

In the Vineyard

December 14, 2006

“My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit finds joy in God my savior.”
Mary's Canticle, Luke 1: 46-47.

Voice of the Faithful wishes our readers Christmas blessings. May our world know a true communion of peace for our families and loved ones.

NEWS Alert: Catholic News Service reports that the Vatican has confirmed Nebraska bishop Bruskewitz's excommunication of Lincoln, Nebraska members of the Catholic reform organization Call to Action (CTA). See <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0606995.htm>.

- Read VOTF response. (<http://www.votf.org/Press/pressrelease/121206.html>)
- Read the CTA press release at <http://www.cta-usa.org/press/lincoln.pdf>; and SNAP's comment at http://www.snapnetwork.org/snap_statements/2006_statements/120806_nebraska.htm.
- Read VOTF's Gaile Pohlhaus in Theologian's Corner – “Excommunication: Neither Theology Nor Revelation”

In this issue:

VOTF NATIONAL News: National Representative Council Nov. '06 meeting recap under [National News Update](#); also, for those who might have missed seeing the May 2006 resolutions VOTF passed, click here.

- **VOTF Protecting Our Children Working Group Update:** A year in preparation, the VOTF Protection of Children National Parish Survey is soon to be sent to at least one parish in each of the 194 dioceses and eparchies in the United States. **Your participation is needed.**

VOTF annual and monthly financial statements are posted on our website along with a summary of our annual budget in an effort to model the transparency we request of our church leaders. Click here for more details.

<http://www.votf.org/Financials/financial.html>

DIOCESE/State Watch:

Los Angeles, CA – The nation's largest diocese will pay \$60 million to settle 45 clergy abuse lawsuits, out of about 500 pending; **FT. Worth, TX** – The *Star-Telegram* reports on recently released Fort Worth diocesan files that reveal Bishop Joseph Delaney “and other church leaders sometimes intentionally misled the public, their congregations and the priests' accusers”; **Barnstable, MA** – The sad story of a retired priest and a small fortune of embezzled parish funds emerged last week, highlighting again the need for parishioners' vigilance and stewardship of parish finances; and more from **Cleveland,**

OH, Pennsylvania and Bridgeport, CT. AFFILIATE Highlights: VOTF SW Florida and VOTF Twin Cities, Michigan.

A tragic day in Chicago: The violent deaths of three workers in the Citigroup Center in Chicago on Friday, Dec. 8 has left many reeling, including VOTF Chicago. One of those killed was VOTF Chicago leader Michael McKenna. See Janet Hauter's message in "Remembering Michael McKenna".

Book Review: Anne Southwood reviews *Living Vatican II, The 21st Council for the 21st Century* by Gerald O'Collins, SJ, Paulist Press, NY, 2006.

Recommended:

- *From Apostles to Bishops: The Development of the Episcopacy in the Early Church* by Francis Sullivan, Newman Press, 2001. This highly readable, succinct overview of the early Church's challenges and growth sheds considerable light on current issues in our Church.
- *He Leadeth Me* by Fr. Walter Ciszek, Ignatius Press, 1995. Ciszek's memorable testament to faith and survival over 23 years in Soviet prisons and their labor camps in Siberia was published in 1973. Since his death in 1984, efforts have been under way to name him a saint. Even without sainthood, Ciszek remains a contemporary inspiration.
- **VOTF Ohio's** Jack Rakosky whose background is an interdisciplinary doctorate in psychology and sociology reviews Mark Chaves' *Congregations in America* (2004), at the VOTF Cleveland website. <http://www.votfcleveland.org/article3.html> Jack says the good news from this first random sample study of congregations is that even very small congregations of fewer than a hundred regular participants are very vibrant. Interestingly and sadly, the clergy shortage among Protestant congregations is even greater than among Catholic congregations.

Theologian's Corner – "Excommunication: Neither Theology or Revelation" by Gaile Pohlhaus

SITE-Seeing, Etc.

The November 24, 2006 *National Catholic Reporter* editorial repeated a concern for the Church, which they originally wrote a year ago: "We are watching the disintegration of a once-great national church, the largest denomination in the United States, into regional groupings bent on avoiding the spotlight and the big issues." Subscribers can access NCR's updated assessment in "Not bad for melodrama" at <http://www.ncronline.org/index1124.htm>.

Zingerplatz Pictures announced the long promised DVD release of its Award winning feature length documentary, “Hand of God.” This full-length ”Director’s Cut” version of the film – as seen at film festivals and other screenings across the country – is now available for purchase by credit card directly from the “Hand of God” film website. Go to our “Buy the DVD” page where you can utilize Google. For details, go to <http://www.handofgodfilm.com/dvd.html>. For residents of Boston’s North Shore, the DVD can also be purchased at CinemaSalem – the site of several sold-out screenings of the film. Other stores may be supplying the DVD in the coming months.

Hand of God also premieres on PBS’ Frontline on January 16th at 9:00pm. For more details go to

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/programs/info/2507.html>

Provoke Radio interview with VOTF president Mary Pat Fox and VOTF secretary Gaile Pohlhaus during the USCCB meeting in November **is at** <http://www.provokeradio.com/>

Frank Murray, VOTF representative (WI, IL, IN), reminded us recently of **Vatican II’s reference to dialogue between laity and Church officials** in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), Ch. IV: The entire text is available at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

“Let the spiritual shepherds recognize and promote the dignity as well as the responsibility of the laity in the Church. Let them willingly employ their prudent advice. Let them confidently assign duties to them in the service of the Church, allowing them freedom and room for action. Further, let them encourage lay people so that they may undertake tasks on their own initiative. Attentively in Christ, let them consider with fatherly love the projects, suggestions and desires proposed by the laity. However, let the shepherds respectfully acknowledge that just freedom which belongs to everyone in this earthly city.

A great many wonderful things are to be hoped for from this familiar dialogue between the laity and their spiritual leaders: in the laity a strengthened sense of personal responsibility; a renewed enthusiasm; a more ready application of their talents to the projects of their spiritual leaders. The latter, on the other hand, aided by the experience of the laity, can more clearly and more incisively come to decisions regarding both spiritual and temporal matters. In this way, the whole Church, strengthened by each one of its members, may more effectively fulfill its mission for the life of the world.”

In 1993, Fr. Tom Doyle wrote “Clergy Sexual Abuse: The First Decade”. VOTF Long Island has posted Tom’s assessment on their web site at http://www.votf-li.org/doyle_decade.pdf. According to Tom, all the Catholic publications to which it was submitted rejected it. “One editor told me it was too ‘passionate’ and ‘explosive.’ Another informed me that it was too sensationalistic and that it exaggerated the problem and still another advised me to cease trying for publication and discard it because it was

overly critical of bishops and presented a highly distorted and subjective view of a problem that was no longer urgent.”

QUOTE for our time: “As you embrace the new beginning of Advent, know that you are safe, ever in God’s care. And soon Jesus, the fulfillment of God’s promise, will come bringing justice and peace to the Earth. May we be vigilant, standing with intention and purpose in readiness to welcome our Savior! Proclaim the good news among the nations: Our God will come to save us.” *From the St. Jude League of the Claretians web site at http://www.claretians.org/site/PageServer?pagename=clr_homepage.*

DIOCESE/State Watch

Los Angeles, CA: The *Los Angeles Times* reports: “The nation’s largest Roman Catholic archdiocese said Friday it would pay \$60 million to settle 45 lawsuits alleging sex abuse by priests.” See the following coverage:
http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20061201/ap_on_re_us/california_church_abuse>http<http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20061201/ap_on_re_us/california_church_abuse.

- VOTF Northern California web site at www.votf-sf.org.

Fort Worth, TX: According to the *Star-Telegram*, Fort Worth Bishop Joseph P. Delaney’s diocese “buried key facts about six men accused of molesting children in their secret archive, known as the confidential files.” For details, go to <http://www.bradenton.com/mld/bradenton/news/nation/16121319.htm>.

Barnstable, MA: Cape Cod Online reports: “A retired priest pleaded guilty yesterday to embezzling more than \$500,000 from a Woods Hole church in what the prosecutor called a ‘wholesale looting.’ The Rev. Bernard Kelly, 73, was sentenced in Barnstable Superior Court to seven years of probation for embezzling from St. Joseph’s Church in Woods Hole and filing false tax returns.” See <http://www.capecodonline.com/cgi-bin/print/printstory.cgi>.

Pennsylvania: As noted in VOTF’s *Focus* newsletter last week, the Pennsylvania legislature passed a landmark bill strengthening sexual abuse laws which Governor Rendell signed on November 30. VOTF members were very influential in getting this legislation passed. Some of the major provisions of the bill are:

- Close a loophole in the mandatory-reporting law. Until now, anyone designated a "mandatory reporter" of child sex abuse was obliged to report abuse to civil authorities only if a victim reported abuse directly to him or her.
- Make it a criminal offense for a person to knowingly conceal or facilitate sex abuse by a person whom they employ or supervise.
- Extend to age 50 the time by which a sex-abuse victim may bring criminal charges against his or her abuser. The existing limit is age 30. The extension

applies only to abuse after the bill becomes law, and does not extend the time a victim can sue an abuser.

- Require criminal-background checks for workers in foster, adoptive and family day-care homes.
- Require much more detail about sex offenders to be listed in the "Megan's Law" database, including a physical description of the offender and the make and license-plate number of his car.

To learn how you can get more involved in the **Protecting our Children** campaign, [click here](#).

Bridgeport, CT: The *Stamford Advocate* reports: "A Superior Court judge has ruled that sealed documents from priest sex abuse cases in the Bridgeport Roman Catholic Diocese should be open to the public. Judge Jon Alander's ruling Wednesday is the latest in a long running legal battle pitting the diocese against several newspapers." For more, see <http://www.stamfordadvocate.com/news/local/state/hc-07071301.apds.m0431.bc-ct--churdec07,0,5427915.story?coll=hc-headlines-local-wire>; the Diocese of Bridgeport statement is here: <http://bridgeportdiocese.com/breakingnews.shtml>. **VOTF Bridgeport, CT** will have a statement on their web site at www.votfbpt.org.

Cleveland, OH – The *Cincinnati Post* reports: "Seven other Roman Catholic dioceses in Ohio and the Parma Byzantine Eparchy have contributed money to create the voluntary Counseling Assistance Fund aimed at victims who no longer trust the church to help them." Go to <http://news.cincypost.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20061117/NEWS01/611170366>

Ohio: NRC representative Ed Friedl (Region 6 - MI, OH) writes: "Nineteen farm parishes in Northwestern Ohio were closed within the past year and a half and their assets (bank accounts and properties) were confiscated by Bishop Leonard P. Blair of Toledo. Two of the viable parish communities have sued the Bishop and the Diocese for the return of their assets misappropriated by Bishop Blair. This is a landmark case in Ohio, as well as for other states, in asking for a definition of "Corporation Sole". Thus far, the first parish to sue, St. James of Kansas, Ohio, an Internal Revenue 501(c)3 entity, has met with some initial success because the judge in the Court of Common Pleas in Seneca County, Ohio, has not accepted the Diocese's Motion to Dismiss but has accepted St James Parish's Memorandum in opposition to the Diocese's Motion.

These people need our financial and spiritual support in a case that portends to have a long drawn out resolution, particularly if the Diocese drags out their replies.

For further information from St. James Parish log on to their website: www.stjameskansas.org (Click on "updates" to obtain some background and further information.)

AFFILIATE Highlight

VOTF of Palm Beach County 12/4/06

The Palm Beach County Voice of the Faithful affiliate held its annual public program at the Trinity Center of the Holy Name of Jesus CC in West Palm Beach on November 18, 2006. The program theme was “In Search of an Accountable Church”, and was presented in two parts. The first was presented by Dr. Jon Connelly, a practicing Psychotherapist, on the subject of “Sexual Abuse and Violence – The Process of Recovery” and featured case history talks by three recovered patients. The second part was presented in a Town Hall Meeting format covering “Financial Accountability” issues, with featured panelists Mr. Denis Hamel, Chief Financial Officer of the Diocese of Palm Beach and Harry Darling with a background in Forensic Accounting. All of the proceedings of the program were recorded by TV camera with the intent of making them available on CD’s for a nominal charge. The presence of the diocesan financial personnel was endorsed by Bishop Anthony Barbarito, and contributed to the success of the program.

In the first part of the program, three survivors presented detailed and accounts of their abuse experiences and the recovery process through the unique, specialized treatments developed at Dr. Connelly’s “Institute for Survivors of Sexual Violence”. This Charitable Foundation treats all the abused who seek help from professionals trained free of charge under the auspices of Dr. Connelly. The understanding is that, once trained, they, in turn, will treat anyone seeking help, free of charge to those unable to pay. The Foundation is dependent on donations to accomplish the feat of free training of professionals nationwide in the application of Dr. Connelly’s methods.

The Town Hall Portion of the forum portion of the program was highly relevant to the attendees, since Palm Beach County has become the epicenter of the recent exposures of priests helping themselves to church monies for non-ecclesial activities. David Schoonover queried panelist Denis Hamel about alleged financial improprieties in 2004 at St. Joseph’s Parish in Stuart, FL. David reiterated the publicized concerns, based on evidence, about Fr. Chris Allen’s spending habits. The diocesan vicar general dismissed all the claims as “lacking in evidence” with the all too familiar reply that “Parish priests control the parish coffers.” When the diocese was presented with evidence of Fr. Allen’s purchases of sex toys and adult videos, Fr. Allen promptly resigned, and retired to New Mexico on funds provided by the Church. Even when the laity strives for honest financial accountability, it appears that institutional secrecy puts up a formidable roadblock.

Another significant query to the panel highlighted the abuse of hierarchic power on the diocesan level in the past. A highly respected employee in the diocesan office reported to the bishop some accounting irregularities and questionable expenditures. The bishop thought enough of these challenges to threaten this employee with loss of job if it was ever discussed again. In fact, in order to maintain employment anywhere in the church she would have to sign a document attesting to the non-disclosure agreement. The

panelists were made aware of a painful consequence of financial abuse by priests, namely emotional abuse of ecclesial employees.

There was much discussion about the route that collections take from basket to bank, including all the stops and exposures along the way, and what could be done to render this process “bullet proof.”

VOTF Twin Cities, Michigan issued the following press release on December 4, 2006, Minneapolis, MN:

“Voices of Hope: Educating about nuns who sexually abuse within the Catholic community”

The Twin Cities Voice of the Faithful affiliate, together with two other Catholic Twin Cities advocacy groups (Solidarity and Call to Accountability), hosted a powerful educational forum on the issue of sexual abuse by nuns November 11, 2006. The three hour event was moderated by Tim Power, retired priest and Co-Moderator of Twin Cities VOTF.

Three victims of abuse by nuns and former nuns spoke of their experiences. The survivors' personal witness to the devastation caused by the sexual abuse by nuns in their individual and family lives moved audience members to tears and outrage. Tragic stories of victims of nuns, from a compilation of over 600, were shared in the voice of one survivor whose commitment to advocacy spans decades. Repeated, documented, and failed attempts since 2001 to speak to and engage in dialogue with leaders of female religious were described.

The Provincial head of the SSND order from Mankato, Minnesota gave her perspective on sexual abuse as a leader in her order and regional leader in the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). Dr Noel Larson, Ph.D., renowned for her work with female perpetrators of sexual abuse, was the keynote speaker for the event. Dr. Larson brilliantly summarized current data regarding the psycho-social development of female abusers, contrasting and comparing what we know about male and female sexual offenders. She detailed the serious and lasting damage of sexual abuse to children and the impairment to brain function which results from abuse.

Twin Cities VOTF will host future educational events on this topic to help victims find healing and justice and in order for religious orders to prevent further sexual abuse by nuns. **For more information, please contact: twincities-votf.org (612-384-9501) or solidarityrebuildtrust.com (651-387-0106).**

BOOK Review

Living Vatican II, The 21st Council for the 21st Century by Gerald O'Collins, SJ, Paulist Press, NY, 2006

Review by Anne Southwood, VOTF Boston, MA

At the beginning of the Vatican II Council, bishops decided that the existing documents on divine revelation and on the Church needed major revision. After approval of the remarkable *Lumen Gentium* on the Church in 1964, it approved *Dei Verbum* on revelation in 1965. The “people of God” were focused on Jesus as the mediator and fulfillment of God’s revelation in scripture and tradition.

Before critiquing the reception of the Council documents, the author tells us his background and reaction to the Council in progress. Collins was an Australian seminarian during the first two sessions, but as an ordained Jesuit in Germany he was kept abreast of developments during the last two sessions. Then working in direct pastoral ministry, he exulted in the lay participation made possible by the new vernacular in the Mass.

Collins declares the Document on Divine Revelation the “Magna Carta” of his scholarly life. His focus has always been how we can speak of divine revelation not only in the present but the future, as the link with salvation history. In this book he connects *Dei Verbum* and the *Gaudium Et Spes* document to joy and hope in the modern world. Collins points to a share in the paschal mystery that is open to all, in a way known only by the Holy Spirit.

Eventual Dean of an invigorated theology department at Gregorian Institute, Rome, Collins made *Dei Verbum* central to his Fundamental Theology course. His is a theology of action and hope; Christ is not only the light of the world but the life of the world. Revelation and salvation are inseparable.

Collins states the history of Catholic Christianity has shown repeated “creative fidelity” and renewal in reception of Council documents. Is this always with good speed? No. Does Collins fault specific institutions of the Holy See? Yes, but tactfully. His document-based book is not always an easy read, but is the work of an insider wanting to share wisdom.

The author returns to the fourth century to applaud the response of the Cappadocians in support of Trinitarian theology. Collins shares the base providing motivation for their creativity: the saving work of Christ and the Holy Spirit, the normative authority of scripture, and communal worship carried to the greater community in need. Collins asks modern theologians to use the same criteria in their work in service of the Church. The teaching office of the Church, he notes, is not above the Word of God, but serves it. He insists that the service of theologians is not limited to functions guided by the official teaching office. His goal is the support theologians can bring to the people of the world in freedom of inquiry and thought. In addition to noting successful Church synods, Collins also supports strong episcopal conferences and the ordination of female deacons as well as the appointment of more women to Curial offices.

Without discounting progress made, Collins offers helpful hints for liturgy aimed at a richer, more grace-filled worship. He advocates more involvement and better catechesis of the young. Collins offers a chapter on receiving the moral teaching of the Council and one on relations with others. His interest in ecumenism leads to a suggestion of a common hymnbook, which might facilitate more organic unity of Christians. Other dreams of the future include more free cultural expression in living out Vatican II in Christ, who brings life in abundance.

NATIONAL News Updates

WORKING Group Update – Protecting Our Children

Protecting Our Children National Working Group Preparing to Survey Child Protection Policies Within the Church

A year in preparation, the Protection of Children National Parish Survey is soon to be sent to at least one parish in each of the 194 dioceses and eparchies in the United States (The U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops lists 18,992 parishes in the U.S.). VOTF affiliates throughout the country, responding to a draft survey, have contributed to the final version.

The goals of the “Protection of Children National Parish Survey” are

- to assess the implementation of parish Safe Environment programs
- to gather data on diocesan support to parishes in preventing child abuse

The analysis of Survey responses will be

- sent to United States Conference of Catholic Bishops National Review Board members,
- along with recommendations for ensuring the establishment and implementation of Safe Environment programs in every parish.

Your Participation:

The Protecting Our Children National Working Group needs and welcomes more direct contacts with VOTF members throughout the country. If you would like to participate in the survey, please send your contact information to protectchildwg@votf.org or to the Protecting Our Children National Working Group, VOTF office, P.O. Box 423. Newton Upper Falls, MA 02464.

We also value your comments and suggestions about the POC link on the VOTF web site: www.voiceofthefaithful.org/Protecting_Our_Children/. In our continuing effort to keep the site current, we want to know, and to incorporate, the views and activities of our POC parish affiliates.

Watch for more details about the POC National Survey of Safe Protection Policies and about other POC activities in future issues of *In the Vineyard*.

Protecting Our Children Panel at October Meeting of VOTF Upper Cape and South Coast, Massachusetts Affiliates

Panelist Paul F. Walsh, Jr., District Attorney for Bristol County, reflecting on his experience dealing with clergy sexual offenders and those abused by clergy, noted the push for more legal accountability. He urged public awareness and education about pedophile behavior, symptoms of sexual abuse, and ways to protect children. He called on citizens to help raise public consciousness of the vulnerability of children, in particular the dangers posed by pedophiles over the Internet. The DA's office in Bristol County has created an Internet-safety program.

Larry Finnerty, PhD., Assistant Superintendent of the New Bedford Schools, focused on the overlap between the Department of Social Services mandate to protect children and the mandate of schools to educate children. With a reminder that teachers must report suspicion of child abuse to DSS by completing a 51A form, he called for interagency collaboration to ensure safety and protection.

Patricia T. Gomez, PhD., representing Protecting Our Children VOTF National Working Group, talked about the mission and goals of POC. She called on the laity to work within their parishes to ensure that Safe Environment programs are in place. The mandates of the Bishops' charter require that every parish have a Safe Environment program for adult abuse prevention training and child personal safety training. POC urges parishes to adopt a protection of children policy and establish a Code of Conduct for volunteers and ministers. The web page of POC on VOTF.org lists resources to help the laity set up these safeguards in their parishes. POC also recommends that parishes establish Safe Environment committees to oversee both the collection of criminal background checks and the distribution (and acknowledgement) of Codes of Conduct by all whose ministry or volunteer work brings them in contact with children. POC is currently in the process of surveying parishes around the country about their Safe Environment programs.

Arlene McNamee, LCSW, Director of Social Services for the Fall River Diocese, described the work of her diocese for child protection since 1994. She oversees all parish training of adults and children; her office posts all diocesan policies on their web page. Her diocese uses four curricula for child personal safety training. Her office oversees parish audits, which check employee records, CORI checks, and volunteer records of training; she reports a high level of compliance to date. She reiterated the need for parents to be aware of their children's use of the Internet and warned about real dangers of unmonitored access. The USCCB web page has resources for Internet protection.

Carmen D'Urso, Esq., Boston attorney representing survivors of clergy sexual abuse, explained that the large number of children abused by a priest was due to priests' privileged access to children and their position of authority. He recommended that teaching about sexuality in seminaries be revised and that changes be made in state

legislation to protect the rights of survivors to accuse their abusers. He proposed that civil and criminal statutes of limitations for reporting abuse should be eliminated.

Bob Moll of the Upper Cape VOTF served as moderator.

[Patricia Gomez also represented POC National VOTF at the November National Representative Council Meeting in St. Louis. Along with POC web page printouts – POC Action Initiative #2: “Working to Insure That Your Parish Is Safe” and Cynthia Crossen-Tower’s guide for assessing the safety of a parish – Pat distributed copies of the “POC National Working Group Survey of Child Protection Policies Within the Church.” She asked that the survey be completed and sent, with comments and suggestions, either by email to protectchildwg@votf.org or by regular mail to the National office in Newton. Pat’s audience was enthusiastic, many expressing surprise at the availability of “positive action that we can recommend to all of our affiliates and members.”]

NATIONAL Representative Council Meeting Update

November 10-12, 2006, St. Louis, MO

The semi-annual meeting of Voice of the Faithful’s National Representative Council (NRC) met at a retreat house outside St. Louis. Seventeen Representatives and four voting alternatives, plus all four of the Officers attended the meeting.

Much of the meeting was taken up with small group discussions and brainstorming sessions. On Friday evening, the newly formed Council Committees met to begin organizing themselves and to identify the issues they would tackle and how to work together going forward. On Saturday, participants and St. Louis observers met again in five small groups to identify priorities for VOTF beyond the two Accountability Campaigns now under way. The Council will be discussing this list of priorities on the internet and will reduce them to three shortly after the new year.

Mary Pat Fox, VOTF President, addressed the Council with her vision of the future. Her presentation can be found on the website ([link here](#)). Other speakers were Brad Pritts, chair of VOTF Financial Accountability Advisors, who addressed the Council on the intricacies of monitoring financial statements and the importance of having lay people actively involved in budgeting at both the parish and diocesan levels. David Clohessy, National Director of Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), addressed the group about the importance of working to extend both civil and criminal statutes of limitations in order to protect children.

Representatives from each of the fourteen Regions made reports on the work of VOTF in their regions. This was a very encouraging and uplifting part of the meeting, because it became clear that VOTF affiliates and members throughout the country are making progress to advance the mission and goals of VOTF.

Ray Joyce, Executive Director of VOTF, reported that we have a balanced budget this year, but that if we are to accomplish all the works we have on our plates, we have to dramatically increase our income. He also indicated that the website redesign is well under way, and should be completed early in the new year.

Several resolutions were considered, including two on Accountability matters that had been presented earlier on-line by Frank Douglas. They were remanded to the Mission and Goals Committee for further editing and will be voted on after the first of the year. However, at the request of Kris Ward, one section of the resolution on legislation to protect children was unanimously approved. This motion was made to assist VOTF members in their efforts to attend a secret Vatican trial being held in Erie PA. The motion states:

“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 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.’”

The four Officers subsequently added their concurrence to this vote.

A resolution, presented by Jim Jenkins, concerning the promotion, distribution and viewing of the film “Deliver Us from Evil” was also voted unanimously. A vote was also taken to strike the word “Lay” from the Position Description for Representatives to the Council. The vote was 20 to 1 in favor.

In the final evaluation, all participants agreed that this was a successful meeting and that we are beginning to come together as an organization focused on common goals.

THEOLOGIAN'S CORNER

Excommunication: Neither Theology Nor Revelation

Contrary to what some think, Canon Law is neither theology nor revelation. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* **CANON LAW** is “The rules which provide the norms for good order in the visible society of the Church.” One might liken it to by-laws of a corporation or organization. In the introduction to *The Code of Canon Law* promulgated in 1983 Pope John Paul II said “As the Church’s principal legislative document founded on the juridical legislative heritage of revelation and tradition, the Code is to be regarded as an indispensable instrument to ensure order both in individual and social life, and also in the Church’s own activity. Therefore, besides containing the fundamental elements of the hierarchical and organic structure of the Church as willed by her divine founder or as based upon apostolic, or in any case most ancient, tradition, and besides the fundamental principles which govern the exercise of the threefold office entrusted to the Church itself, the Code must also lay down certain rules and norms of behavior.” Also in the introduction Pope John Paul II traces the very roots of Canon Law

to the Law of Jesus “Love of God, and love of our neighbors as ourselves” and the Sermon on the Mount especially the beatitudes.

As the introduction reminds us the first ten centuries of the Church saw a proliferation of ecclesiastical laws. In the middle of the twelfth century a monk, Gratian, collected all these laws. There were many and they frequently contradicted one another. Additional compilations were put together through the centuries until the first coherent code was promulgated in 1910. Pope John XXIII of happy memory called for a revision of the code on the same day as he called for the Second Council of the Vatican. The revision was not undertaken until after the Council but was promulgated in 1983.

As stated above Canon Law is a collection of rules for good order. Unfortunately, as with most law, it requires special training to understand how it operates in the Church. In fact it has, with respect to the sacraments especially, acted in such a way as to minimize and legalize theology. Baptism provides a good example. Catholic children are taught that in the case of emergency anyone may baptize by pouring water over the head of the person to be baptized and saying (while pouring) “I baptize thee in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” What a minimization of a beautiful sacrament and the beautiful theology of being baptized into Christ and receiving the salvific grace of God.

Technically and looking at Canon Law with legalistic eyes the Ordinary of a diocese may excommunicate individuals but does this fit in with the teaching of the one who said “the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” when questioned about the laws of Palestinian Judaism? Does excommunication make sense in a world that is not predominantly Catholic? Does it make sense when Pastors don’t know their parishioners and visitors don’t stand out like sore thumbs? But even more puzzling is the prohibition to the table of the man who ate with publicans and sinners including his betrayer. For a code of law that finds its roots in the law of love this is hardly a loving thing to do.

Excommunication should only happen when a person's action poses a grave threat to the faith life of others. Call to Action has been a rejuvenating call to the faith life of many, not a grave threat. *Gaile Pohlhaus, VOTF National secretary*

REMEMBERING Michael McKenna
from Janet Hauter, VOTF Chicago

On Friday afternoon, here in Chicago, a senseless act of violence occurred that will forever leave its imprint on members of VOTF. Michael McKenna, a patent attorney and leader of our downtown affiliate, was the intended victim of a gunman who took hostages in the Ogilvy Building in downtown Chicago. Apparently the shooter was disillusioned

about a patent issue, yet he didn't even know Michael and had to ask who and where he was. Michael was shot in the head.

A more compassionate, kind and "centered" individual one could not meet. He was very active in his parish and committed to VOTF. Despite the pain he felt about how our institutional Church was governed, Michael knew all too well that we needed to maintain a "cold anger" to quiet our rage in order to know with certitude when the Spirit was calling us to action. Michael spoke softly but his statements were always targeted at change. He skillfully reasoned his way to plans we were engaged in and always, always, always Michael's was the prophetic, calm, deliberate voice that helped us focus on root causes. Michael will be dearly missed. He leaves behind a wife and a two-year old.

Michael had a personal stake in VOTF and saw us as the force needed to save our Church from itself. He made every meeting he could when he was in town. We salute you, Michael, for your calm, your voice and your spirit. Your mission is now to change hearts!

Please pray for the McKenna family and hold them close as the birth of the Christ Child opens up for us a new era. Michael, we need you now more than ever!

[For more on this story, go to

<http://www.theconservativevoice.com/ap/article.html?mi=D8LTBJDG0&apc=9001>; and http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/asection/la-na-shooting10dec10,0,1134013.story?coll=la-news-a_section.