

In the Vineyard

February 14, 2008

“It’s important for victims of sexual abuse to have historical truth established.” *Terry McKiernan of BishopAccountability.org commenting on the value of documenting abuse. See the Boston Globe story under SITE-Seeing, Etc.*

In this issue: Have you sent any inquiries to our national officer candidates or watched/heard any of the debates? It’s not too late to learn about the candidates in the VOTF national elections Feb. 10-24; a quick look at then and now in terms of membership; a victory for the laity in Maine, for vigilance everywhere and, yes, for bishops who listen (DIOCESE/State Watch); “seeds of hope” among younger Catholics? See Book Alert in this issue AND a review of *Voices of the Faithful*; BishopAccountability.org has built an archive of truth (SITE-Seeing, Etc.); suggestions for VOTF Lenten Action; ever wonder about the accomplishments of the 2005 Accountability *Now* campaign?; and more.

NATIONAL News

VOTF **NATIONAL OFFICER ELECTIONS** are under way – Feb. 10-24 and ballots are being distributed. For election news, access to audio replays of the officer candidates’ debates and some responses to readers’ questions, visit the Election page. (For the audio replays of the debates, go to <http://votfelection.com/?cat=25>.)

PRESS RELEASES on two about-faces – in the Portland (Maine) and the New Hampshire dioceses. In Portland, it took a public outcry from the laity to force Bishop Richard Malone to rescind a decision to allow Fr. Paul Coughlin to resume some duties (see VOTF comments on the decision and on the reversal – and check out Diocese/State Watch for reports from the media). In New Hampshire, Bishop John McCormack finally agreed to a fourth state audit, but only after steadfast pressure from NH’s Attorney General and her staff (see the VOTF comment).

Check out these options for **LENTEN/SPRING ACTIONS** – suggestions from the Accountability Campaign Team.

NUMBERS, NUMBERS, we’ve got numbers. You can count by snail mail, you can count by email, you can count by data entries. Check out this snapshot on VOTF registrations to see how our numbers continue to grow.

DIOCESE/State Watch

IOWA: The Roman Catholic Diocese of Davenport is prepared to launch an unprecedented campaign of reform and restitution to sexual abuse victims as part of a bankruptcy settlement plan.

<http://www.desmoinesregister.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080201/NEWS02/802010393/1001/RSS01>.

MAINE: It started out as a sure fire way to repeat bad history but is closer now to being proof positive for vigilance. According to a Feb. 6 *Maine News* item, “Maine’s Roman Catholic bishop has allowed a retired South Portland priest to resume some duties, more than three years after he was forced to resign for covering up allegations of sexual abuse within the church.... [The priest] besides protecting Skinner [the convicted abuser] ... was also found to have had inappropriate physical contact with a minor in 1985 while he was serving at St. Mary’s Church in Bangor, according to the diocese. But that contact did not amount to sexual abuse, and Coughlin was never charged with any crime, or punished by the church for the incident.” <http://news.mainetoday.com/updates/021882.html>. By Feb. 11, the story had changed:

<http://bangornews.com/news/t/city.aspx?articleid=159978&zoneid=176>. For more coverage on this story, go to <http://news.google.com/news?hl=en&tab=wn&ned=us&q=%22malone%22+%2B+coughlin&btnG=Search+News>.

IRELAND: VOTF Ireland is astonished by a large donation made to a convicted “pedophile priest” now serving a prison sentence. See

<http://www.derryjournal.com/journal/Victims-of-clerical-sex-abuse.3674643.jp>;
<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article3292039.ece>; and
<http://www.ireland.com/newspaper/breaking/2008/0211/breaking27.htm>

AFFILIATE Initiative: Here’s an idea your affiliate might want to consider: The award-winning play “Doubt” will be shown by the VOTF Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky affiliates who arranged a block of tickets for a special performance to be held on March 16. The play will be preceded by a "Perspectives" discussion at 6:00, led by the play's director. For more details, go to AFFILIATE Notes in this issue.

BOOK Alert: Boston College professor and theologian Tim Muldoon, author of *The Ignatian Workout: Daily Spiritual Exercises for a Healthy Faith*, has written another book geared to a population much on the minds of older Catholics. *Seeds of Hope: Young Adults and the Catholic Church in the United States* is now available from the Paulist Press at

<http://www.paulistpress.com/bookSearch.cgi?quickSearchString=Tim%20Muldoon&quickSearchField=author>; Amazon.com; and Barnes and Noble. It is expected to be in book stores in March. AND Tim’s web site offers an excerpt at <http://www2.bc.edu/~muldoont/>.

In the last issue of the *Vineyard*, we advised you of Dick Taylor’s book *Love in Action* and his web site at <http://www.gospelnonviolence.com/>. Because this book is really a **handbook**, we add the following for your consideration:

“*Love in Action* teaches you how to build an effective, faith-based group working for reform. You’ll find step-by-step ideas **on how to start a group, run effective meetings, negotiate, or carry out direct action**. Here are anecdotes, exercises, and hundreds of examples of people translating conviction into effective personal and institutional

transformation. Discover the foolproof organizers checklist, how to do strategic assessments, the 12 steps of social change, and the essential ingredients of any action.”

SURVIVOR Support Community Notes

Bob Schwiderski, Minnesota SNAP director and VOTF NRC representative, notes the following:

“**Saving Children: The Sex Abuse Tragedy**” is a documentary co-produced by the National Association to Prevent Sexual Abuse of Children (NAPSAC) and Twin City Public Television (TPT). The documentary is based on Victor Vieth's presentation of **Unto the Third Generation: A Call to End Child Abuse within 120 years** at our 2007 fall conference in St. Paul, Minnesota. Vieth is Director of the National Child Protection Training Center, a training program of NAPSAC. Supporting Victor's presentation is the courageous testimony of five survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

[The documentary was aired on Feb. 9 but may be aired elsewhere. Visit the NAPSAC web site at <http://sapn.nonprofitoffice.com/> to learn more about the work of this organization. The site is currently under construction but is expected to be up and running shortly.]

SITE-Seeing, Etc.

Food for Lenten thought in this story of the laity's complicity in clergy sexual abuse: <http://sentinel.org/node/8755>.

The *New York Times* reported: “The Rev. **Marcial Maciel Degollado**, founder of the influential Roman Catholic group the Legionaries of Christ and the most prominent priest disciplined after accusations of sexual abuse, [has] died.” http://select.nytimes.com/mem/tnt.html?_r=2&emc=tnt&tntget=2008/02/01/world/americas/01maciel.html&tntemail1=y&oref=slogin&oref=slogin.

Doing what few would have taken on and fewer could have accomplished, **BishopAccountability.org** has been building an archive of truth on behalf of the thousands of victims/survivors of clergy sexual abuse. The *Boston Globe* story is a must-read at http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2008/01/29/vast_archive_on_abuse_aids_victims_scholars/.

VALENTINE'S DAY THOUGHT for our time: St. Valentine's Day has confused so many people that the Catholic Church no longer officially honors St. Valentine. Yet the holiday has both Roman and Catholic roots.

The roots of St. Valentine's Day lie in the ancient Roman festival of Lupercalia, which was celebrated on Feb. 15.



For 800 years the Romans had dedicated this day to the god Lupercus. On Lupercalia, a young man would draw the name of a young woman in a lottery and would then keep the woman as a sexual companion for the year.

Pope Gelasius I was less than thrilled with this custom. So he changed the lottery to have both young men and women draw the names of saints whom they would then emulate for the year. Instead of Lupercus, the patron of the feast became Valentine.

There was also a conventional belief in Europe during the Middle Ages that birds chose their partners in the middle of February. Thus the day was dedicated to love, and people observed it by writing love letters and sending small gifts to their beloved.

So St. Valentine's Day is either "for the birds" or for the rest of us. [Gathered from www.americancatholic.org .]

AFFILIATE Notes

"Doubt" is a play about knowing the right thing to do and making the leap to do it. The Cincinnati and Louisville affiliates have bought a block of tickets to a special performance of this play for their members and others who might be interested. What follows is a little more about the play and some contact information.

"The play presents the agony a nun experiences when she begins to think the parish priest is molesting young boys. She had no actual positive evidence that this is truly happening, but plenty of intuition and abstract evidence as she notices the troublesome changes occurring in some of her young charges. Her personal moral struggle involves looking out for the welfare of the young boys; her status as "just a parish nun" who probably won't be believed or even listened to, yet feels morally impelled to do the right thing and report to authorities what she recognizes as child abuse. The internal struggle is agonizing for her -- as it is/was for others who find/found themselves in the same position. The play does not get into the actual sexual situations of the perpetrators and their victims, only the moral struggle of the nun caused by her awareness of those situations and consequent obligations to right the terrible wrong."

Playhouse offers group rates to groups of ten or more. If you are interested in having a group of your members attend, call Joe Penno, Group Sales Manager, 513-345-2242, Ext. 239 for ticket availability and reservations or email wtrjack@cinci.rr.com.

BOOK REVIEW

Voices of the Faithful: Loyal Catholics Striving for Change by William D'Antonio and Anthony Pogorelc. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company

[This book is part of the Boston College Church in the 21st Century Series. To learn more about the C21 initiative and this book, go to

http://www.bc.edu/church21/publications/c21bookseries/Voices_of_the_Faithful.html.

To “catch up” on the D'Antonio/Pogorelc initiative see the 2005 *National Catholic Reporter* essay by William D'Antonio at

http://ncronline.org/NCR_Online/archives2/2005c/093005/093005a.php.]

Written by Anne Southwood, VOTF MA

The authors specialize in the sociology of religion. They humbly understate when they offer analysis in this book as “instructive.” Their book mandates real thought by all in the Church. Catholics are so familiar with phrases like “good Catholic,” “practicing Catholic,” “loyal Catholic,” and the telling “non-Catholic,” these various pigeonholes are not questioned. We know what they mean. But, do we really? The analysis of VOTF survey data alone, and in contrast to a similar 2005 national survey, can shock.

A typical Catholic in the national survey can likely be a person who no longer attends Church every Sunday. It should not surprise when the annual parish census shows a drop in attendance from 30+ percent of registered parish members to 20 percent in a few years. It is also revealing that nearly 1 in 5 Catholics surveyed failed to give a positive answer to a significant question: How important is the Church to you? Twenty percent of Catholics don't consider the Church important to their lives.

This begs a few questions seeking better definition of the 21st Century Catholic. The old phrases don't articulate “Catholic” well. How “loyal” is a Catholic who doesn't worship with other Catholics? Can the absent cradle Catholic be called a “good” Catholic? These questions pop out even without extending thought to the responsibility of a Catholic Christian or the mission of the Church.

Happily, analysis of the response to VOTF-specific survey questions offers a solid investigative base. One analyst was asked during break time at the Boston symposium if the analysts were surprised that VOTF members were all Catholics. “You know, I think a few were,” was the answer. The book subtitle, *Loyal Catholics Striving for Change*, confirms the scientific conviction of the assembled analysts that the VOTF organization is comprised of *measurably* good Catholics. We *pray* more, we *do* more. We care for our damaged children and our Church in general. Statistical analysis of cradle Catholic roots, graduate degrees, charitable outreach, parish involvement, verifies vested interest. If the mission of the Church is to proclaim the gospel in word, sacrament, witness and service - been there, done that. If the grave scandal resulting from failure to curb scandalous actions prevents Church mission in any way, we know our responsibility to give voice like a beagle on a rabbit scent...and keep it up like the Hound of Heaven.

Lest we bask in righteousness, the analysts point to several just questions and concerns from their differing theological and sociological viewpoints. The book cites remarkable homogeneity and universal support for the goals of the movement but in terms of the staying power of the movement, individual analysts run us through a cold shower. Devotion and skills are not enough. Theologian Hines looks for reframing in a more holistic vision, learning from ecclesiology and other reform movements. Rev. Imbelli, specialist in pastoral ministry, would have that vision based more openly on the universal call to holiness and unity in Christ.

Hines dislikes a narrow focus on administration and governance on the grounds that it implies the laity restricts itself to that rather than intrude upon a province belonging to the hierarchy. Going forward, this might tend to isolate and absolutize institutional dimensions of Church. Michele Dillon, sociology of religion specialist, mines a similar vein and she is right out front in the title of her paper: *bringing doctrine back into action*. After thorough analysis, her questions focus on what we could do better. A simpler question she asks: What could we do to help improve the job that priests do, based on the gap between negative survey reaction and the desire to support priests of integrity?

Another question invites further thought on structural change. Dillon points out that a "show me the money" approach may not necessarily lead to changing the structure of the Church. The more profound question she asks is whether a narrow focus on issues we know best actually splits structure and doctrine, and "affirms a dispossessed laity trying to repossess." She notes that it is within Catholic tradition to use doctrine to change structure. Her thesis is that it is theologically naive to assume that split or a split in culture and structure. Going forward, we must ground more openly in mission.

So, this is not a totally feel-good book. If that is the goal, stop after Ch. 4, before the analysts take over. The statistics in the first section are nicely used and not a great burden to the statistically challenged. If you want to learn and ponder new phrases like "critical fidelity" and "loyalty holds exit at bay," and "culture two Catholics" in terms of reframing the VOTF movement for effectiveness, read the analysts. Having gotten that far, if interested in activating membership, read the conclusion. As the survey points out, 60 percent of high educated VOTF members went to their first meeting alone on their own initiative without being asked. Clearly VOTF does not portray a static people. Motivated by shared roots, and trusting the Spirit, these are people who knew who they were in 2002 and chose to act. This book is an aid to defining a future path and fellow travelers.