouraged to choose an action group that most suits them.

(As a long time VOTF member I found Dan's enthusiasm for and devotion to these causes to be at the highest level since the organization's beginning; let's all take them seriously enough to work for them).

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

HOW MANY CHANCES DOES CARDINAL GEORGE GET?

(Statement by Barbara Blaine, national president of SNAP)

How many chances does Cardinal George get? For years, he shunned victims, deceived parishioners, protected predators and stonewalled prosecutors. But put that aside for a moment, just consider his very recent track record on clergy sex crimes and cover up.

In 2006, despite his being arrested and against the advice of George's own lay review panel, George left Fr. Daniel McCormack in a parish. A sensible person has to ask

"HOW MANY MORE arrested predator priests are still in Chicago parishes right now?"

In 2006, despite at least four allegations of child sex abuse and against two recommendations from his own lay review board, George left Fr. Joseph R. Bennett in a parish. A sensible person has to ask

"HOW MANY MORE serially accused predator priests are in Chicago parishes right now?"

In 2008, George admitted using his political clout to try to free a convicted predator, Fr. Norbert Maday, from prison. A sensible person has to ask

"HOW MANY MORE proven predator priests is George trying to get out of prison now?"

In 2008, despite his criminal conviction for child molestation, George keeps Fr. Kenneth Martin on the church payroll. A sensible person has to ask HOW MANY MORE admitted predator priests work in or for the archdiocese right now?

Each of these four troubling cases surfaced thanks to brave victims, determined lawyers and hard-working journalists. Does anyone really believe that these four disturbingly reckless cases are the only ones in the archdiocese? That defies common sense.

So today, we call on Cardinal George to "come clean"; and answer these crucial questions, questions that address the core issue: how can he continue to put his flock at risk of horrific, preventable childhood trauma.

The excuses that "Father X is just in an administrative job" and "Father Y is elderly and can't get around well" just doesn't cut it. It takes just seconds for a predator to get his hands on a child.

We also call on George's weak-kneed, handpicked abuse panel to speak up or step down. He's manipulating them, and they're letting themselves be manipulated and it's wrong.

On one hand, we're grateful that 2 years ago, they expressed their outrage to George for his deceptive maneuvers to essentially try to blame them for the fact that a dangerous predator stayed in a parish and molested boys long after he should have been removed.

But shame on the board for writing a private letter to George, when they should have shouted from the rooftops that Chicago's highest ranking Catholic official was deceiving the public.

Since then, we've seen at least three other fiascoes - the Bennett case, the Maday case and the Martin case. Yet the abuse panel stays silent.

Two years ago George tried to make the Review Board look bad. Now, the board is making itself look bad.

They're becoming as complicit as George is.

We call on them today (11-2-08) to show some spine, honor their mandate, and either publicly protest George's on-going misdeeds, or resign.

If they've believed that they can bring reform to this corrupt institution working "behind the scenes," they've been duped. The evidence clearly shows there has not been any meaningful reform regarding child safety or even basic honesty. The board members continue, by their silence, to provide political and public relations "cover" for a recalcitrant, unrepentant, secretive and reckless church official.

In 2005, the board urged George to remove Bennett. He did not. In 2005, the board urged George to remove McCormack. He did not.

In 2003, for the second time, the board urged George to defrock Maday. He did not (until 2008.)

And again, these are just the George misdeeds that have been publicly exposed.

Today we call upon George to "come clean" and disclose how many other proven, admitted, and credibly accused predator priests are still working in or for the archdiocese, are trying to be sprung from prison by the archdiocese and are being imported by the archdiocese. **And we call on George's abuse panel to speak up or step aside.**

OTHER VOICES AROUND THE COUNTRY

By Joanne Blair

VOTF groups in MA have announced that the Senate passed the "Protect Our Children Act" unanimously and the next step is the House of Representatives. VOTF is asking members to contact their congressmen in support of U.S. Senate Bill 1728.

"The Liturgical Year: Season for Spiritual Growth" is the title of a program sponsored by **Lynn, Northshore and Seacliff MA VOTF Affiliates** in collaboration with the Department of Theology, Boston College. Programs are on Sunday from 7 to 9 p.m.

Winchester MA Area VOTF (WAVOTF) met on November 17 for a Prayer Experience with Bob Short, Director of Ministry at Youville Hospital. Their next meeting is December 1 when a Panel of Priests will engage in dialogue with the group.

VOTF National President Dan Bartley has issued an invitation to all interested members of the **Boston Area VOTF Council** to his talk on December 3. He will focus on VOTF's strategic planning process that is currently underway as well as the three major initiatives being undertaken.

Concord MA Area VOTF members were invited to a lecture "How to be a Catholic in a Changing World (and a Changing Church)", the second of six in a series given by Michael McLaughlin. McLaughlin, a theologian and convert to Catholicism, posed the question "If lay people are going to have a greater say in the Church, then we all have to do some homework to become more knowledgeable about the Church, its history and its core assumptions and concerns. Otherwise, how can we have much of a say?"

Twin Cities (Minneapolis & St. Paul, MN) VOTF presented Father Michael O'Connell with the Priest of Integrity Award for leading the charge in dealing with clergy sexual abuse issues, not only in his own diocese, but also nationwide. According to the VOTF group "Had other dioceses moved as quickly and openly, perhaps the abuse would have been mitigated sooner than it was." (Father O'Connell began working with victims in 1984, almost 20 years before the crisis exploded in Boston.)

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CLERGY ABUSE SURVIVORS PROTEST HARTFORD ARCHDIOCESE POLICIES

By Joanne Blair

SNAP members, led by the national director, David Clohessy, gathered in front of St. Joseph's Cathedral to protest Archbishop Mansell's "passive, failed policies", especially regarding Father Stephen Foley who has left Connecticut for Arlington, VA. Clohessy traveled all the way from St. Louis, MO, to reprimand Mansell for refusing to tell the public where Foley lives. This refusal comes in spite of the fact that the Archdiocese has already settled 12 lawsuits regarding Foley's proclivity to sexually abuse boys.

Father John Gatzak, spokesman for the Hartford Archdiocese, said the archbishop couldn't release Foley's address because it would violate his rights. When asked if an exception could be made for accused sex offenders, Gatzak commented "Again, those are accusations that have been made." (Is he really trying to have us believe that the Archdiocese would make payments for the 12 lawsuits they have settled if it were just an "accusation"?)

After settling the lawsuits against Foley, the Archbishop is facing yet another one - on hold because Foley failed to appear for a deposition in Arlington, VA, where he now lives (and collects \$1000 a month stipend in addition to health benefits).

Somehow, David Clohessy seems to be on the right track with his comment, "Archbishop Mansell is protecting his church and his own reputation and the reputation of the people who came before him." (And who protects the victims, actual and potential?)

(Info from Hartford Courant article by Elizabeth Hamilton.)

Spread the
Word

AROUND THE CHURCH - NEWS IN BRIEF

By Joanne Blair

The Synod of Bishops on the Bible, held in Rome from October 5 to 26, ended on a moderate note. They endorsed both the use of the historical-critical method of study while also calling for a theological and spiritual reading of the Bible. In a more surprising mode, the synod recommended women be officially admitted to the ministry of "lector", a minister authorized to read Bible passages at Mass. The laity in general received strong support from the bishops who endorsed lay-led liturgies of the Word in the absence of a priest, as well as small ecclesiastical communities (often known in Latin America as "base communities".) (Info from NCR)

Bishop Martin Amos of the Davenport (IA) Diocese has scheduled 18 atonement services throughout the diocese. The services are held in parishes which reported priest abuse or where accused priests have served. The Bishop himself leads the services and before each one encourages parishioners to ask questions or express thoughts or concerns. During one service he was asked why the diocese wasn't more helpful to victims and their families when abuse was reported. He commented "I don't know. That just blows my mind. I have a lot of these same questions as well."

SUPPORT VOTF NATIONAL AS YOU SHOP FOR CHRISTMAS...

If you plan to do any online shopping at Amazon.com, please go to the VOTF website first and access Amazon through VOTF. Amazon.com will then donate a small percentage of whatever you buy (including gift certificates!) to VOTF. You won't be charged any extra and VOTF will be able to raise some money! Please visit <http://www.votf.org/amazon/>

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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN PARISHES ARE LINKED OR CLUSTERED?

A number of parishes in the Hartford Diocese have been linked or clustered. The shortage of priests will result in many more parishes facing this situation. What can the laity and clergy do in advance to prepare for linkage?

This was the topic of discussion at St. Mary's in Simsbury on Wednesday evening, November 12. Sr. Elissa Rinere, a Passionist sister and a canon lawyer, led a conversation on what has and has not worked throughout the U.S. in those parishes that have been linked.

OTHER VOICES AROUND THE COUNTRY

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Dr. Margaret Farley, progressive feminist theologian and nun, will be the featured speaker at the December 4th meeting of **Greater Bridgeport (CT) VOTF** which will take place at 7:30 p.m. at the First Congregational Church on the Green, 5 Park Street, Norwalk, CT.

Farley, the first woman to teach full time at the Yale Divinity School, will discuss her latest book "Just Love: a Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics."

WORDS OF WISDOM

Spoken by **Oscar Romero**, Martyred Bishop

THE VIOLENCE we preach is not
the violence of the sword,
the violence of hatred.

It is the violence of love,
of brotherhood,
the violence that wills to beat weapons
into sickles for work.

November 27, 1977

God's reign is already present on earth in mystery.
When the Lord comes, it will be brought to perfection.

That is the hope that inspires Christians.
We know that every effort to better society,
especially when injustice and sin are so ingrained,
is an effort that God blesses, that God wants,
that God demands of us.

March 11, 1980...spoken moments before his assassination in a San Salvador hospital

Welcome to Send the Bishops a Message.com

Had Enough of Unaccountable Bishops? So Have We!

"Send the Bishops a Message" is the initiative of reform-minded Catholics who are tired of the "business as usual" approach of the bishops.

We will get our message across by advocating that all Catholics withhold financial support, whether it is cash, check or credit cards, on designated "Withholding Sundays."

The continuous failure of Catholic Church officials to protect our kids and provide acceptable levels of stewardship for our hard-earned donations requires that we take this action. These officials have adamantly refused to accept responsibility for their grave moral failures in the clergy sex abuse crisis. They repeatedly "apologize" but neither admit covering up sex crimes against children nor accept their part in the grave scandal brought down upon Catholics everywhere.

Time and again, we have seen evidence of cardinals and bishops protecting clerical sexual abuse predators. This includes Cardinal George, the current head of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). This has to stop! The hierarchy has cost the Catholic people billions of dollars in legal fees and settlements. If the church officials don't change their ways, the financial hemorrhaging will result in more parish closings, and the people of the church will continue to bear the burden of this folly.

The bishops have squandered our trust, and now is the time to send them our message. We urge all Catholics to Send the Bishop a Message by withholding cash, check and credit card donations on designated "Withholding Sundays."

We Catholics have no elections, no recall procedure, or impeachment processes that allow us to replace those who have cost us so much. Withholding donations is the best way for a disenfranchised laity to send, with one voice, a message to church officials in the only language they understand -- MONEY!

We understand that many Catholics will find it culturally and psychologically difficult to withhold their donations. However If we fail to use the only power bishops listen to, the power of money, we will have more abuse, more scandal, and more financial mismanagement. Ask yourself, can we afford to put more children at risk? Can we afford to have more parishes close because of financial mismanagement? Can we afford a secretive, unresponsive, unjust system of governance any longer? We cannot. Therefore we urge you to exercise the power of the purse on Withholding Sundays to send a unified message to the Church hierarchy. Business as usual will no longer be tolerated.

We want to be clear: we are not opposing any Catholic doctrine or dogma. We want our children to be safe. We want our parishes intact. We want our donations to be managed openly according to the principles of good stewardship, accountability, and transparency.

OUR OBJECTIVES:

To make Catholics aware that they have the power to change the Church governance policies by selectively withholding financial donations

To give Catholics an opportunity to speak with a strong united voice

To send a message to the bishops that business as usual - abusing our children, covering up these crimes, putting children at risk by shielding criminal priests, and mismanaging financial resources - will no longer be tolerated.

**(For more information, visit
www.sendthebishopsamessage.com
or call Frank Douglas at 520-404-2489)**

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

UNCHAIN GOD

By John Chuchman
(with permission of the author)

We need to unchain God from our smallness,
from our restricted imaginations,
and stand in awe of the unknowable.
We must stop enlisting God in our causes
as sponsor of our ambitions and greed.
We must stop insisting that we know
precisely what God believes about issues,
about political strategies,
and whose side he cheers in the spasms
of human violence that we call war.
Feudalism, historians remind us, was an
economic, political and social system
based on land, loyalty and the need for
security and protection.
Its linchpin was unquestioned loyalty.
As a layered social phenomenon,
it was hierarchical in nature.
At the lowest rung of the feudal order,
serfs, the laity,
almost exclusively uneducated peasants,
were allowed to live on the land they worked,
and to keep a modest portion
of the food they produced
while supplying the necessities of life
for their superiors.
In return for their labor,
serfs enjoyed the protection of the vassal
from marauders and other invaders.
Their lot was difficult,
no land, no education, no power, no voice!
So the pope, the king in this scheme,
grants benefices, or dioceses
to his bishops in exchange for homage,

loyalty and obedience.
The bishops in turn grant benefices to their priests
in exchange for the same
and lay serfs get to come to church
and reap a modest amount of spiritual food
for life's journey.
When Constantine made Christianity
the official state religion in 313,
the church over centuries adopted
the trappings and conceits of a royalty.
There is a built-in arrogance,
a high regard for power and property,
an immediate tension introduced
between accumulating power
and exchanging authority over subjects
and the rather contrary demands of the Beatitudes,
the essence of our gospel.
A larger frame
for understanding the almost incomprehensible
response of the bishops worldwide
-and on up to the pope himself-
to the sexual abuse crisis,
is the model of rule the church is trying
to maintain into the 21st century.
Their first instinct, we know,
is to protect the institution
and their own standing in it.
the benefices they enjoy depend on keeping
The marauder out,
so the victims and their families become enemies,
threats to the good order of the prince's holdings.
This crisis wasn't and isn't about sex.
We can forgive sexual sins and sinners.
This crisis became a true crisis

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when it became about the abuse of power
and authority.

Increasingly the leaders today
of this supposed pilgrim community
(of followers of the way of the cross,
of those who were following the Christ
who rejected retaliation, who ate with sinners,
who came here principally
to display the Mercy of God)
rummage through the old props closet
to restore the garments and affects of royalty
as a way to reclaim their idea of a Catholic identity.

And what should that identity be?

Lamb of God?

Suffering Servant?

Dispossessed Healer?

Incarnation of the Mercy of Christ?

Nonviolent Christ?

Mitres?

Robes?

Tyranny?

GIRMS?

Smaller, Purer Church?

Exclusivity?

You decide.

