

## In the Vineyard

Feb. 8, 2007

“When Frank DeMonico became a delegate to the first synod of the Diocese of Metuchen, he soon realized this was not the church he grew up in.” See *DIOCESE/State Watch for the Metuchen synod story reported in the Home News Tribune*

### NATIONAL/International News

VOTF issued a press release on Jan. 29 protesting the dismissal from his parish of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, outspoken supporter of clergy sexual abuse victims and survivors. The Bishop was also banned from speaking on church property in the dioceses of Tucson and Phoenix AZ. For the Arizona story, go to MichiganLive.com at <http://www.mlive.com:80/newsflash/regional/index.ssf?base/news-41/1170183253252210.xml&storylist=newsmichigan>; for the VOTF Tucson AZ press release, the *Arizona Star* web site at <http://www.azstarnet.com/allheadlines/167457.php>; and *Arizona Daily News* at <http://www.azcentral.com:80/news/articles/0205bishop-ON.html>. VOTF Tucson AZ letter to the editor published here: <http://www.tucsoncitizen.com/daily/opinion/41049.php>

VOTF to award **Bishop Gumbleton a VOTF Priest of Integrity Award**. See National News Update.

See VOTF National News for an update on the Executive Director Search process.

Looking for the **VOTF Bylaws**? Go to [www.votf.org](http://www.votf.org); in the list on the left side of the Home page, click on "Who We Are" for the menu, click on "Officers, Trustees and Incorp. Documents" and then choose "Bylaws."

### Also, in this issue:

**World Synod of Bishops 2008** (this page) – just getting started.

**Eyes on New York NY: New Yorkers** look to Boston for advice on parish closings; VOTF NY working with parishes; also, see “Report from New York” by Francis Piderit of VOTF NY

**DIOCESE/State Watch: VOTF Delmarva DE** is making legislative progress; is the **Los Angeles CA** archdiocese parish closing approach an improvement over others? Many think so; **Davenport IO** archdiocese extending for four years the reporting to civil authorities of clergy sexual abuse allegations; **Bridgeport CT** still reeling from a second episode of “questionable” parish financial management, but parishioners seem willing to “move on”(Also, see VOTF Bridgeport, CT Dan Sullivan’s take in Commentary); **Metuchen, NJ** had their own synod and the whole diocese participated; in Commentary, see a follow-up report from **St. Louis MO** where “*a priest was removed from his diocese in Yakima WA and reassigned to St Louis, after allegations of impropriety.*”

## Commentary:

*Theologian's Corner*: "Scandal and Conscience" – Sally Vance-Trembath, VOTF vice president

"Something Special Happened Here" – Vince Grenough, VOTF Louisville KY

"Report from New York" – Francis Piderit, VOTF NY on the "state of the diocese" with regard to parish closings

"Getting it' in the Bridgeport CT diocese" – Dan Sullivan, VOTF Bridgeport

**SITE-Seeing, Etc.:** links to Lenten reflections, women in the Bible, SNAP, David Gibson and more.

**The October 2008 World Synod of Bishops** "The Word of God in the Life and the Mission of the Church" called by Pope Benedict XVI, may be **an opportunity for laity to be heard** via their diocesan leadership. For a brief overview of this and past synods, go to <http://www.cwnews.com/news/viewstory.cfm?recnum=46930>. Note: "At their next meeting, the members of the Synod council will begin preparations for the October 2008 meeting. The first major task is to compose the *lineamenta*: the preliminary document sketching the main lines of discussion for the meeting. **The *lineamenta* is then circulated among the world's bishops for comments and suggestions**, and the Synod council then prepares the *instrumentum laboris* that is the working document for the Synod discussions." Catholic News Service noted that "Pope Benedict met Jan. 25 with the synod's preparatory council at the end of a meeting to draft an outline that will be sent to bishops' conferences around the world for comment" at <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0700486.htm>.

For an idea of past Synods, go to

[http://212.77.1.245/news\\_services/press/documentazione/documents/sinodo\\_indice\\_en.html](http://212.77.1.245/news_services/press/documentazione/documents/sinodo_indice_en.html).

- Read how one **diocesan** synod evolved in DIOCESE/State Watch (Metuchen NJ).
- As various organizations consider the **upcoming Synod in 2008**, it is instructive to consider some of the feedback from the 2005 Synod. FutureChurch provides thoughtful commentary in "Reports from the Synod" at <http://www.futurechurch.org/index.htm>.

## SITE-Seeing, Etc.

**Lenten reflections:** Benetvision offers "In New Wineskins – Prayer, Fasting, Almsgiving and Saints" for your Lenten journey; these are readings prepared by Joan Chittister and Robert Ellsberg for Ash Wednesday (Feb. 21) through Easter. Order online at [www.benetvision.org](http://www.benetvision.org) or call 814-459-5994.

- Also see the VOTF Lenten Action on Conscience 2007.

The **January 26 issue of *Commonweal*** magazine may be worth a trip to your library if you are not a current subscriber. Paul Lakeland writes a spirited defense of Roger Haight, dismissed by the Vatican in 2005 from his position at Weston Jesuit School of Theology; a review of Lisa Sowle Cahill's book *Theological Bioethics* (Georgetown University Press). Lisa is a professor of theology at Boston College.

Sign up for the **2007 National SNAP conference**, July 20-22, in Washington, DC. Go to [http://www.snapnetwork.org/snap\\_conferences/WashDC\\_2007/preview\\_announcement.htm](http://www.snapnetwork.org/snap_conferences/WashDC_2007/preview_announcement.htm).

The *Boston Globe*, lauded for its exposure and coverage of the clergy sexual abuse tragedy in the Catholic Church, looked to the unsung heroes of the story as it unfolded and continues to unfold – the plaintiffs' lawyers. See "Legal Legacy" at [http://www.boston.com/news/education/higher/articles/2007/02/04/legal\\_legacy/](http://www.boston.com/news/education/higher/articles/2007/02/04/legal_legacy/).

On the *Wall Street Journal* online site, **David Gibson** (author of *The Rule of Benedict*) wrote "Keeping an eye on the collection plate" at [http://www.opinionjournal.com/taste/?id=110009582&mod=RSS\\_Opinion\\_Journal&ojsr\\_s=frontpage](http://www.opinionjournal.com/taste/?id=110009582&mod=RSS_Opinion_Journal&ojsr_s=frontpage).

### **Exploring the Roots of our Faith: *A pilgrimage to Rome* - Sign up NOW!**

While time may stop in the Eternal City, time is running out for those interested in going on a once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage to Rome. There, we will have the opportunity to know the Church at its center and to share our hopes and dreams for its future ... all the while enjoying all that Rome has to offer including its wonderful cafes and loving people. Read more at <http://www.travelillum.com/trc/crf/>.

"Changing the structure of the Church" (VOTF goal #3) means different things to different populations. Grade-school Catholic education has been in trouble for decades but the Boston archdiocese may have hit on a new collaborative model for hope. Read the *Boston Globe* of Jan. 30 at [http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2007/01/30/archdiocese\\_tries\\_new\\_tack\\_on\\_schools/](http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2007/01/30/archdiocese_tries_new_tack_on_schools/).

An **excellent introductory text** on "Women in the Bible and the Lectionary" by Ruth Fox, OSB, is on the CTA web site at <http://www.cta-usa.org/reprint6-96/fox.html>.

**QUOTE for our time:** "When Cardinal Bernard Law resigned for not telling the truth about pedophile priests, Rome gave him a promotion, a position on five of the curial congregations of the church, St. Mary Major, one of the four principal churches in Rome, and a luxurious Roman apartment. On the other hand, this bishop, Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, told the truth, even about his having been abused by a priest himself when he was a young seminarian. Most of all, he took the position that it is the obligation of bishops to bring transparency, accountability and justice to the plight of sex abuse victims, whatever the financial ramifications for the church itself...the question looms large for all of us: ***What is going on in a church that stamps out the light?***" Sr. Joan Chittister, National Catholic Reporter column "*From Where I Stand*" of February 1, 2007.

## VOTF NATIONAL News

At the VOTF Holy Trinity affiliate meeting in Washington DC on February 24th, VOTF will be awarding Bishop Thomas Gumbleton with a National VOTF Priest of Integrity Award. Bishop Gumbleton will be acknowledged as a priest of integrity whose prophetic voice of support for victims and survivors of clergy sexual abuse continues to change for the better the landscape of silence that enabled decades of abuse.

More details will be available shortly on the VOTF web site at [www.votf.org](http://www.votf.org).

Call to Action also issued a statement.

### *Voice Of The Faithful National Search for Executive Director*

Voice of The Faithful(VOTF) has announced the opening of its search for an executive director. In a statement, VOTF President Mary Pat Fox said, "Voice of the Faithful with 35,000 members in the United States and 37 other countries and 120 affiliates is looking for an experienced professional to support the network and help move this grassroots organization to a new level of prominence in establishing a voice for Catholics in the US and throughout the world."

Fox announced that Mark Mullaney, president of his own consulting firm and past chief operating officer of both for-profit and not-for-profit companies in Boston and Chicago will lead the search. Mullaney was the chairman of the last National Executive Director Search for VOTF in 2004 and is a founding member of Voice of the Faithful. Fox noted "...the importance of the national reach. The need to have a professional search conducted for this position is clear to the VOTF Board of Trustees, Officers and National Representative Council (NRC) and to the operating units and affiliates of VOTF. This search enables us as an organization to focus on the current needs as well as the future development of the mission and goals of VOTF".

Other search committee members include VOTF national secretary Gaile Pohlhaus, PhD and Independent Lay Theologian; National Representative Council/NY Ed Wilson, a corporate lawyer for 40 years and vice president and general counsel of Loral Corp., New York; Evelyn Seely, affiliate representative; VOTF Trustee Svea Fraser, MDiv; office staff representative Alice Campanella, with a graduate degree in Library and Information Science. The members of the committee are charged with identifying candidates who have spiritual depth as well as a commitment to furthering the mission and goals of VOTF.

As in the past, the search committee will use consultant services as warranted and has access to a network of over 4000 senior executives worldwide. Fox noted, "We are excited about the process in place and expect to complete this important task in a timely manner. The opportunity, at this critical juncture, is significant and the committee and

available resources are prepared to respond."

## DIOCESE/State Watch

**Delaware:** VOTF Delaware has been making news on the legislative front. Skip Sullivan of VOTF Coastal Delmarva notes, "The state senator who introduced the legislation has been working closely with VOTF to ensure passage of this bill. The second link below will take you to an excellent Op Ed by two VOTF members."

- [delawareonline | The News Journal | Sex-abuse victims may get more time to sue](#)
- [delawareonline | The News Journal | Allowing more time for victim is the key to ending child abuse](#)

**New York NY:** *New York Times* coverage on parish closings in the New York archdiocese notes help from Boston's experience:

[http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/27/nyregion/27church.html?\\_r=1&oref=login&ref=nyregion&pagewanted=print](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/27/nyregion/27church.html?_r=1&oref=login&ref=nyregion&pagewanted=print) and

[http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/26/us/26bishop.html?\\_r=1&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/26/us/26bishop.html?_r=1&oref=slogin). See Francis Piderit's (VOTF NY) report in [Commentary](#).

**Davenport IO:** A comment in the *Des Moines Register* from the Iowa SNAP director noted: "It was recently reported that the Roman Catholic Diocese of Davenport has extended for another four years its pledge to local authorities to report allegations of sexual abuse of minors by clergy." Iowa does not include clergy as mandatory reporters. The full text is at

<http://desmoinesregister.com:80/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070201/OPINION04/702010371/1035/OPINION>.

**Bridgeport CT:** The model priest living the high life finds many parishioners who value ministry over financial management – or is it more than sloppy bookkeeping? See the *New York Times* story "Connecticut parishioners still admire ousted priest" of Feb. 2 at [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/02/nyregion/02priest.html?\\_r=1&ref=nyregion&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/02/nyregion/02priest.html?_r=1&ref=nyregion&oref=slogin). Also, note Dan Sullivan's remarks in [Commentary](#) – "Getting it' in the Bridgeport CT Diocese".

**Metuchen, NJ:** The Metuchen NJ Diocese held its first synod "The synod filtered feedback from more than 6,000 parishioners, clergy and laity over a 22-month span. The final policies won't be announced until Wednesday, as Bootkoski is still in the promulgating and reviewing the language of each law. But if there are no changes to the final proposals submitted to the bishop, those in the diocese can expect some of what was requested, including: More accountability among priests and pastors, and the sharing of resources — including pastoral partnership — among parishes." See the *New Brunswick Home News Tribune* at <http://tinyurl.com/39kb5x>. The synod's conclusion is also covered at <http://www.thnt.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2007702020380>.

**Los Angeles, CA:** From the archdiocese of Los Angeles web site “Under the direction of Bishop Gerald Wilkerson, a Task Force has been hard at work to assure that our parishes are provided with good leadership by competent laypersons and Religious who have the charism to serve as Parish Life Directors, that is, those who are responsible for the welfare of the parish in the absence of a resident priest pastor.”  
<http://www.archdiocese.la/news/story.php?newsid=643>.

## COMMENTARY

### Report from New York

*Francis Piderit, VOTF New York*

[The following message was sent in late January to VOTF members in the New York archdiocese. See DIOCESE/State Watch for more.]

In the wake of the January 19th announcement of the parish realignment decisions by the Archdiocese of New York, we share some news and thoughts with you, and to ask your help as we prepare for the important work that lies before us in the weeks and months ahead.

**Helping Affected Parishes:** Our first response to the announcement has been to reach out to affected parishes. We know that two parishes are already actively organizing their response: Our Lady Queen of Angels in East Harlem and Mary Help of Christians on the Lower East Side.

*Our Lady Queen of Angels in East Harlem:* Over the past week, we coordinated contacts with Peter Borré, head of the Council of Parishes in Boston, who has led resistance in the Boston area over the past two years. This Saturday, Peter will be coming to Manhattan to meet with the parishioners of Queen of Angels. A public procession is being planned for 1:30PM, beginning at the church, 226 East 113<sup>th</sup> Street. Participants are asked to wear crosses and blue ribbons, signaling that Jesus and Mary are marching with us. The procession will pass other Catholic centers in the neighborhood, and end at 1261 Fifth Avenue (108<sup>th</sup> Street), where we will meet, hear from Peter Borré, and strategize as a community.

*Mary Help of Christians on the Lower East Side:* Representatives from Mary Help of Christians will attend on Saturday, and are also working to stage a public demonstration at St. Patrick’s Cathedral on Sunday, Feb. 4, time to be determined.

Each affected parish needs to determine its response: to protest or to acquiesce. VOTF NY cannot make that decision for them. What we can do is help them understand what tools and resources are available to them if they are ready to fight to save their parish. And if they decide to defend their parish against closing, we can help them fight. So if you know individual parishioners in the affected parishes, call them, get a sense of the

reaction, and invite them to join in Saturday's march and meeting, which are surely the first of many to follow in coming months.

### **Responding to the Decisions of the Archdiocese**

As you may know, VOTF New York was aggressive in attempting to influence the realignment process. We held our first Parish Encounter event in 2005, where we had representatives from over 40 parishes participating. At our second event in April of 2006, we heard powerful testimony from parishes already on the list, signaling the presence of strong faith communities determined to carry on. We hope that our work made a meaningful contribution to the fact that the final list of parishes to be closed was much shorter than the original list.

Having said this, we also recognize that the Archdiocese, beyond releasing the list, has revealed virtually nothing about its decision-making process. The attitude seems to be, "Trust us, we know what we are doing." But we know from bitter experience that when it came to issues we care deeply about, such as the safety of our children, the hierarchy of our church has repeatedly demonstrated in the past that it did not know what it was doing.

We care deeply about our parishes. Will the decision-making be any better when it comes to parishes?

So it is difficult to take the decisions announced last Friday on trust. The Archdiocese has revealed nothing about its financial condition. Cardinal Egan has publicly stated that within two years of his arrival in New York, he "balanced the budget, and we have never had anything but a surplus ever since." If this is indeed true, then why is it that the Archdiocese of New York has not published financial statements of its condition in more than 20 years. After VOTF NY representatives met in person with the chief financial officer of the Archdiocese, William Whiston, in February of 2005, we promised complete and consolidated financial statements for the Archdiocese and all the entities it controls by August 2005 at the latest. To date, no financial statements have ever been released.

We really have no idea what the financial condition of the Archdiocese is... whether parishes are being closed due to the lack of parishioners, the lack of clergy, or for the sale of real estate assets... or whether these decisions are good decisions or bad decisions for the life of Archdiocese as a whole. What we do know is that at least two New York faith communities love their churches and are preparing to fight to protect what they love.

As we work with affected parishes in the months ahead, we should constantly strive to demand more information and a greater voice in the future of our church in New York. No one is going to give us that voice. We need to seize it.

[As part of the mobilization to support the three parishes slated for closing (in the poorest parts of New York City) VOTF NY and SNAP are organizing Saturday afternoon demonstrations at St. Patrick's Cathedral. Below is an excerpt from text distributed by VOTF NY describing the Sat. Feb. 3 gathering:

*This weekend, the coldest of the year, some thirty demonstrators from Our Lady Queen of Angels demonstrated outside the Cardinal's residence on Saturday afternoon, praying the Rosary and saying novenas. Simultaneously, some fifty demonstrators from Our Lady of the Rosary marched back and forth across Fifth Avenue from the entrance to St. Patrick's. On Sunday at 2PM, Mary Help of Christians parishioners young and old prayed the Rosary at the top of their lungs.*

As in Boston, parishioners from all over the diocese, not just those whose parishes were affected, took part in the support process.]

### **FOLLOW-Up from St. Louis**

*Robert Kaintz*

The following is the text of a letter sent to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and *St. Louis Review* in response to the transfer of Fr. Darrel Mitchell from Yakima, Washington to the St Louis archdiocese. Fr. Mitchell has since left St. Louis rather than meet with the parishioners of St. Ambrose parish. [See *Vineyard* Jan. 25 coverage]

*Accountability has become a critical issue in the Catholic Church resulting in the concern of lay groups such as Voice of the Faithful. Recent events in St Louis demonstrate how far-reaching the issue can be. As recently reported in the Post, parishioners at St Ambrose parish requested an explanation for why a priest was removed from his diocese in Yakima WA and reassigned to St Louis, after allegations of impropriety. The laity asked for an accounting and the priest resigned. While this may not solve the systemic problem of reassignment of troubled priests, it did address the specific incident. Increasingly, the Catholic laity is asking for openness in its Church, not only regarding the sexual abuse scandal, but in finances and in governance as well. The incident at St Ambrose demonstrates that an active laity which collaborates with its clergy can be effective in improving transparency, but only at the cost of challenging existing procedures. Carol Williams, St Louis and Bill Brinkmann, Crystal Lake Park*

We also discussed the archdiocesan proposal on centralized accounting. We have had both positive and negative reactions on the local level. The proposal would decrease the possibility of fraud but also move control of finances away from parish finance committees to the archdiocesan level. We feel this proposal does present an opportunity to influence policy and would welcome input and resources from national VOTF. This also may be an opportunity to obtain a seat at the table with Archbishop Burke and enable us to obtain the appropriate safeguards in the policy. My understanding is that there has been quite a bit negative reaction from the clergy so our support may be of value to him in selling this policy to the archdiocese. I must say that I am not optimistic that he will sit down and talk with us on this subject.

Perhaps the most interesting recent development in St. Louis was a joint meeting of VOTFSL and FOSIL. FOSIL is the Fellowship of Southern Illinois Laity, an organization of lay Catholics working in the tradition of the early Christian community, to keep the voice of prophecy alive. Their membership extends worldwide. FOSIL is a

member of COR – Catholic Organizations for Renewal – which is a coalition of Catholic groups, inspired by Vatican II, to further reform and renewal of the Catholic Church. FOSIL is also a “cooperating organization” of Call to Action. FOSIL is based in Belleville, Illinois and was instrumental in holding the first Lay Synod in the Diocese of Belleville.

### **“Getting it” in the Bridgeport CT diocese**

*Dan Sullivan, VOTF Bridgeport*

I was particularly troubled by the disclosures about the financial problems at St Michael's for several reasons, among them the fact that during the last 20 years in this diocese I have never met another priest who I thought so well represented the ideal of what I thought a priest should be. Fr. Moynihan is charismatic, warm and a wonderful speaker. He always seemed to have an approach to things that seemed grounded in both theology and reality. That being said, if he is guilty of more than poor record keeping, he should be dealt with on the same basis as anyone else.

But I am also concerned about how much of the retribution that may be exacted from Fr. Moynihan is designed to protect the reputation of Bishop Lori and buttress his chances for further promotion in the hierarchy. Once again, we have a situation where a significant amount of money seems to be missing, but at least at the moment, all that is being reported is improper or sloppy accounting procedures. It is incomprehensible to me that when problems were first discovered in early 2004, almost three years ago, a more thorough investigation was not immediately undertaken and the "reforms" mandated by the bishop were not monitored to ensure that appropriate practices were being followed. As President Reagan said, "Trust, but verify." Bishop Lori's self-serving assertions of vigilance, complaints about his workload and allegations that intervening events (such as sexual abuse lawsuits - his timeline seems confused, since most of those cases were settled by the diocese in 2001) precluded him from following up on this problem portray him as a CEO who is incompetent at best, and perhaps negligent. As my Mother always reminded me, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions!"

The Bishop and his staff can continue to refine their financial guidelines for parish accounting, but until they put in place an effective system to monitor those policies, situations such as those at St Michael's in Greenwich and St John's in Darien, where it was disclosed in mid-2006 that the pastor there, Fr Fay, had “inappropriately” and “extravagantly” misspent some \$1.4 million during the last five years of his fourteen year tenure as pastor, will continue to occur. But it is not just reforms in financial practices that are necessary. As long as the culture of secrecy and silence that was intrinsic to allowing the child sex abuse scandal to spiral out of control endures, the Church will continue to experience scandal. Bishops, clergy and the laity must all adopt a culture of openness and transparency, and take seriously their responsibility to hold all accountable to those principles. We can ill afford to ignore potential warning signs, as evidenced by the dismissive remark of Bishop Lori's spokesman, Joseph McAleer. In spite of the irregularities noted at St. Michael's almost three years ago, when recently confronted with the fact that Fr. Moynihan had driven at least six expensive Infiniti sedans during his

tenure as pastor, and also owned a \$200,000 yacht, McAleer said “I don’t keep track or take notice of what priests drive or if they own boats or not, so you really can’t generalize.”

If that is the attitude of our leaders, we can only wonder what lessons they have learned from the scandals of the recent past.

Further information can be found at [www.stamfordadvocate.com](http://www.stamfordadvocate.com) and at [www.bridgeportdiocese.com](http://www.bridgeportdiocese.com).

## **Something Special Happened Here**

*Vince Grenough, VOTF Louisville KY*

Every once in a while something very special happens. That is what occurred this past week on Saturday, January 23. The Trappist monks at the abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky invited a group of people to come to the abbey. These people are all affected by the clergy sex abuse scandal in the Archdiocese of Louisville and are also members of the Louisville area Voice of the Faithful. Five of them are victims/survivors of childhood sexual abuse by priests – four men and one woman. Also in the group were two spouses and two young adult children of the survivors. The group also included two leaders of the VOTF affiliate. The monks said they wanted to listen to all of their stories.

The time set aside for our meeting with the monks was somewhat short for this many speakers, therefore everyone in the group was invited to send, ahead of time, their own personal story of the abuse they endured when they were children. These stories were all made available to the monks to see in the days before the visit.

Trappist monks place a very high value on silence and on contemplative solitude. Why would they do something as unusual as this? The answer became very clear as the day progressed: Because they care that much about the healing of those in pain.

In planning for the event Abbot Damien Thompson said he could not predict how many of the monks might accept his invitation to participate in something like this. The visiting group hoped that at least 10 or 12 monks would be there during the listening and dialogue session in the Chapter Room. Any more than that would be beyond expectations.

As it turned out almost every one of the 50 or so monks came! Everyone sat in a large circle in the spartan Chapter room. After brief opening remarks each person stated their name. Then, one by one, the visitors told how their lives are impacted every day as a result of what was done to them when they were very young.

The first speaker, a survivor who was abused at Holy Spirit church, displayed a large map of the Louisville area that contained numerous colored dots to indicate all of the parishes (more than 50!) where abuse is known to have occurred. Other colored dots indicate where known or credibly accused abusers (over 30!) were stationed at one time or

another. Two parishes had five different known or credibly accused priests stationed at them: St. Elizabeth in Louisville and St. Joseph proto-Cathedral in Bardstown. The map also shows that many of the abusers were stationed, at some time, in the “Holy Land of Kentucky.” the three-county area of Marion, Nelson and Washington counties. The abbey of Gethsemani is in Nelson county. One must wonder how many people in that area live with the terrible effects of childhood abuse.

He and the other survivors told how they have been treated as a result of talking publicly about what happened to them; especially how their accusations were responded to by the bishop and by other diocesan personnel. These were difficult stories to hear. The monks listened with obvious dismay, but also with great compassion and concern. Some had questions, to which the group members responded. One survivor spoke highly of several priests and one deacon who responded as Jesus would have responded.

From the Chapter room everyone went directly to the abbey church for the chanting of Vespers. At the end of the service Abbot Damien stood before the assembly and invited all to pray for intentions of healing, forgiveness and conversion.

After Vespers the group of visitors, Abbot Damien and the monks who are the councilors of the abbey, walked across the road to the abbey guest house to eat dinner together. The various conversations that took place were animated and were punctuated with expressions of deep concern, but also occasionally by good, relaxed humor. The group returned to the abbey church for Compline, the evening prayer of the monks. Then it was time to leave.

During the drive back to Louisville some of the survivors who normally cannot stand to go near a Catholic church said that they want to go back to the abbey – soon and often.

## **Scandal and Conscience: Joining VOTF as an Act of Conscience**

*Sally Vance-Trembath, VOTF National vice president*

Gaile Pohlhaus and I have been asked to serve VOTF by offering theological reflection on a regular basis in the *Vineyard*. The theme for VOTF's Spring Action this year is the notion of conscience in Catholic theology. Given that, and the recent excommunications in Nebraska, we thought it worth devoting some time to the adjacent notion of scandal.

A well-formed conscience will use the "avoidance of scandal" as one of its tests in making a good decision. Scandal is one of those multi-valent words. Like the word reception, it has a common discourse meaning as well as a technical theological meaning. In both its common use and its theological use, the word scandal derives from the Greek word for "snare" or that which causes us to trip or stumble. Theologically it refers to those actions or failures that might damage someone else's relationship with God. In other words, we can "cause scandal" by our actions and that adds another layer of gravity to a sin.

When I was invited to speak to a newly formed VOTF group here in San Francisco by Peg and Ed Gleason, I quickly discerned that failing to speak might damage the faith of my students and especially of my own children. What kind of theologian would I be if I failed to confront this situation? In the years since then, I have always set aside one day in my Catholicism courses to explicitly discuss this crisis. Not to do so would be a scandal. How?

Let us suppose that one of my Catholic students was talking with one of her peers who is attending Santa Clara, not because it is Catholic but because it is a rigorous, intellectual environment. And let us further suppose that my student is asked to say what she thinks about pedophile priests. In her theology class, my students should be given the tools to help her questioner understand the situation using the same intellectual rigor that she is asked to use in her chemistry or rhetoric class. If I had not given my student those tools, her confidence in the Church might appear foolish to her friend. After just a couple conversations like that, my student's own relationship with God might be dented. Certainly her relationship with the Church would be. My failure to provide her with those tools would be a significant factor because I am responsible to both my student and to the Church.

So relationships are at the heart of the teaching on scandal. Just as there are people in my parish whose relationship with God gives me life and nourishes my own faith life, the opposite can happen as well. There are actions that can damage the inner life of others. I think this is what Fr. Tom Doyle means when he talks about abuse as "soul murder".

Like so many teachings in Catholic theology, these two aspects of scandal are two sides of the same theological coin. Sin is ultimately damage to our relationship with God; the absence of sin is one description of a relationship with God in which we are able to rest and draw strength and comfort. In this way, a scandal is a kind of assault on our relationship with God. Because the Church is such an intense location for our relationship with God, our relationship with the Church often gets *identified* with our relationship with God. This has been one of the enduring dangers of the Catholic way of thinking, that is, the easy slippage towards thinking that the Church *is* God's Reign on earth. It is not. However, the Church does serve God's Reign and the Catholic Church teaches that it is the richest servant of that Reign available to the human community. Institutional forms are quite secondary to the mystery of God's presence in the whole people of God gathered in the power of the Holy Spirit for the sake of Jesus' historic mission. However, Catholicism claims that these institutional forms are very important and effective. Because we are incarnate, creatures of the real, concrete, natural world, there are fundamentally humane ways to deepen and nourish our work for the Reign of God.

The particular institutional forms where we exercise Christian ministry are very powerful in the formation of other people's faith life. They all have the same root: Baptism. In Baptism we accept the Christian truth claim that all our relationships of love are everlasting, that the Creator of the Cosmos loves every person, that God's own personal presence as Spirit is a feature of the inner life of every person. These are the core truth

claims of Christianity. They must be at the center of every action we take. When they are not, their absence might be the "snare" that keeps a questioning young person away from the Church.

The same woman who asked me to join VOTF five years ago, Peg Gleason, has given us one of the best descriptions of scandal that I have ever heard. She tells of raising six children in the Viet Nam years and of marching against Viet Nam. When she explained to her then-young children why she marched, she said it was so they "would never have to kill another mother's child in a war." Years later, when she was discussing the abuse of children by priests with her adult children, they said that when they were younger, they had friends who were molested. When she asked them why they did not come to her they said that they thought that the priests were so important to her that she might not believe what her children had to say.

Peg says she recognized the depths of the scandal at that moment. Why scandal? The deep respect that Peg had developed for pastors had been turned into an obstacle in her relationship with her children and had blocked her ability to minister to them in the name of the Church. The trustworthy mother with whom they could discuss war and peace had been made unavailable to them because peace had been made unavailable to them. They did not trust the institutional Church. Their mother was less credible *precisely because* she still placed her trust in the Church. They could trust her to question the government, but could not trust her to question the Church. Because of this, their own human and legitimate questions about the Church were called into question. Having been formed to appropriately raise questions, especially questions regarding justice and the dignity of human persons, they could not give allegiance to a Church that seemed not to allow such questioning. And there is the heart of the scandal. The Church appeared to value the institutional form at the expense of young people. In so doing, the Church severed the connection with the Reign of God; in the Reign of God, each person's value and dignity is protected and lifted-up. Five years later, Peg is still working for VOTF to protect children, support priests who work for Jesus' mission and to change the systems that protected abusers. Why does she continue? To stop would be a scandal.

[See the VOTF Lenten Action on Conscience on the VOTF web site.]