

VOTF National Representative Council Meeting

Minutes, November 10-12, 2006

The VOTF National Representative Council (NRC) met at The Marianist Retreat and Conference Center in Eureka, MO, on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, Nov. 10-12, 2006.

Attending: 21 voting representatives (17 reps. and 4 alternates). Reps: Dan Bartley (Region 2), Bud Bretschneider (Region 3), Bill Culleton (Region 3), Donna Doucette (Region 1), Frank Douglas (Region 13), Ron DuBois (Region 1), Ed Friedl (Region 6), Jim Jenkins (Region 11), Bob Kaintz (Region 9), Lisa Kendzior (Region 10), Chuck Miller (Region 4), Rosa Maria Montenegro (Region 14), Rich Moriarty (Region 4), Sheila Peiffer (Region 2), Susan Vogt (Region 5), Kris Ward (Region 6), Ed Wilson (Region 2). Alternates: Patricia Gomez (Region 1), Sheila Connors Grove (Region 1), John Marshall Lee (Region 1), Sally Vance-Trembath (Region 11).

Also in attendance: Officers: Mary Pat Fox (President), Sally Vance-Trembath (Vice President), Gaile Pohlhaus (Secretary), Mary Freeman (Treasurer); John Hushon, a member of the Board of Trustees; and members of VOTF affiliates from the St. Louis area.

Friday Evening, November 10, 2006

Following the opening dinner, Moderator Ron DuBois opened the meeting with a prayer. Representatives and alternates introduced themselves, and the Council then broke into smaller groups for the startup of the Standing Committee meetings. (See Attachment 1 for the Standing Committees members.) During this initial meeting, committees were asked to discuss the functions of their committee, the means of communication to be used, the interim chairperson and the criteria that would be used to evaluate proposals and resolutions. The committees were also charged with evaluating the two resolutions on Survivor Support and Financial Accountability that are currently before the Council.

The Council reconvened as a whole after the committee meetings. The following notes are from the flip charts used to list the reports delivered by each committee.

Mission, Goals and National Impact Committee

Interim Chair: Chuck Miller

Functions of Committee:

- Review proposals as they relate to Mission and Goals (especially policy)
- Generate proposals

- Develop collaboration with officers and BOT – involve representatives of all groups within VOTF where possible, in order to avoid wheel spinning – early consultation should be a priority

Criteria:

- How would the proposal affect, promote, expand or conflict with Mission and Goals? (interest in expansion of goals)
- Who would be affected? (within VOTF, Church, society)
- How would proposal be perceived by affiliates?

Membership and Growth

Interim Chair: Kris Ward

How do we attract people?

- Go where the problems are (closings, abuse)
- Two resolutions lack “pizzazz”

What do we have to offer? VOICE!! “No more silent Catholics”

- Need to captivate the people in the pews

Lay Synod – VOTF taking the lead, bringing together other groups

Comprehensive communication strategy

- Press releases more often/ better coverage (like about this meeting)
- Team of “1st Responders” to deal with the media; communication as member services
- Be proactive about getting in the press
- What do the membership numbers mean? Are they real? What is a member?

Develop the 3rd goal

- What does a reformed Church look like?
- Nothing taken off the table for the moment
- What now in regard to Accountability Campaign?

Organizing principle: formation of structures that allow people to decide – have a VOICE

Affiliate Development

Interim Chair: Ed Wilson

At his request, Representative Ed Friedl was excused from the committee and left the meeting.

Committee members discussed the following items:

How to improve communication with affiliates: There often is too much information and too little clear focus from National.

Need more attention to priorities and some realism about what can be done.

Fundamental work of VOTF is done in the affiliates.

How does NRC Rep communicate with the affiliates?

There is a need for recognizing and using gifts, talents and different levels of knowledge within affiliates and for clarification of process for leadership within affiliates.

Regarding the resolutions: “whereas” wording is turn-off

- Good ideas/good information – change wording
- Remember the effect on people in the pews
- In the form presented, the two resolutions undercut affiliates that are trying to work with the dioceses.
- Harsh tone does not represent the views of people VOTF wants to attract to membership, and is offensive to diocesan officials with whom affiliate leaders are trying to work.

General Discussion

There is a need for better integration of all the parts of VOTF

Information is flowing, but it is “hard to catch the trout as the fish swim by”

Need self-assessment

Which Standing Committee keeps us on task – wields the effectiveness meter?

- Mission & Goals?
- Should officers address this issue of assessing for focus?

Saturday, November 11, 2006

The meeting was called to order at 9:03 by Moderator Ron DuBois.

Bob Kaintz, Region 9 Representative and host for the meeting, welcomed meeting attendees and led the opening prayer.

The Steering Committee announced a change in the day's agenda: At the request of guest speaker Brad Pritts from VOTF's Financial Accountability Advisors group, he will make his presentation at 3:30, before the Council considers the resolutions sponsored by Frank Douglas. The discussions and planned vote on the Survivor Support and Financial Accountability resolutions will begin at 3:50 pm, followed by the report from the Convocation Implementation Team (CIT), and the presentation by guest speaker David Clohessy from SNAP.

President's Report

Mary Pat Fox presented the President's Report to the Council (see Attachment 2). She reported on visits to the tri-state VOTF gathering of Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana, which began with a celebration of accomplishments, that is, things that have changed as a result of VOTF efforts: the charter for children, laity's voice on financial accountability, and working on legislative actions to extend statutes of limitation were three of the changes cited.

Mary Pat also reported attending a CT/RI affiliate meeting and attending the Catholic University conference on The Church in 2006.

On behalf of VOTF, Mary Pat delivered the petitions from VOTF's current campaigns to Bishop Gregory Aymond, chair of the USCCB committee for protection of children and laity. The petitions sought three actions: funding for the John Jay study of the causes and context of the sexual abuse scandal, creation of a national database of credibly accused sexually abusive priests, and achieving financial accountability through effective diocesan and parish lay finance councils.

Bishop Aymond said that initial findings from the John Jay study would be ready next summer. They also discussed the creation of a national database of credibly accused priests, with the bishop noting that a majority of the bishops do understand that the sex-abuse crisis is not over. Mary Pat said the bishops seem to have some concern about legal issues with a national database funded by the bishops' conference.

Turning to the outlook for the future, Mary Pat said that VOTF must work within the Church to promote change, which means that we must:

- Inspire more laity to live out their baptismal responsibilities

- Get Bishops to accept and recognize our help

Within the next 5 years, VOTF should aim to get Church leaders to accept responsibility for the survivors of clergy sex abuse and increase support for priests of integrity.

The strengths of VOTF, Mary Pat said, are our commitment to church, commitment to change, action orientation, work for justice, and highly educated membership. Our weaknesses are a lack of unity and anger that is turned inward. She called for VOTF to:

1. Create a faith community – spirituality is a part of all we do.
2. Direct our focus outward.
3. Inspire other laity to live out their baptismal call.
4. Get priests and bishops to accept our help.

Reporting on the current Campaigns, Mary Pat said 13 affiliates participated in recommended activities at Pentecost and 30 affiliates participated in recommended activities in the fall, which indicates a growing support and action.

Currently the officers are working on a draft strategic plan. Mary Pat told the Council, “We all need to get on the same page about how we will create the changes we seek.”

Questions, answers, and a discussion period followed the President’s report:

Donna Doucette asked Mary Pat if VOTF had considered suggesting to the bishop that the USCCB utilize bishopaccountability.org as an outlet for posting a national database of abusers, if the bishops were concerned about hosting it themselves. Mary Pat said that the bishop was aware of bishopaccountability.org but that a link probably had not been considered.

Rich Moriarty asked about the 66 change organizations concerned with Church reform and how VOTF can align ourselves with those efforts. Mary Pat said that we share certain issues, but most of the issues of other organizations are not our main focus—recommend partnering with these organizations but not necessarily becoming THE ONE reform group.

Ed Wilson and Sheila Peiffer asked about the research Mary Pat mentioned that was done by a VOTF intern. Mary Pat explained that the intern researched every diocesan website to see if they posted the names of credibly accused priests, to find the name of the victim assistance coordinators, to see how easy this information was to find, and to see if they had a link to SNAP or VOTF.

In reference to the study done by the intern and reported to the bishops, Kris Ward and Bud Bretschneider asked if we would bill the USCCB for the report, since its information was part of the mandated activity from the bishops’ charter. Ray Joyce (Executive

Director) clarified that the USCCB should be responsible for producing its own list, but that we could send a symbolic letter citing the work done and asking payment.

Sheila Peiffer asked what materials Mary Pat gave to Bishop Aymond. Mary Pat said she gave him the signed petitions that were of our fall action for the campaigns and some brochures.

As a comment on Mary Pat's reference to anger turned inward, Frank Douglas asked Mary Pat if she had a corrective action plan to counteract the weaknesses she cited (lack of unity and anger). On the Strategic Plan process, he said he expected this meeting to provide some input.

Ed Wilson noted that many dioceses do not know how to set up websites, which would make it difficult to abide by the requirements of the charter to post the names of victim assistance coordinators.

Chuck Miller commented on the support of bishops to expand the John Jay study to include all sexual abuse of children, not just children abused by clergy. Chuck's concern is that this will dilute the focus on our understanding abuse within the church. Mary Pat clarified that the expansion proposal was from John Jay's initial Causes and Contexts RFP, wherein they would initially do the research within the church and then look at society as a whole. However, John Jay is responsible for obtaining the funding that would allow this add-on.

Jim Jenkins requested a copy of Mary Pat's presentation and also asked if the bishops have overcome Vatican objections to the Cause and Context part of the study? Mary Pat will take this up with both Bishop Aymond and the John Jay group.

John Marshall Lee asked if there is a possibility to have a special fund within VOTF to continue the John Jay study.

Priorities Discussion

As a preliminary to the discussion of priorities, Donna Doucette for the Steering Committee read an email from Hugh O'Regan of Region 11, who was unable to attend at the last minute due to illness. Hugh designated Sally Vance-Trembath as his alternate because they live within a few blocks of each other, they belong to the same affiliate, and he is certain that she knows what his vote would be on issues arising that require votes during the meeting.

At Bill Culleton's request, there was a motion to suspend the 3-minute rule (which limited each person to a 3-minute comment) during this session. The motion failed, and the 3-minute rule remained in force.

Bill Culleton facilitated the discussion on Priorities for the Council, using methods prepared by Linda Mains, who also was unable to attend the meeting due to illness.

Bill asked the meeting attendees to consider the questions cited in the agenda, including: What do you want VOTF to do? Advocacy or large base approach? What is the role of confrontation in our activities?

When attendees separated into small groups for discussion, he said, we should ask what are the three most influential actions VOTF could take in 12-24 months to energize the church for change? Could these actions be in addition to the accountability campaigns and in conjunction with them?

In considering the lenses through which to address these questions, Bill said we should see the Church as defined by five groups:

- Folks in the pews
- Lay ministers
- VOTF members/Other Change Organizations
- Vowed Religious/Clergy
- Hierarchy

Frank Douglas asked whether we were to assess these questions on internal or external grounds? Bill replied that the questions are just a starting place for this discussion.

Chuck Miller asked Bill to add “and further mission and goals of VOTF” to the discussion sentences. Bill agreed but reminded everyone that the words are simply a starting point for the discussion; they do not limit or describe the outcome.

Council representatives and other meeting attendees divided into five groups (per the list of five defined parts of the Church developed by Bill and Linda Mains), with each group asked to consider the question: What are the three most influential actions VOTF could take in 12 to 24 months to energize the Church for change?

After returning from the small-group discussions, each group presented the ideas they had brainstormed for their segments:

Laity group or PIP (People in the Pews)

1. Promote and support Small Christian communities – sharing faith journey
2. Lay synod – let the people decide; give laity responsibility for leadership
3. Formational Programs – Education empowers the people to act; could also be directed to POP (people out of pews, that is, people who are walking away from the Church)
4. Provide resources to groups, parishes, in crisis – (any)

Lay Ministers and Employees and Volunteers

1. Open dialogue with the National Association that represents lay ministers
2. Give voice to injustices in the parish and archdiocesan workplaces
 - Research and publicize discrepancies in pay scales
 - Seek social justice / job security, including for volunteers
3. Consider a national working group to partner with the association of lay ministers

VOTF and Other Change Organizations

1. Have a monthly VOTF prayer
2. Work for vocal/spontaneous Prayers of the Faithful (at Mass); and then pray for VOTF issues
3. Work for better communication of Working Group Materials, e.g. pastoral planning & selection of bishops and pastors
4. PR in the secular Press – be more proactive about getting our message out
5. Identify major reform groups

Vowed Religious and Clergy

1. Joint national meeting about changing the Church
2. Support existing priest groups & networks for discussion of change
3. Hold local meetings about lay/clergy problems, issues & concerns
4. Create & communicate best practices regarding priests' pension
5. Research, study & inform people in the pews on priest compensation and duties as a justice issue

Hierarchy

1. Prepare for Mahoney indictment
2. Audit Child Protection Charter
3. Voice of Compassion funds – Escrow accounts
4. Vatican Witness – to speak directly to the Pope
5. Support for Priests who are accused but accusations are “unsubstantiated – in “limbo”
6. Spiritual parish audit

From these lists, Bill Culleton and the Council could see groupings of some related strategies and themes:

Strategy options identified in the small-group discussions included media use; partnering and collaboration; consistency with the Pope’s message

Objectives also could be identified: justice; voice; defining the church

One general option that could be suitable across the country was to have a parish-based pastor transition plan, saying this is what we want to do when our pastor leaves or parish closes; have a meaningful voice in the selection of the priest or in a parish-closing situation.

Chuck Miller made the following motion: The NRC shall select 5 priorities from the lists developed today and these top 5 will be placed on the NRC listserv for comment, and a vote shall be made in 3 weeks by NRC members to select the top 3 action items. The motion passed unanimously.

To complete the Priorities Discussion process, Bill asked all Representatives to place their “votes” on the flip charts for those priorities they preferred. Each voter had three votes, which could be placed on any one to three suggested activities on the flip charts.

From this process, the following five priorities were identified:

- Lay Synod to give the laity a meaningful voice and leadership responsibility
- Priest pension – create and communicate best practices
- Workplace justice in parishes and dioceses – give voice by research & publicity, seeking social justice
- Groups in crisis – provide resources regarding any crisis or problem
- Work for better communication of Working Group material among members – for example, regarding pastor and bishop selection and pastoral planning

Of these options, the Lay Synod had by far the most votes, with 19. Priest pension best practices received 9 votes; workplace justice issues, 8 votes; resources for groups in crisis, 6 votes; and better dissemination of Working Groups info, 7 votes.

Representatives will now discuss the priorities on-list for 3 weeks and narrow the list of five to the top three options.

The Council then adjourned for lunch. Upon return, Susan Vogt led the assembly in prayer at the start of the afternoon session.

Report from NRC Representatives on Board of Trustees

Ron DuBois and Dan Bartley reported to the Council on their participation on the Board of Trustees as the elected Council members to that body. (See Attachment 3 for the report.) Ron and Dan then took questions from the Council.

Question: When will the Council get the minutes of the Board retreat? Answer: The process for distributing Minutes from Board meetings is being determined. The retreat attended by Board members in Boston was not actually a Board meeting.

Question: As the NRC reviews the 5 priorities for later action, is there other info from the Board that can inform the review and narrowing them down to 3? Answer: The Board's Strategy Committee will meet on Nov 27th and their minutes will be posted to the listserv prior to the three-week deadline for voting on the 5 priorities. This could provide some useful information for the Council as it assesses the priorities.

Ron and Dan noted that the Board has constituted itself into four committees: Strategy, which is led by Bill Casey; Fundraising, led by Jim Post; Governance, led by Elia Marnik; and Audit, led by Dan Bartley. Each Board member participates on two committees.

In response to a request for a clarification of the roles, goals, and chairs of the Board, Ron and Dan said Committee reports would be made available as they are produced.

Reports from NRC Regions

Per the item on the agenda, each Region was given 5 minutes to report on activities in its region. (See Attachment 4 for the regional reports submitted in writing.)

Region 1 (New England states: CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, VT) report was presented by Ron DuBois and Sheila Connors Grove.

Ron DuBois said there are 50 affiliates in the New England region and they run the gamut from very active to some being an affiliate in name only; the region even has one affiliate that holds its "meetings" as a weekly protest in front of the cathedral. New

England members and affiliates supported legislation to require religious groups to file the same paperwork as other non-profits. Although the legislation failed in its first go-round, it will be re-submitted in the next session. Significant numbers of VOTF members were involved in supporting legislation to reform the statute of limitations laws, and they met with some success. The criminal SOL was extended 27 years beyond the age of 16 and eliminated in those cases where there is external corroborating evidence.

Sheila Grove reports on the meeting the Boston Area Council VOTF had with Cardinal O'Malley and his top aides. BACVOTF presented four requests: support removal of the civil statute of limitations; post the names of priests who are abusers; accept VOTF's assistance to be more actively involved with the diocese Protection of Children efforts, and remove the ban on VOTF affiliates meeting in parishes. Another meeting is scheduled in 6 months.

Hartford also has had a meeting with their Bishop. They also are working on something they like to call the "idiots guide to money and the church."

Region 2 (NY) report was presented by Ed Wilson and Dan Bartley

Ed Wilson reported that the Tri-State group (NY, NJ, CT) has formed two groups, one to study legislation and one to study finance. Clergy and laity in the New York Archdiocese continue to have issues with Cardinal Egan concerning, in general, parish closings and treatment of priests, and the upcoming secret canonical trial of accused molester Msgr. Charles Kavanaugh. Brooklyn continues to have dialogue with its diocese.

Dan Bartley said there is a change in local leadership on Long Island, which continues to have monthly meetings, and additional leaders are needed. The newsletter and the response to it continue to be fantastic. The region also is calling for a funding of the John Jay study.

Region 3 (PA) report was submitted by Bud Bretschneider

Bud summarized the written report. He said that because of the Grand Jury report, they are calling for the hiring of a child advocate for the archdiocese. The Witness to Sorrow event conducted by Cardinal Rigali received criticism as a public relations act, but had some good consequences. There is a new affiliate that meets in a parish. The Archdiocese allows pastors to decide on allowing VOTF meetings. They are having a First Friday vigil.

Region 4 (DC, DE, MD, VA) report was presented by Chuck Miller.

Chuck distributed a questionnaire to the 8 affiliates in his region. There were 6 returned. Four of the affiliates focus on supporting survivors and passing civil SOLs. The affiliates expressed some concerns about national VOTF not being responsive to needs of local affiliates, and felt that National is fearful and not bold enough.

Region 5 (AL, KY, LA, MS, TN) report was presented by Susan Vogt.

There are 5 affiliates in the region but 3 are inactive (2 of these due to last year's hurricanes). Of the other two, one is very strong (Louisville) and the other much weaker. The affiliates are not sure what actions to take – legislative and financial actions seem intimidating. Additional information is in the attachment. The Covington KY affiliate has started a VOTF forum (blog) to allow people to express their voices on issues.

Region 6 (OH, MI) report came from Kris Ward.

The region has 10 affiliates – 3 are new affiliates (Toledo and Youngstown included). Region is very engaged in legislation. There is an ecclesiastical trial to be held in Erie, PA of a priest who is credibly accused. This is from a NY diocese, but the trial was moved to PA. VOTF affiliates are alerting the media and sending letters and requests that the trial be open, rather than held secretly. VOTF members also are supporting the family of the accuser.

Region 7 (IL, IN, WI) had no representative or alternate at the meeting.

Region 8 (MN, ND, SD) had no representative at this time.

Region 9 (IA, KS, MO, NB) report came from Bob Kaintz.

Bob announced that the region has its first affiliate in Iowa now. He and others from the St. Louis affiliate attended the CTA conference. St. Louis is experiencing challenge in leadership. They are setting up a blog to connect people. Mid MO has a ministry of letters to editors. They also are looking for boldness.

Region 10 (TX, OK, AR) report was presented by Lisa Kendzior.

There is one active affiliate in Fort Worth. They are beginning a dialogue with the new Bishop. They also are beginning to work on the VOTF campaigns.

Region 11 (CA, NV, HI) report was presented by Jim Jenkins

The affiliates are meeting with the new Archbishop in San Francisco – who agreed to approach the priest's council about VOTF. In Oakland a new cathedral is under construction and the VOTF affiliate is collaborating with SNAP to have a survivors garden as a part of the new Cathedral. The Bishop of Santa Rosa failed to report abuse of a minor, which allowed the abuser priest to escape to Mexico. As a result of this crime, a relationship is being forged between Latino and Caucasian communities. They are beginning a lobbying campaign to indict the bishop under the child protection laws.

Region 12 (WA, OR, MT, ID, AK) had no representative at the meeting.

Region 13 (AZ, CO, WY, NM, UT) report was from Frank Douglas.

There are 3 affiliates and 450 members in the region. A VOTF group is planning to attend the “Deliver us from Evil” film in Tucson. Tucson has had speakers such as Tom Doyle and Sally Vance Trembath. Sedona has a prayer-oriented affiliate. The Phoenix VOTF has had no meetings and is experiencing challenges.

Region 14 (FL, GA, NC, SC) report was presented by Rosa Maria Montenegro and John Hushon (Board of Trustee member)

The region is working hard on bishop accountability. Rosa Maria’s affiliate meets monthly. They are planning a town meeting with presentations by an archdiocesan finance rep and others. The Bishop was not available for a healing mass. They have a strong Speakers program again; this session begins next week. Some smaller affiliates have merged and one larger affiliate now represents 9 parishes.

Following the Regional Reports, representatives were reminded that the VOTF officers try to hold a monthly conference call with Council representatives. However, the last two calls were cancelled because no representatives signed up. The officers are trying to meet with each Rep this way. But they cannot communicate if no one will participate in the calls. Those who have not participated were urged to sign up.

Executive Director’s Report

Ray Joyce distributed copies of the balance sheet and other financial statements, and a written report is available also (see Attachment 5).

Ray said we have a balanced budget this year. He then reviewed the balance sheet and financial statements. Overall VOTF is doing better this past year than in previous years. In addition, the audits of the organization were completed in August, and there were no “notes” (i.e., areas needing improvement in reporting).

The Donor reports by region and the comprehensive donor revenue analysis show that all numbers are up compared with last year.

Ray also reviewed the Fiscal Year 2007 budget summary, which will be posted on the main VOTF website.

Ray briefly reviewed the Membership report by region, noting that numbers are still about the same as before: most of the membership resides in New England and in New York, and some states have only a relative handful of members.

The review and cleanup of the Donor Perfect e-mail list is complete. There will continue to be bounce-backs, because people will always change email addresses without notifying all the senders. Also there are still some problems with a few email services that can

cause bouncebacks. But the list is much cleaner than before. The office is now down to two separate databases, from the seven that existed when Ray began as the Director.

The Board of Trustees has established a Development committee and this hopefully will help identify continuing sources of support for VOTF. However, it is very important that an equivalent committee on the Council be developed too. The logical place for this activity might be the NRC's Budget Standing Committee, but as yet no one on Council has agreed to serve on that committee.

The Website re-design is under way. The designers have reviewed survey results and discussed plans for the initial focus groups on how it should look / what it should do. How should NRC be represented on the web page?

Following Ray's presentation, the Steering Committee again called for Council members to volunteer for the Budget Committee. Sheila Peiffer and Bud Bretschneider offered to serve.

In response to questions from the Council, Ray also provided the following information:

- National advisory council meets by conference call.
- The new VOTF website should be ready by first of the year.
- Recommend that an "In Lieu of" program be set up for memorials

Frank Douglas asked when the web site would be updated and Ray said at the end of November.

Guest Speaker: Brad Pritts from Financial Accountability Advisors Group

Brad Pritts is chair of the Financial Accountability Advisors group that was formed by the CIT to help in the current VOTF campaigns and to provide assistance to affiliates investigating or seeking to improve financial accountability in parishes and dioceses.

Brad provided a brief background on each of the advisors; these same descriptions are available on the VOTF Web site and elsewhere.

Brad then described the general issues we face in assessing financial reporting in the Church, the risks for such analysis, and the solutions.

General Issues

- The material is technical / complex (boring)
- Trade off between accuracy/preciseness vs. user friendly
- Structure and Guidelines exist – but compliance is uneven
 - Canon law

- USCCB Guidelines
- Structural Change National Working Group
- Generally Accepted Accounting Principles
- Connections with Law and Management
- Historical Reporting vs. Budget / Priorities

Risks

- Ignorance
- Left to professionals / technical specialists
- Too complicated
- Too prescriptive (i.e., what we ask is so detailed that it cannot reasonably be applied, or costs too much in terms of what we get)

Solutions

- Educate, support and develop existing lay advisory bodies
- Seek independent oversight and opinions
- Use professionals to excite the complacent

Resolutions in Support of Accountability Campaigns

Frank Douglas briefly described the latest versions of two resolutions before the Council: one on Financial Accountability and one on Survivor Support.

Council members commented on the tone and style of the two documents, with some feeling that both were inappropriate. Frank noted that the format and presentation are what the Council had previously said it wanted for resolutions. Some committees said they did not think the resolutions would help attract new members.

Following the discussion, Bill Culleton made the following motion:

- The NRC hereby endorses in principle the two resolutions proposed by Frank Douglas, and refers them to the Mission, Goals and National Concerns committee as the lead committee to further refine the resolutions, which will be returned to the listserv within 60 days for a vote.

The motion passed unanimously.

Kris Ward then asked if a portion of the Survivor Support proposal could be approved so that it would be available when VOTF affiliates in her region try to attend the secret trial of the alleged abusing priest in Erie PA. The text of her motion is from Section B of the proposal labeled Supporting Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Clergy Version 3.2:

- The NRC hereby adopts the section of the proposal which says “Church officials should promptly inform the public by all means possible of cases known, admitted, or of credibly accused abusive clergy that have been submitted to the Vatican, and should keep the public up to date on the progress and disposition of the cases.”

This motion also passed unanimously.

Guest Speaker: David Clohessy of SNAP

David Clohessy congratulated VOTF on still being in existence. He said that many in the survivors’ community had bets on how long the organization would last – and that the more optimistic guesses were for 6 months or a year. So he considers the fact of VOTF’s existence 5 years later to itself be a success.

David spoke on the overall outlook for Statute of Limitations Civil Windows legislation. He described some of the efforts that have succeeded and discussed work under way to expand into states where SNAP has not yet sought changes in the civil statutes. They also are working harder to make distinctions between the issue of civil windows and practices such as mandatory reporting.

In response to questions from meeting attendees, David explained the concepts of “windows” and “tolling” and made the following points:

California is the only state that has civil windows laws. Some states have delayed discovery laws that are helpful, but not perfect.

To persuade legislators, it’s “all about numbers – turn out hundreds of people.”

This is the cheapest law enforcement tool at your disposal – all about prevention - the 90% that are out there but never identified.

After the question/answer session, the meeting adjourned for dinner.

Liturgy

Following dinner, the Council assembled for Mass in the chapel at the site. The St. Louis affiliate then hosted an evening social.

Sunday, November 12, 2006

The meeting opened with a prayer by Gaile Pohlhaus, Secretary of VOTF.

Moderator Ron DuBois announced that the collection taken to cover miscellaneous meeting expenses yielded \$500. This exceeded the costs for the extra expenses. The Council then voted to give \$75 stipends to the recording secretary, the liturgy celebrant, and the liturgy musician. The remaining funds will be divided between the local affiliate and the VOTF national office.

The Steering Committee proposed that the spring meeting for VOTF be held in Boston, at St. John's in Wellesley if possible, as a way to celebrate the 5th anniversary of VOTF's founding. The location also would help reduce transportation costs, because most of the Representatives live east of the Mississippi. It also would allow Council members to meet founders and the national staff, who cannot travel to the out-of-state meetings. The discussion will continue on the listserv.

Elections Committee Report

Ron DuBois, Linda Mains, and Susan Vogt have served as the Elections Committee for the past year. They have considered several procedural issues and options in that time. Ron presented a report on the Elections Procedures (Attachment 6) and Representative Position Descriptions (Attachment 7) that they have developed for Council approval. He also described proposed changes in the NRC Operating Procedures that would improve the elections process (Attachment 8).

In describing the proposed new standards, Ron noted that he had spent considerable time these past 18 months organizing and running elections in the regions where new elections were needed for the Council positions. These should more properly be run from within the region itself, Ron said.

From the Representative Position requirements, Ron drew the attention of the Council to the requirement that the candidate be a "lay Catholic." Vowed religious are, by Church definition, members of the "laity"; only the "ordained" are set apart. Twice in VOTF's short history the founders and the previous Council considered the question of whether priests can be members of VOTF and whether, if members, they can take leadership positions. Both times the conclusion was that as a voice for the laity, we should not preclude membership but should not allow priests to serve in leadership positions. But these votes were never officially declared as policy.

Susan Vogt presented a motion that the word "lay" be removed from the new Position Description Core Requirements for Representatives. Frank Douglas seconded the motion.

Susan noted that in many affiliates priests participate in the hard work under way, that our aim is to be the voice of the “faithful,” which includes all of us. Others noted that if a priest works for our Mission Statement and three goals, there would not seem to be a good reason to exclude them. Some Reps reported that priests are among their affiliates’ most energetic workers. Others wondered how VOTF could decide who is a priest and who is not a priest – if we accept the Church’s definition of “priest,” then any priest who is not formally laicized would continue to be a “priest” by definition, even those who are fathers, grandfathers, and strong “lay” advocates for numerous years. One current Representative noted that unless VOTF created some new sort of new definition for “priest,” he himself would have to resign even though he has not functioned as a priest for more than 30 years.

Discussion ensued over whether it would be possible to decide “priesthood” on the basis of whether a man puts himself forward as a priest or not. This would be a self-proclaimed distinction. If questioned, then someone would have to investigate and decide whether the man actually were still a priest.

Following the discussion, the Council approved the motion: 20 voting “yes” to remove the word “lay” from the Council Representative requirements, and one voting no (Chuck Miller).

Dan Bartley commented that the decision by the Council was a big step for the organization and suggesting including this motion as part of a press release indicating that VOTF now allows priests or bishops to be part of the National Representative Council.

Report on Election of BOT Members

Bill Culleton reported to the Council on the negotiations he and Linda Mains conducted with the Board of Trustees, at the request of the Council, over elections of trustees. (See Attachment 9.) Bill also described a proposal he and Linda developed that moves away from the positions of both parties and seeks to find common ground through participation on the nominating committee and by using a consensus-based decision-making process. (See Attachment 10.)

Because a new Board is in place, and there are no impending BOT elections, this decision need not be made immediately. Bill suggested returning to the issue at a later time, after the Council deals with more-immediate proposals and changes.

Bob Kaintz and Frank Douglas both addressed the issue of a democratic process in electing members to the Board of Trustees. Frank stated that an undemocratically selected/elected Board of Trustees Council was a “show-stopper” for him, that he cannot continue to be a member of a church reform group where the people in control, who for VOTF are the members of the Board of Trustees, are not democratically elected.

Resolution on Documentary Deliver us from Evil by Jim Jenkins

At the request of Jim Jenkins, the Steering Committee asked the Council if they would suspend our rules regarding the submission of resolutions for voting at the semiannual meeting. The procedures call for such resolutions to be submitted six weeks prior to the meeting so that Representatives have sufficient time to consider the issue. Jim said that the resolution did not involve a significant change, but concerned a recommendation regarding the showing of the film documentary “Deliver Us from Evil.”

The Council voted unanimously to suspend its rules regarding submission of resolutions for this proposal.

Ray Joyce commented that most of the actions called for in the resolution already have been done by the national office, in particular publicizing showings and asking affiliates to arrange screenings. Donna Doucette asked if Jim Jenkins would revise a portion of the proposal – Item 2 under the “Be It Resolved section – so that it reflected the actual events to which Ray referred. Jim Jenkins agreed.

The Council approved the resolution (see Attachment 11) unanimously.

Working Group Presentations and Handouts

Protecting Our Children National Working Group

Pat Gomez provided Council members with several handouts detailing the information available from the Working Group for parishes and dioceses and including a sample Code of Conduct used in one of the parishes in Massachusetts.

Pat reported that the working group is preparing a national survey of parishes on their protection of children. She then distributed the draft survey to NRC members and asked them to return the survey along with comments about its presentation, as a way to help the group finalize its development.

When the survey content is finalized, the Protecting Our Children group will distribute it nationwide. They hope to get 5,000 responses and then to have the data analyzed by a university and also by the National Lay Review Board. NRC members will be asked to serve as a liaison to get these surveys returned.

Other National Working Groups

Donna Doucette reported that other National Working Groups continue to develop resources that may be used by all VOTF members, both in their affiliates and in their parishes. Currently:

- The Structural Change Working Group (Goal #3) has distributed, via the National Office, a CD of its guidelines and documents to all the U.S. bishops,

with a cover letter explaining its contents and what VOTF seeks from the bishops as a response.

- Prayerful Voice, the working group focused on resources for carrying out our Mission Statement “prayerfully,” is undergoing changes. One co-chair has resigned, and the group has had difficulty making its voice heard consistently, because the chairs were not Internet-savvy and have been frustrated in their attempts to develop nationally without that aid.
- The Working Group for Goal #2, Support Priests of Integrity, is reorganizing under the chairmanship of John Ryan (see Attachment 12). He has focused on an “organized, revitalized and national approach” for the group. John is using emails, conference calls, and grass-roots organizational tactics to develop this group further.
- The Support Survivors Working Group (Goal #1) has been frustrated in efforts to develop a strong national presence in some ways. They support survivor groups and provide a daily national briefing on survivor-related news, but efforts to expand their network within affiliates have been difficult.

In response to questions from Representatives, Donna noted that the CD distributed by the SCWG Goal #3 group was reviewed and approved by the NRC at its meeting last year in Arlington VA. Therefore Council did know about both the CD and its contents. However, it has taken longer than anticipated to arrange its distribution.

In response to another comment, Donna reported that regular phone conferences do occur between the heads of all working groups on a regular basis. They also hold regular phone conferences with the National Officers. In addition, the bylaws allow for establishment of new working groups as needed.

Convocation Implementation Team

Ray Joyce reported that CIT is looking for two representatives from the NRC to participate on this committee. The CIT is implementing the two campaign initiatives that grew out of the proposals at the Indianapolis meeting. They provide support and technical assistance to affiliates in implementing the campaigns.

What can we do in the spring, is the question the CIT is now considering. They are thinking of a possible focus on protecting children—perhaps something like the development of a prayer service on children as gift. Or the distribution of tamper-proof bags in collaboration with the Knights of Columbus.

There was some confusion about the length of time the CIT will be in operation. Council members recalled hearing that the CIT would last two years, for the length of the campaigns. Therefore it should disband in 2007. But Mary Pat and Ray said the two-year timetable was intended to be calculated from the start of the actual campaigns. That date was Pentecost 2006. Therefore CIT will be in operation until 2008, they said.

Report on the 2007 Convention

Bud Bretschneider reported that the convention is scheduled for October 19-21, 2007, in Providence RI. Richard McBrien is one confirmed speaker; it is possible they will also extend a request to Cokie Roberts to speak.

The convention focus will be on workshops and sharing stories. Mary Freeman, National Treasurer, is coordinating the conference planning. She said the committee is looking to have sessions that will inspire our newer members, sustain those who are exhausted from this work, and support those who are in the prime of their VOTF membership.

Tentative schedule is for the convention to open Friday with a keynote speech and a reception. The convention then will run all day Saturday. They also have use of the hotel space for Sunday but have not determined what will happen then. Possibly the NRC can make use of the facility to hold one of our in-person meetings.

Affiliates will be queried about their needs and responses to the convention. The replies are due back in early January.

EVALUATIONS on the Meeting

As a general statement, Representatives were reminded that people must read and respond to proposed agendas in advance of the meetings.

Representatives then listed “What Worked” in the meeting:

- Outstanding facility and all support services
- Timer in use for speaking and comments
- Bill Culleton and Linda Main’s priorities process
- Respect for each other
- Follow-through
- Collegiality
- Prayers – they were appropriate and effective
- Liturgy was meaningful
- Action / To Do List – results
- Listening
- VOTF is doing an enormous amount of work with a huge impact
- Lay synod is a DREAM – it represents hope
- Everything done with a sense of dedication and commitment
- Consideration given to disparate ideas

- Thanks for Mary Pat's presentation – helped to set the tone
- Great support from the Officers
- Appreciated contribution of trustee as “one of us”
- Hearing from the council members who are on the BOT – felt a surge of growth
- News update from Erie PA
- Two speakers – Brad and David – injected interest and invigoration
- Fr. Marek Bozek's impromptu remarks at lunch on Saturday

Representatives then commented on what needs improvement for the next meeting:

- Awareness of people's departure times (also that Reps must adjust their return reservations so as not to miss the meeting period on Sunday)
- Revisit time frame of 6 weeks before meeting for submission of resolutions (suggestions 3-4 weeks)
- Revisit the procedure and process for developing the agenda (some people remain unclear on when to contribute ideas)
- Highlight more reports of affiliate successes
- Celebrate our successes
- Alternates need a package that says “here's what you should know before you get here”
- Target quarterly reports from Regions to NRC
- Start earlier on Sunday morning if possible
- John Moynihan should attend the meetings – and we'd like to get to know him; so should Peggie Thorp
- New Members/Alternates – informally assign mentors from local regions
- Rules of Order need to be better-known
- For reports, an extensive background review is not necessarily needed – shorter backgrounders would allow more time for more discussion
- Craft the agenda looking for participation vs. reporting out