

VOTF CALLS FOR HEALING AND A BIGGER ROLE FOR LAY PEOPLE

*The local Voice of the Faithful
chapter will present its reform
plan at a national convention in July*

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NORWALK — With a prayer that included the words “heal our divisions,” 32 members of the Voice of the Faithful in the Diocese of Bridgeport welcomed theologian Dr. John Healey to their meeting at the First Congregational Church on the Green Thursday night.

More than two years after discussions began on making structural changes to restore the good name of the Roman Catholic Church, and a month after presenting its five reform proposals to its members, the group is ready to present its document during a national convention in Indiana in July. The proposals call for giving a greater voice to lay people in the way the church is run.

“We’re need to change the way things are run,” said Joseph O’Callaghan, former VOTF chairman. “The sexual abuse crisis affected the whole Catholic Church.”

The organization was formed after a string of sexual abuse allegations against priests was glossed over by many bishops and “tainted the church” in a scandal that has rocked the nation and shattered faith in Catholic bishop’s ability to lead effectively.

More than \$1 billion has been paid by United States bishops to resolve clergy- related sexual abuse convictions, according to the Catholic Research Center. The Bridgeport Diocese reported in February that it has received sexual abuse allegations against 32 priests from 107 people and paid out more than \$37 million to settle claims.

Healey, who stood on the floor for three days during the Second Vatican Council in 1962, used his expertise to study the proposals and offer his opinion.

“These require no change in the doctrine,” he said. “But they do require a massive change in the mindset of people.”

The five proposals are:

”The election of bishops from diocesan clergy by elected representatives of the clergy, religious and a diocesan synod under the presidency of the archbishop of the province in question.

”The selection of pastors by an elected parish personnel committee after applications are reviewed, evaluated and discussed and interviews undertaken to determine the nominee for appointment by the bishop.

”Election of separate diocesan councils governing pastoral and financial concerns with the laity in the majority with oversight responsibility for issues relating to worship, religious education, social concerns, diocesan and parochial administration, financial administration and other diocesan pastoral works.

”Creation by the bishop of individual parish councils composed of elected parishioners responsible for governing the same concerns.

”Establishment in each parish of a corporation consisting of all registered parishioners with the authority to use, administer and maintain parish property, acquire new property or sell unneeded property. The bishop and the pastor would be ex-officio members of

these councils whose officers would be elected by the parishioners.

"I see no reason to question the orthodoxy of what has been proposed," Healey said.

"They avoid doctrinal issues."

O'Callaghan said the proposals "will make it clear to the whole country what we're talking about when we're say structural changes."

Healey said as far back as the year 120, bishops were part of the collective elders who made decisions. However, they have adopted an attitude they are fourth in a straight line from "God, Jesus, Peter, then me (bishops)," he said.

Healey said early history shows bishops were administrators and not active in the church and at the end of the Middle Ages the word "holy and bishops" were not synonymous.

Healey said throughout its history, the Catholic Church has had a list of "untouchables" but "the (sexual) crisis is leading us to touch things we've never touched before."