

In the Vineyard December 19, 2008

Message from National

We here at VOTF's National Office would like to wish VOTF members and their families a peaceful and merry Christmas and a joyful New Year. We appreciate the support and feedback you have given us throughout this last year and count ourselves blessed to work with such a thoughtful and inspiring group of people.

Merry Christmas!

National News

The national office of Voice of the Faithful has been busy these last few weeks! They sent out a press release refuting Judge Merz's op-ed in the Boston Globe. VOTF's release was picked up in David Gibson's blog, Beliefnet.com

(<http://blog.beliefnet.com/pontifications/2008/12/doubts-grow-on-merz-nrb-oped.html>).

VOTF also signed on to a letter from SNAP requesting that the Archdiocese of St. Louis review the case of Father Osborne through the procedures set up by the lay-led National Review Board.

And, in the case of Father Roy Bourgeois, VOTF sent a letter to the Papal Nuncio as well as put out a press release asking that the pope reconsider the harsh response to Father Roy's support of women's ordination.

Something to Ponder: What happens when a personal decision, made in accordance with a "well-formed" conscience, places one in opposition to what the Church defines as doctrine? Fr. Roy Bourgeois found out that one answer is excommunication. VOTF has prepared a study guide on the Church's teachings about conscience, for use as a personal review or as part of a discussion session in your affiliate or parish. You will find all the materials you need [here](#).

VOTF Remembers Cardinal Avery Dulles

VOTF expresses its sorrow and regrets to the New York Province of the Society of Jesus and the Dulles family on receiving word of Cardinal Avery Dulles death. Cardinal Dulles died on December 13, 2008 in the Jesuit infirmary at Fordham University, New York.

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/13/us/13dulles.html?_r=1&sq=Avery%20Dulles&st=cse&scp=2&pagewanted=print

VOTF members will remember Cardinal Dulles' outstanding book *Models of the Church* originally published in 1974 and significantly revised in 1991. Although he was usually characterized as a conservative theologian, it was *Models of the Church* which encouraged many post-Vatican II Catholics to think of their church in new and different ways.

News from the Working Groups

VOR/LE Advent Gospel Reflection Series Underway

Voice of Renewal/Lay Education's yahoo-list members began an Advent gospel reflection series on November 30 with Mark, ("we're all the work of your hands"); continued with Mark 1:18 on John the Baptist; moved to John 1:6-8/19-28; and will finish on Dec 21 with a reflection on Luke 1:26-38. The Advent Sunday gospels are found at <http://www.usccb.org/nab/122108.shtml>.

The method used on the discussion list is to begin with reflections by Gaile Pohlhaus (Prayerful Voice working group) and VOR's Bill Murphy and Anne Southwood. The gospels are then "unpacked" by members. As each member explores their reactions to the gospel reading, they focus on one word or phrase. In the words of the reflection leaders: "We hear different things at different times; VOR people are not static. Some words jump out more than others and reappear as we connect with each other: Watch....Prepare....Repent....Path....Coming....Rejoice....Joy....Hope."

We'd love it if you want to join the conversation next Sunday, but you need to go to VOR_VOTF@-subscribe@yahoogroups.com to subscribe to the discussion list. To read more of the conversation:

Advent Gospel Reflection Series

Nov 30, First Sunday of Advent

Gaile:

"What I say to you, I say to all: `Watch!'"

"we are the clay and you the potter:

we are all the work of your hands."

Throughout this Advent Season watch how the Potter shapes you so that you will truly be the work of God's Hands.

Bill:

I love the power and poetry of images, like "be alert" and "watch!"

If I can sit with these words and let them take hold of me; then they produce the anticipation desired by the season of Advent. I don't find our culture very good at anticipation, at waiting. We want to force everything to happen – call our kids on our cell phone to find out where they are rather than letting them come to us.

I am convinced that if we could get better at slowing down (even for only a few minutes each day), we could develop a better openness to receive the gift of "the Christ".

Prayer: may we all find ways to live and celebrate this season in whichever ways bring us closer to God and God's people.

Anne:

We missed singing rehearsal this week and were asked to come to church early today to practice. A visiting priest was yelling the gospel and homily at the earlier mass. "Watch" became "watch out!" The gatekeeper would sweep up unworthies without the name of God on their forehead and deposit us outside the walls.

We were edgy during rehearsal, upset by his homily. We were singing "let all creation bend a knee to the Lord." Some were thinking we wouldn't be around to do that, caught up in the judgment sweep. I sputtered... how can he make these good people feel like this? Maybe the name has worn off the forehead, but see the heart on our sleeve. Our commitment over years is strong.

Moving to our own liturgy was one of those "thank you, God" moments. Our new pastor wasn't going to let the starkness of Mark leave us fallow. In a wonderful teaching moment, the final "Watch!" of his gospel reading was an invitation wrapping itself around us. Be alert in hope and longing, he then said, in joyful expectation...savor these words with me. Advent is a beautiful season. Look for Emmanuel, God present with us now. Access the Spirit the Jesus of history has left us. Take a quiet minute in this busy season and say Marana Tha...come, Lord.

OK, I will do that. Gaile is so right about Advent. I recentered and grew today.

Prayer: Spirit of God, please help our reactions be worthy of the center of our life.

December 2, second Sunday in Advent

Bill:

For me the word of the week is REPENT, which I immediately connect with two other difficult phrases, "I'm sorry" and "I forgive you." I find them both difficult to say and to hear; but it is so essential to utter them and experience the cleansing healing of their spoken reality. We need to do this for one another for it has made possible the birth of Christ in my life.

Gaile:

Last week the word was WATCH! This week the word is PREPARE! and to me that usually means figure out the calendar for the next few weeks, think about gift wrapping, and work on Christmas cards. Carolyn Disco sent me a piece by James Martin, S.J. that was on NPR <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=97854252&sc=emaf> entitled More Virgin Less Virgin Islands. It made me think about how I used to prepare for Christmas when I was in CCD. Every day I would do either something charitable or a small penance and then put a piece of straw or twigs into a box to fill up the manger for

the Baby Jesus. In addition my family would pick Kris Kindles for whom we would do something nice throughout Advent. I think I will revive the customs with my grandchildren. It was a great way to PREPARE!

Anne:

Well, I had one of those back to basics moments listening to what we all call the John the Baptist gospel this morning. I never got past the first sentence to follow an attraction to the hair shirt details of ;(ugh) eating locusts. How many times I headed right for those locusts!

Mark begins his gospel with a simple but crucial announcement to everyman. I've worked hard, folks, to gather information from different sources and here it is in a nutshell... "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus CHRIST." As a not very good homily droned on, it didn't matter. I'd heard an important thing.

I began to think not just about stories of Jesus and witness to Jesus. My mind moved to Jesus as not simply showing us a path, but as the path itself...not just pointing to the gate, but as the gate itself...not just announcing salvation open to everyman, but Jesus the risen Christ as salvation itself coming in glory.

Another translation of this Mark passage uses "about Jesus" in this title, but I was glad of my NAB translation using "of Jesus," this morning. Matthew and Luke don't begin this way and John is very philosophical using "Logos," the pre-existing Word, but the first sentence of Mark offers easy access to grateful warmth on a snowy winter morning.

December 14, third Sunday of Advent

Gaile:

So it's traditional but Gaudete Sunday always says rejoice to me. I love the rose vestments (a reminder that the Pope sent a rose to the Queen of Spain on this Sunday. don't ask me why, I know, but the reason is not a pretty one considering the deaths that it caused.)

And the psalm reading is the Magnificat. The Baptizer tells again that the one is coming. And if the Son of God/man is coming then surely he is bringing God with him to us. so again I say "Rejoice!"

Anne:

What word reached out at me listening to the Gaudete gospel today? I'm usually turned on by the rejoice songs we sing and the pink rather than the somber purple. Today was different. I found myself thinking on the word recognize ("whom you do not recognize") and felt the tension between the here and the not yet. Jesus has been here and it was a struggle to be recognized. I thought wouldn't any effort to "make straight the way of the Lord" need to recognize the Holy Spirit in our lives? How do we better articulate a living God who holds our interests in the palm of a hand reaching for us? I think Mother Teresa said that anyone living with a sense of Joy is a witness. Being around people like her and

Dorothy Day is a means of recognition. I guess I'm coming from the perspective of association with the good. As Paul would say, live in the Spirit. For the past few days I've been remembering good people I've known, about change and how they affected my life;20must be that Advent quest Gaile spoke of.

Bill:

I have been intrigued by the line "make straight the way of the Lord", because my experience has been that God rarely works in "straight lines." I don't know who said the quote, "God writes straight with crooked lines", but I find that more characteristic of the way he/she works. While I am a planner by nature and temperament, and can be very goal oriented, I try to do it with a sense of humor - it's what I gotta do, but doesn't necessarily have a lot to do with what God's gonna do. Sort of "If you want to make God laugh, make a plan." I often find the best way to figure out what God wants is to meander about, waste time, poke around and see what opens up.

The last reflection on the December 14 gospel, by Bill:

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Is Enrollment in Seminaries Truly on the Upswing?

The Boston Globe's Michael Paulson did a recent article on the increase in enrollment in Boston's St. John Seminary. ("Stunning Turnaround for St. John's Seminary"
http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2008/12/14/stunning_turnaround_for_st_johns_seminary/).

But according to John Ryan, chair of VOTF's Priest Support Working Group, "The truth of the matter is that Cardinal O'Malley has saved the brick and mortar seminary facility, not via a turnaround in vocation enrollment for the Archdiocese of Boston, but by persuading nearby bishops to send their seminarians to Boston to study. Most dioceses send their seminarians to larger metro area seminaries, and we find that the trend of recruiting up to one-third or more of their seminarians from outside the U.S. continues." To read more of John's thoughts,

Enrollment in Seminaries Rising?

John continues, "Because of the age demographics of the priesthood, diocesan and religious, there are 5000 fewer priests in 2008 compared to 2000 with virtually no

increase in the number of seminarians at the graduate level and yearly ordinations over the past eight years. On top of that, the Catholic population in the U.S. over the past eight years has gone from 59.9 million to 64.1 million. Of the 18,479 parishes, 3,141 are without a resident priest in year 2008, about the same as in year 2000. The overall trend in seminary enrollment is stagnant and cannot keep pace with the numbers of priests retiring or otherwise becoming incapacitated due to age.”

NOTE: To learn more about VOTF’s National Working Group for Priest Support, go to www.nwgps.org

Michael Paulson pointed to the same trends in his article by noting that despite the increase in seminarians in Boston, the number of priests expected to stay and serve in the diocese was far fewer than the number being educated there.

Affiliate News

VOTF Ireland Voices Outrage

In response to news that parishioners had raised more than \$60,000.00 for Father Eugene Greene, a self-admitted child rapist., Voice of the Faithful in Ireland called upon Bishop Boyce to issue a pastoral letter, condemning Father Greene’s crime and supporting his victims. You can see the VOTF Ireland’s release here.

VOTF Ireland’s statement on donations to child rapist Eugene Greene

The scale of donations to the self-admitted child rapist Eugene Greene indicate a most serious state of denial of the most horrific crimes in Donegal. Leaders of church and state have totally failed in their duty to ensure a climate of abhorrence of such behavior, and of solidarity with the survivors of that abuse and their families.

We see no solution to this appalling situation other than a state inquiry into the diocese of Raphoe that would enable the survivors to tell their story and bring home to all in Donegal the atrocities that have happened there in recent decades.

While Jesus said that any one who scandalized a child should be tied to a millstone and flung into the sea, those who have contributed to this fund are blatantly contradicting that. They are insisting that a perpetrator of the most shocking crimes against children should be rewarded instead, and his many victims insulted. They are compounding the original abuse and betraying their neighbors.

They show a truly shocking inability to put themselves in the shoes of children who were tortured by this man over many years.

We can only suppose those who have contributed to this fund are motivated by a misguided compassion for a disgraced priest who may have served in their own parishes.

It is clear they have failed to read the Catholic church document 'Towards Healing' which calls upon the entire church community to show solidarity with the victims of abuse, not with their abusers.

We therefore call upon Bishop Philip Boyce to issue a pastoral letter which would put right this wrong and bring home to all the people of his diocese our church's abhorrence of these crimes. It should point out that these donations suggest our church is in solidarity with child abusers rather than their victims – and that this brings our church into disrepute. It should emphasize that while most priests serve their people faithfully, the Catholic church does not teach that the sacrament of ordination makes a priest incapable of crime. It should acknowledge that dreadful crimes have indeed been committed by a priest in this instance. It should make a clear distinction between Catholic belief and those distorted and superstitious beliefs that attribute some kind of immunity from sin, and from crime, to clergy.

Donegal's politicians, especially those in ministerial office, have also been disgracefully silent over these atrocities, and should have been calling long ago for a state inquiry into what happened in Raphoe, and into why there are no diocesan records of Greene's behavior when there is now compelling evidence that it was known to some senior clergy as early as the 1970s. The scale of what happened in Raphoe was comparable to what happened in Ferns, where a state inquiry helped to educate people to this appalling evil.

In Ferns those who had also suffered severe sexual abuse as children benefitted greatly from being able to put their stories on the record as adults, and from being believed at the highest state level. Raphoe's many victims deserve no less. Their political leaders have let them down by not calling for such an inquiry in Donegal, and by remaining entirely mute during this catastrophe. It is high time they made amends.

Site Seeing

David Gibson's blog, which mentions VOTF's reaction to Judge Merz was also picked up by *Commonweal Magazine*. (<http://www.commonwealmagazine.org/blog/?p=2604>) <http://blog.beliefnet.com/pontifications/2008/12/doubts-grow-on-merz-nrb-oped.html>

U.S. nuns have also thrown their support behind Father Roy Bourgeois” http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=11270

U.S. to Nuns to Vatican: We support Fr. Roy Bourgeois--and women's ...

The nuns told the Pope they "join Fr. Roy Bourgeois and the majority of U.S. Catholics, who believe that women are called to priestly ordination in the Catholic Church."

VOTF Ireland's Sean O'Conaill had an article printed in Belfast's *Irish News* last month – “*Change overdue in culture of pray up, pay up and shut up.*” Is Irish Catholicism poised for change?

By Sean O'Conaill
Irish News, Belfast, Nov 6th, 2008

Following the announcement this week of a parish reorganization plan for the Armagh Archdiocese, Sean O'Conaill asks if Irish Catholicism is poised for change...

Change overdue in culture of pray up, pay up and shut up

CLUSTERING of parishes; pooling of resources; new structures and ministries to engage "all parishioners in the task of continuing Christ's mission in the community". All this by 2012? Is the diocese of Armagh, and maybe the whole island of Ireland, now approaching the tipping point for the revolution portended in the life of the Catholic Church by the Second Vatican Council of 1962-65?

"If not now, never!" will be the reaction of many. Lay people of my 1960s' generation who were enthused by the promise of spring in Vatican II have been deeply disillusioned by the long winter maintained in the Irish Church by authoritarian and clericalist attitudes with deep historical roots.

These were well epitomized by Ireland's dominant cleric in 1965, Archbishop John Charles McQuaid of Dublin. Returning from Rome to Dublin that year he insisted: "You may have been worried by much talk of changes to come. Allow me to reassure you. No change will worry the tranquility of your Christian lives."

Inevitably this "tranquility" involved careful maintenance of the closed and secretive clerical system that gave us, by 1994, not only stagnation but the clerical sex abuse disasters.

Incredibly, there is still in Cardinal Brady's pastoral letter of November 3 2008 more than a hint of this baseless fear that it is the Irish Catholic laity who are least prepared for change. For example, he goes to great lengths to reassure his people that the clustering of parishes will not erode parish identities.

The sad fact is that by dithering over Vatican II for more than four decades the Irish bishops have done far more harm to many Catholic parishes than any clustering could achieve.

This delay convinced many lay people that the clericalist straitjacket would never be removed and the 'priesthood of the laity' never realized. We seemed to be doomed to a culture of 'pray up, pay up and shut up' forever.

Many a disillusioned Irish Catholic has put aside ancestral hostility to the Reformation as a consequence, and joined Christian traditions that gave more scope to their Christian idealism.

They became convinced their Catholic clergy didn't really want them to grow up and that other traditions were less hostile to Christian maturity.

This trend is growing at present in my own diocese of Derry, where an explicit promise given by Bishop Hegarty in 2003 to implement a model of collaborative ministry in the diocese has yet to be given the slightest substance.

The coming of relative peace has opened the way for a wide range of Christian evangelical and fellowship churches to make serious inroads into the Catholic community in the diocese. Significantly, the Baptist Church is making steady progress in attracting Catholics, who had no equivalent ceremony of adult commitment for lay people. And many other Catholics who couldn't overcome their antipathy to the Reformation have simply walked away altogether from worship, strengthening the apparent victory of secularism.

Secular culture may be ideologically opposed to all religion but it provides a friendly enough space for educational, self-help and self-improvement activities of all kinds.

Thus, ironically, while the Catholic Church's clerical culture has remained rigidly hierarchical and inertial, the secular revolution has made collaboration and re-education routine for lay people in their ordinary lives. So it has also made most of them far more ready to embrace change in their Church than too many of their ageing clergy.

Accountancy, counseling, psychotherapy, medicine, nursing, care of the aged and dying, teaching, business management, 12step expertise – all these and more are skills of obvious application in reeducating and rebuilding local Catholic parishes and communities, yet our Church is still dogged by an attitude expressed by one priest to an acquaintance of mine when (noticing the altar candles were unlit before Mass) he went to the sacristy to ask if he could be of any help. "No," was the priest's reply. "This is a one-man show!"

This autocratic inertia is still deeply embedded in the Catholic clerical system through its territorial and hierarchical principles, making bishops and priests solely responsible in their dioceses and parishes.

Canon law, the basic organizational blueprint of the Church, still arguably gives an incoming parish priest the authority to abolish any structure or arrangement that may have been created or permitted by his predecessor.

This is far too great a threat to reform. This fact alone will make many of us pause before investing time and energy in the reforms now mooted in some dioceses.

Why on earth, if there is now a commitment to change, is canon law not revised to require, for example, open elections for parish councils, and scope for decisions by those councils that could not be overruled by an incoming priest of the old school?

The reason is that not all bishops and priests are yet convinced about the need for change. A disastrous attitude of ‘it’ll do me in my time’ has taken hold of too many, so a centralized and clericalist canon law remains a serious obstacle to change.

Too many Catholics never learned that in the first millennium Catholic bishops were actually elected by their people, so Catholic conservatives can too easily maintain that any move towards democracy, for any purpose, would put us on the Gadarene slope to voting for polygamy or Sharia law.

But there is absolutely no reason why the election of a parish council with decision making power (e.g. to build a parish hall or appoint a parish youth leader) should lead to any change in any matter that needs to be decided centrally (e.g. revising the mandatory celibacy rule for priests).

To insist that it will is to be intellectually dishonest and to condemn Catholicism to terminal decline.

For decades we have made the case for the principle of subsidiarity in secular governance, so why opt for an entirely contrary principle in the administration of the Church? Is the future of any diocese or parish in Ireland to continue to lie forever at the mercy of grumpy old men?

Meanwhile secular individualism has clearly gone too far.

Vulnerable people – children, teenagers and senior citizens – too often lack due care and attention. Loneliness, self-hatred, self-harming, sexual and drug-related violence, addiction and depression are rampant.

Secular politics patently can’t address all these problems – especially in an era of economic recession.

TV has become an inadequate distraction from these hard realities.

The Lord who came to give us life “and give it more abundantly” is surely ready to revive our Irish Catholic Church – if we are all ready – and to revive our communities as well.

This is no time for hesitating over changes that should have come decades ago.

It is time for all Irish dioceses to follow, and even to go joyfully beyond, what Dublin and now Armagh have promised.

- Sean O’Conaill is acting coordinator of Voice of the Faithful (Ireland).

Calendar

Voice of the Faithful of Southwest Florida's 2009 Speakers Forum presents:
Robert Blair Kaiser "*An Action Plan for Citizenship in the Church*"

7:00 PM, Thursday, January 29.

The venue for the Speakers Forum is Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church, 1225 Piper Blvd., Naples, FL.

For more information please contact Peg Clark at 417-3077 or visit VOTF of SWFL at www.naples.net/presents/voice. A free will offering will be taken to cover expenses. All are welcome.

Book Corner

If you are looking for a thought provoking book for your holiday break, try *The Shack*, by Wm. Paul Young. It is the story of a man who suffers horrible tragedy and finds his way to understanding and a closer relationship with God. More spiritual than religious, the Shack introduces readers to an engaging, loving and accessible image of God.

Questions/Comments blurb from previous Vineyards