

In the Vineyard

June 19, 2008

In this issue: Continuing the message of accountability, VOTF has sent a petition with 8,000 signatures to Pope Benedict XVI; results from the May 2008 VOTF Survey on “what to do about abusive priests in our midst”; update on VOTF’s plans to help build a People’s Synod; a profile of Fr. James MacGee, nominated for the VOTF Priest of Integrity Award; just saying “no!” to diocesan reorganization plans in Cleveland OH; looking ahead to the sixth anniversary of the VOTF National Convention in 2002, we re-print four of the letters that appeared in the first VOTF quarterly, “Voice”.

STOP THE PRESSES

If not literally, at least figuratively, as we say thank you to Peggie Thorp for conceiving of and then producing *In the Vineyard* these many past years. On the occasion of her “retirement” from *In the Vineyard*, we publish these tributes from the National Office:

The VOTF Board of Trustees recognizes Peggie Thorp’s fine work as editor and the outstanding cumulative accomplishment of *In the Vineyard*. In appreciation and thanks, the Board is presenting to Peggie a framed original VOTF logo, signed by the designers.

The VOTF National Representative Council honors Peggie with unanimous approval of the following resolution:

Be It Resolved: As Peggie Thorp has announced her retirement as Editor of the VOTF publication *In the Vineyard*, the National Representative Council formally acknowledges the vast contributions that Peggie Thorp has made to VOTF as Editor.

Be It Further Resolved: The NRC expresses sincere gratitude for her dedication to this enterprise and commends Peggie Thorp for the many years of service to *In the Vineyard*. Her faithfulness to this publication ensured that the primary communication vehicle of VOTF was always professional, relevant, and informative.

Be It Further Resolved: The NRC applauds Peggie’s scholastic endeavors, wishes her Godspeed, and anticipates future contributions that will expand our understanding of the VOTF mission statement and how to BE Church.

VOTF National News

On June 4, we sent our petition calling for true transformation of the Church to Pope Benedict XVI. The petition included the names of approximately 8,000 individuals who agree that VOTF’s solutions – justice and compassion for survivors of clergy sex abuse; accountability of bishops to the people they serve; full participation of lay men and women in decision-making; financial transparency and accountability – are a pathway to

this transformation. To read the cover letter, petition and signers AND/OR to add your name to the ongoing petition, click [here](#).

The VOTF Survey on “What to do about abusive priests in our midst” drew more than 800 respondents over a several day period. The following are the highlights of this two question survey:

- Seventy-seven percent (77%) of those responding called for establishment of online diocesan registries that would alert parents to the locations of these abusers.
- An equally large majority – 78% – called on diocesan officials who signed confidentiality agreements when removing such priests to seek ways of nullifying those agreements so as to facilitate development of a nationwide registry of abuser priests.

For more on the Survey, click [here](#).

DIOCESE/State Watch

Cleveland OH: In a bold expression of vitality, St. Peter’s Church in the Cleveland OH diocese is “just saying no” to diocesan reorganization plans that would merge or close nearly 50 parishes, St. Peter’s being one of them. Chris Schenk of FutureChurch described the parish decision to fight for its survival an expression of loyalty to the church’s vibrant, solvent contributions to the urban community. A recent gift of \$2 million eradicates a debt to the diocese and would facilitate several parish efforts. For more on this story, see the Cleveland Plain Dealer at www.cleveland.com/living/plaindealer/index.ssf/base/living-01213086718319390.xml=2.

WORKING Group Updates

Survivor Support Notes

In a curious “twist of faith” it appears that “US Catholic officials told families the outcome of their probes into accusations of sexual abuse by priests in *less than one-third* [ital. added] of the cases.” The AFP story on the Orlando FL USCCB meeting is at http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20080612/ts_alt_afp/usreligionscatholicpedophilia_080612234127. Additional coverage is at <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0803130.htm>.

A recent National Survivor Support Working Group press release is on the SNAP website at http://www.snap-greatplains.org/My_Homepage_Files/Page6.html.

Priests’ Support Working Group

Continuing profiles of priests nominated for the VOTF Priest of Integrity Award, Svea Fraser notes Fr. James MacGee. [Click here.](#)

Plus, an idea gathering force -- *From Australia's Catholics for Ministry*: "During 2007 **Catholics for Ministry** circulated a Petition to the Bishops regarding the crisis we face in pastoral ministry. Almost 17,000 Catholics, including 168 priests, signed this Petition, which was forwarded to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference prior to their meeting in November 2007." The petition, the bishops' reply and the group's reaction can be read here: <http://www.catholicsforministry.com.au/>. To see the VOTF resolution seeking a review of mandatory celibacy, click [here](#).

BOOK Notes:

Voices of the Faithful honored by Catholic Press Association: At their annual awards banquet, the Catholic Press Association in the history book category awarded second prize for the year to *Voices of the Faithful*, a C21 series book by William D'Antonio and Anthony Pogorelc. Congratulations to the authors, contributors, series editors, Crossroad Publishing and all involved in preparing and publishing this important book.

Voices of the Faithful is available through Amazon.com and through the Boston College web site at www.bc.edu.

COMMENTARY

John McGinty is the Interim Director of the Church in the 21st Century Program at Boston College. His essay "A Future Worth the Wait" considers the events of Sept. 11, 2001, the *Boston Globe* revelations of clergy sexual abuse, and the emergence and ongoing work of VOTF. These events altered both the American and the Catholic landscapes. McGinty's probing conclusion has already been taken up by VOTF St. Eulalia (MA).

McGinty asks a question based on the lessons learned from these tragedies: "... as you look to the future, as you look to the next five years and beyond, what will be the definition of success? What will it mean, when you look back from the perspective of a 10th anniversary or a 15th or a 20th, to say, 'We have done the right thing? We have done well? We have achieved what we have been called to do? We have been blessed with success?'" Read the full essay [here](#).

SITE-Seeing, Etc.

Looking back to Spring/Summer 2002: Letters written to VOTF in 2002 that still resonate. What is your recollection of the convention or your own beginnings in VOTF? Write to vineyard@votf.org.

Bishop Robinson's US tour recently included VOTF in Orange County. "In a standing-room only community hall Wednesday night, a retired Australian bishop [who was] asked not to speak about the Catholic clergy sexual abuse by some American bishops outlined his theory on its causes and how to move forward."

- See <http://www.ocregister.com/articles/abuse-robinson-church-2066318-sexual-bishops>. For more on the Bishop's tour and message, go to the VOTF home page at www.votf.org and thank you to Hugh O'Regan for directing us to the following site: <http://bishopgeoffrobinson.org>.
- Bishop Robinson's book is *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church: Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus*. The first run sold out at Amazon.com but can be pre-ordered.

Reminder: You can access current and archived news in *National Catholic Reporter*, regardless of subscriber status. Go to www.ncronline.org.

FutureChurch wants female biblical scholars to serve as consultants to the World Synod of Bishops on the Word in October in Rome. At this writing 23 prominent female biblical scholars have agreed to be on the list of possible synod consultants, and U.S. and Canadian bishop delegates are being approached. In this the final phase of the Women and the Word campaign, FutureChurch needs to raise \$10,000 to help ensure that the witness of women is restored to our lectionaries and our faith life. Go to www.futurechurch.org and click on "Women and the Word campaign" for details.

LETTERS to the Editor 2002

Ready in the nick of time for the July 2002 VOTF "debut" at the Hynes Auditorium, Boston MA, was VOTF's first communication vehicle. "Voice" was the generous gift of Brown Publishing Company, then in Wellesley. What follows are some of the letters we published in the first issues of "Voice" and a prayer written by one of VOTF's founders for one of the early meetings at St. John the Evangelist Church, Wellesley MA.

"The trade winds in the Catholic Church (the media attention, new grass roots movements starting, the passion in our hearts) are here NOW. They will go away, as sure as the sun's rising tomorrow.

These winds, unfortunately, have come three months early for VOTF. We are not incorporated; we do not have a refined mission statement; we do not know what we are doing; it is too early.

But we must launch the boat! To not take advantage of this historic opportunity to leverage this trade wind for reform is to settle for a lesser Church for ourselves, our children and our grandchildren." *From co-founder Paul Baier, the wind behind our sails, when we were at risk of missing our launch*

“Thanks for understanding the difficulties that victims have had to live with. It gets easier when people like yourselves band together in the cause of what is right and just. Remain strong and let no one question your faith.” *From a survivor attendee of the convention*

“The most moving experience was to see and hear [survivor] Arthur Austin’s growth from Good Friday, when he could barely speak without breaking down from [the story of] his sexual abuse, and then to see him on this Saturday, challenging us, each and every one of God’s people, full of confidence and conviction.” *From a convention attendee*

A poem from Danusha Goska in Indiana:

Listen for the silenced;
embrace the exiled;
remember the forgotten.

“Movements such as VOTF are an unmistakable sign that Christ is still with His Church and the Holy Spirit continues to blow where She will. We stand at the threshold of a new and wonderful chapter in the story of redemption.” *Brother Michael Cook, a.h., San Antonio TX*

A Prayer for the Laity

Dear God, help us to think clearly tonight and to be our best selves.
Help us to act from motives of justice, not revenge.
Help us to temper our emotions with reason, and our anger with mercy
Help us to give strength to each other, and to Fr. Tom, Sr. Evelyn and Fr. John.*
Help us to act in imitation of your son, with love as our true and transformative guide.
Above all, help us to stand in our truth, unafraid.
We ask these things in the name of the Creator, both Father and Mother...and of the Son,
our Redeemer, Jesus Christ and of Wisdom Sophia, the Holy Spirit. Amen
Luisa Cahill Dittrich for an early VOTF meeting in 2002

*Fr. Tom Powers is pastor of St. John the Evangelist Church in Wellesley MA where VOTF was born. Sr. Evelyn Ronan continues as Pastoral Associate there. Fr. John Philbin was the retired, long-serving pastor who died a few years later. It was extraordinarily difficult for the parish staff to support VOTF, given the obvious relationship every parish has with its diocesan leadership – in this case, Cardinal Bernard Law.

PRIESTS’ SUPPORT WORKING GROUP REPORT

Rev. James MacGee—Priest of Integrity

VOTF’S Providence Convention “Disciples in Action” provided an occasion for honoring selected clergy with a “Priest of Integrity” award for their noted courage and

compassion in their ministry. We know that there are many untold stories of priests doing heroic service in their communities, but it is our hope that highlighting the ones that we have come to know about gives us examples to follow and hope in the unseen, often unsung, goodness that abounds.

There were many priests nominated from across the country, and although a few were singled out at the convention, there were 10 more who also deserve our appreciation and support.

One such priest is Reverend James MacGee, OMI, who was nominated by an affiliate in Florida. Fr. Jim currently serves two parishes, twenty miles apart from each other. The descriptions written about him paint a vivid image of a man whose story is worthy to be told. Consider what he has accomplished in over 50 years in the priesthood:

- Father Jim has served the Church across the world, and in diverse and challenging ways. He was a Fulbright scholar who taught in Japan. He spent time in Appalachia serving the people the coal companies left behind.
- He converted a 12-room rectory into a foster home for five troubled youth.
- A compelling homilist, he has built communities both within his parishes and in the broader community.
- A social activist, he has encouraged others by personal witness to participate in Crop Walk, Relay for Life, food drives and actions for peace and justice.
- His ecumenism is evidenced in his dual-role as a licensed Presbyterian minister while in rural West Virginia as “clergy supply” for neighboring congregations.

Fr. Jim is described as outspoken, with a keen intellect, natural teaching abilities and a sense of humor. The foundation of his energy and enthusiasm is rooted in prayer and his compassion for others. He recognizes his leadership role as one of service and empowerment: “Part of this ministry is considering oneself a member of the community who happens to have this job. The parish is not ours,” he states.

For a man who was born blind in one eye, and with diminishing eyesight in the other, Fr. Jim is a priest with the vision and clarity that sees a better world and draws each of us to help make it that way. He is a living witness to his belief that, “The work of God’s people is to come closer to God.”

COMMENTARY

A Future Worth the Wait

John McGinty

Description of the last five years: Church and nation.

On Monday of Holy Week, 2001, I relocated my life from here at Saint Eulalia's to Sacred Heart Parish in my home city of Lynn, where I had been appointed as pastor. Before the next celebration of Jesus' self-giving on the Cross and exultation in resurrection were celebrated, two huge events which would change both nation and Church had begun to unfold.

One of these events took place on September 11, 2001, a beautiful late summer's day interrupted and shattered by our generation's abrupt and cruel loss of innocence. We are not invincible and we are not the darlings of all upon the earth.

The second of these events took place as the Sunday *Globe* was delivered to doorways and bought coming out of Mass on January 6, 2002. There in those pages began the terrible tale of abuse and scandal, the revelation of the power of sin in the very heart of Church ministry.

These two events, as they have spun out since, have unraveled much of what American Catholics took for granted before those two dates. In the history of the nation, we have entered upon and stepped darkly into the depths of a war fought on at least two fronts, a conflict whose story is not easily ended, one marked by much shedding of blood and many lives left marked in ways which will never fade, as long as life continues.

In the history of the Church, we have entered upon a time characterized by ... what? Many things, I think, both good and bad. This time has been characterized by mistrust, by division, by uncertainty. At the same time, these years have been characterized as well by commitments renewed and deepened, by new safeguards put into place, by new awareness born of what the Church is called to do and to be, by an ongoing – neither smooth nor painless, but real – dialogue among the members of the Church: the laity, the priests, the bishops.

It is difficult to overestimate, I believe, the impact these two events have had and will have on the ongoing life of this nation and of the Church living and acting within this nation. Among those points of impact, among the commitments deepened within the Church, among those pressing for safeguards, among those striving to become more aware both of what needs to change and what needs to be strengthened in the Church - among these is the presence and effort over five years now of the Voice of the Faithful.

You know well that not all parties celebrate either the birth or the continued life of VOTF. You know well that it has been necessary, over these five years, to continually strive to clarify the goals and the inner spirit of this organization. You know well that the mistrust which has clouded these years has impacted how some see and understand - I assume you would say 'misunderstand' - this organization.

But through all of this, you have continued and spread and grown. Through all of this, you have learned. Learned what energy it takes to continue to love, to continue to serve, to continue to work within the Church in times like these. And the truth is, it takes everything a person or a group has to offer. As the Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote during the conflict of World War II, and showed the truth of in both his living and his dying, discipleship to Jesus Christ “costs not less than everything.”

Broader Context for Church: The Years Since the Close of the Vatican Council

As you mark and celebrate five years of this kind of commitment as an organization, and many more years of this commitment as individual believers, it is good to pause and broaden our view a bit. These years have called us .to look into a microscope closely at the reality of how the Church has lived - for good and ill. At this anniversary, it is both worthwhile and necessary to raise our eyes and look around, to place a different lens before our eyes and look at a bigger picture.

In the life of the Roman Catholic Church, that bigger picture is still dominated by the story and the teaching, the documents and the more than forty years of discussion and living which have followed, of the second Vatican Council. Peter Steinfels of the New York Times, in his 2003 book *A People Adrift*, recalls both the continuing and lasting importance of the Council and the ever clearer divisions of right and left which have marked discourse and life in the Church ever since. He calls at the conclusion of that work for a Church leadership, both episcopal and lay, which has two characteristics: “It must be determined to break out of the trench warfare that has constricted discussion within American Catholicism since the Second Vatican Council. [And] It must balance a concern for theological underpinnings with close attention to the practical pastoral realities of animating vital worship, passing on the faith, and fostering Catholic identity.”

This second goal is praiseworthy, but only possible if we pay close attention to the first: the breaking away from trench warfare. To break away in this fashion involves coming up out of our trenches, looking around, putting weapons aside, looking into the eyes of those who see things differently, and speaking with one another. Cardinal Joseph Bernardin worked to make these renewed conditions possible in the Catholic Common Ground Initiative founded at the end of his life, and continuing to the present. Just how difficult it is to end 'trench warfare' was revealed at the Initiative's foundation when, despite its announced goal of bringing parties within the Church who disagree with one another together in respectful dialogue, the Initiative itself came under attack directly and quickly from some of Bernardin's fellow American Cardinals.

The Initiative's first words, in the document entitled *Called to Be Catholic: Church in a Time of Peril*, were these: "Will the Catholic Church in the United States enter the new millennium as a Church of promise, augmented by the faith of rising generations and able to be a leavening force in our culture? Or will it become a Church on the defensive, torn by dissension and weakened in its core structures?"

It is incumbent upon us as disciples, eleven years after those words were written, seven years after the beginning of the new millennium, and five years after the two seminal events with which I began, to confront those two burning questions from our current perspective with honesty. Thus far into a new millennium, has the Church in the United States been “a Church of promise ... a leavening force in our culture”? Or instead: a defensive Church, “torn by dissension” and weakened? Or is there a third possibility, that the Church in our nation over these last years has been a strained amalgam of both these possibilities, at times rising with hope toward what it is called to be, at other times sinking into something much less?

Where Are We Now? What It Takes to Be Aware

To find the truth, to answer these questions rightly, necessitates in us all a high level of awareness: awareness of the current state of affairs, awareness of the tradition that has gone before, awareness of our own biases. I would submit to you that it is a rarity in any generation for anyone to be sufficiently aware of all the variables of one's life and times in order to speak well to the questions. Where are we now? What is objectively our current state of affairs? This is legitimately difficult because we are, all of us, immersed within this current state of affairs. It is our context. We see and judge from within it. If we seek awareness and seek understanding, we probably do so with a certain measure of emotion. If some of us seek neither awareness nor understanding, we may remain blissfully unknowing and uncaring. In either case, it remains difficult to assess the truth of the question we pose to ourselves: what is the state of the Church in the United States today?

Broaden the perspective still further. Read again the beginning of the seventh book of Plato's Republic. The state of humanity, he says, is like that of a group of people living in a cave, chained, unable to turn to the mouth of the cave to see the light, facing toward the back wall of the cave and mistaking the shadows playing on that wall for reality itself. Those in the cave sincerely believe that what is before them, playing before their eyes, is the whole truth. They make their judgments based on what is before them. They believe sincerely there is no other reality to be known. And yet the whole of the world, the whole of reality, the light of the sun and the pursuit of knowledge is just behind them, out of their sight and out of their grasp.

Are we in that cave? Do we presume too easily that we have a good sense of what of consequence is really happening in the life of this Church of ours? Are the filters with which we are judging all the information available to us and bombarding us in this ever-more-accessible information age adequate to screen out the ultimately unimportant and recognize what is finally of lasting import?

I don't know.

And I'm happy to say so.

I do know this. One of the first tools necessary to look with honesty at the present state of the Church is humility. To be radically open to the possibility that though you disagree with me on an issue you may be in the right is the first tool needed to loose the chain around my neck so that I can turn toward the source of light at the mouth of the cave. That same humility is the first hand that can help pull me safely up out of the trench deep within which I've been involved in warfare. To see the truth, I believe I must allow my perspective constantly to be widened and deepened beyond that which I have known until now. And that widening and deepening must be constant and open and last in me as long as I live.

For any of us, there may be then at least a chance that we can look around with new eyes, re-assessing a scene we presumed we already knew, and begin anew to know "Ah, so this is where we are together, as a believing people. This is where we have journeyed together. This is the good we share together, and these are the challenges which we face together."

The Church of the Future: How Do We Reach It?

I have implied by the title of this presentation that, whether we succeed in assessing adequately and well the present state of our Church or not (and it is our responsibility to make the attempt), that there is a future approaching us as Church, and that it is a positive future, a future worth the wait. The theologian Karl Rahner made it clear many times that the future which comes to us as human beings, though it is influenced by our human freedom, is not in fact a future which we create. The future comes to us from the Creator. The future belongs to God. Fundamentally, we receive it.

In his little book *Christian at the Crossroads* (and where else is a Christian ever to be found in this world, after all?) published more than thirty years ago, Rahner raises the question, "Is there an intelligible way for man [the human person] to relate to his future?" Rahner's answer is given in these words, which amount to advice to us facing our approaching future as the community of faith in Jesus Christ: "He obeys the command of the present moment, because there he is always offered several possibilities which he has to consider carefully. He plans the future in so far and as well as he can. He enjoys the present and accepts care for the future in so far as it is entrusted to him. He is calm in everything. He lets the enjoyed present disappear into an unknown future. He never exaggerates his responsibility for the future."

This sounds to me profoundly un-American, and I celebrate that. The terms are not ours: obey, consider, enjoy, accept, calm, allow, never exaggerate.

What does he see in this approach to the future? What Thomas Aquinas saw as our ultimate end. Rahner writes of our future: "There really is a surrender embracing both action and passion which is granted to man In that surrender, full of silent hope, the Christian becomes aware of what is meant by God." [Chapter 9, "The Future," p. 95]

In the measure that the approach to this future is 'entrusted to us,' what do we need to get there? What do we need to reach the Church of the future? Or to put it another way, what

do we need in order to open our hands to accept this God-given future in freedom? What do we need to calm our hearts to wait for it, and to know it as worth the wait?

First, we need a reasonable faith, a reasoned faith. But this does not mean a cold faith. We need a faith colored by imagination, a faith which engages the world in conversation, which is willing to say 'what if?' and 'have you ever thought of this?' and 'would it possibly be better if?' We need imagination if we are to be able to do more than survive the present. We need a faith seasoned by imagination if we are to be able to recognize the future as it comes to us from God.

Secondly, to reach that future worth the wait, we need the voice of the faithful. We need to be a people, a whole people, who feel enabled to speak out loud what is in our hearts and on our minds. There will be limits in this world to what can be, but there need not be limits to what can be dreamt. We need a voice that speaks both when it is welcome and when it is not. We need a voice that speaks not only from one vantage point, but a voice that deepens and resonates and matures and reaches further because it is open to take in and consider and seek to express all that it has seen and heard.

But if we need a voice of the faithful, that is not all we need. We need as well the ears of the faithful. We need to be a people willing first and always to listen: to listen to one another, to all the others: to the others who think and feel quite differently. To the others who are officeholders in the Church. Even to others who perhaps are not willing to listen in their turn.

But if we need both the voice and the ears of the faithful, there is still more we need. We need the hands of the faithful. We need men and women who are willing to pick up the tools of Church life and to put them to very good use. By tools I mean implements as various as the Scriptures, scholarship, charity, established organizations, crying needs, elements of the tradition. We have been presented with a very full tool chest stretching back over two millennia, and behind that the tools of our forebears, our brothers and sisters in Israel, still available to us. We have been provided the instruments to confront in healthful manner all the often-dire conditions of our generation and the one to come. So our hands are needed, and the strength in them, to put our tools to use. Unused, a tool is nothing but a useless piece of material. But in the hands of one willing to work, that tool becomes the instrument of transformation.

Voice, ears, hands. There is one thing more needed as we stand at the crossroads looking to the future. We need the hearts of the faithful. The knowledge of the mind is both necessary and good. We've witnessed in recent times the lamentable effects of our being, as a people, less cognizant of our Christian faith than religious educators and leaders would hope us to be. But the information which we take in by ear or eye ultimately has meaning for us as individuals only if it becomes the truth for which we live, the truth which provides meaning to our hours and days, the truth that connects us in life to one another and to our God. What we learn has to be connected to us by cords which are as vital and as real as the ligaments which join our limbs and the arteries which carry our

lifeblood. In other words, we must live inwardly - be alive at all - precisely because our hearts are faithful, because our hearts beat with the heart of Jesus.

Characteristics of the Church of the Future

Looking then to what we have learned as a people over the past millennia, to what the Catholic Christian tradition has stood for in the world; looking with a critical but loving evaluative eye at the present reality of our life together as disciples of Jesus; looking with that gift of faithful imagination toward the time ahead, what might be some of the characteristics of the Church of the future? What might the Church look like, feel like, live like in that future which is worth the wait?

In a much less than exhaustive list, I will suggest seven attributes which may identify the Church for which we wait.

A Church of In-Spirited Structures

Arguably the sacramental principle is one of Catholicism's most fertile contributions to the Christian tradition: the assertion that the things of this world are capable of carrying within and communicating without the graceful, transformative presence of God. This assertion becomes active every time we gather at the baptismal font, the sickbed, the place of reconciliation, and the altar. This assertion sees the Church as a whole as the effective sacramental presence of Jesus the Savior. By being its own truest and best self, simply by being, the Church proclaims, makes present and effective the saving presence of the Christ embedded within this human world. This assertion sees the Christ as the effective sacramental presence of the Godhead, the One in whom the unending loving care of God for the universe is embodied and enfleshed without end.

One of the implications of the sacramental principle is that the structures of the Church - its infrastructure, its skeleton, its bones, the institutional realities which render the Church of Christ visible and effectively acting in the world - these are not only capable but are called to be vehicles of grace, realities which lift up and celebrate rather than diminish the light of the Spirit within the community. Our institutional structures are meant to be in-spirited structures (imbued and filled as vessels of the Holy Spirit), which therefore are capable of in-spiring believers and potential believers with the living presence of Jesus Christ. To put it differently, in the Church of the future ecclesial structures will be living and open channels of effective, transforming communication.

A Church of Porous Borders

Every freestanding organism and structure in this material world has its boundaries. Two people united in love, united even in the sacrament of marriage, are yet two people united. The longest bridge in the world, the highest building, the largest nation - all these have their borders, their beginnings and their ends.

Borders, though they be often disputed, are a part of living in a world of discreet individual entities in relationship with one another. Borders are, in other words, inevitable. Though we hope and pray and work for the day of full unity among the Christian churches, in the meantime there are innumerable borders among Christians - some friendly, some heavily armed. It is also true that the accomplishment of full Christian unity would in turn more fully reveal a border between the Christian Church and other faiths. This then would expose even more than we see it now the work ahead toward the full unity of humanity.

But though the reality and the utility of borders must be recognized, the Church of the future must be a Church of porous borders. The frontier of the Church must be less a wall and more an area of give and take. It must be not unlike the border - over the last several hundred years at least - between England and Scotland. There is an entire expanse of geography at the southern end of Scotland and the northern end of England which is known in everyday parlance as "the borders." Englishmen and Scotsmen may place the precise border at diverse locations, but all are long since content (at least to this moment) to accept the border as both real and open: open to free passage, open to discussion.

We can learn from the borders present in living organisms, in our own bodies. Individual cells within us have their perimeters, their margins, the point at which they are in contact with the next cell. But each cell is part of something greater than itself. Indeed, the very life of the individual cells, and ultimately of the organ of which they form part and of the entire organism, depends on the marvelous fact that the borders of living cells are porous borders. They live because their margins are permeable. They allow organized exchange. Nutrients enter. Waste products exit. Electronic impulses are passed from one nerve cell to the next, and then to the next. Theirs are communicating borders, and the communication itself- built into their very structure - is vital to life and growth and strength.

The Church of the future, though having an identifiable periphery in the world, must understand and live that border as porous, as permeable, as of value precisely because it is the point of living and open communication with other Christian churches, with other faiths, with non-believers, with the other living realities of this world.

A hard and fast boundary which closes out the rest of Christians, the rest of humanity, the rest of the world - whether out of concern for the sanctity of the Church or out of fear of what is 'out there' - is never what it may be intended as, a safeguard and protection and defense. Rather it is a suffocating line which threatens the life of the Church even as it tries to protect it. The Church needs no Berlin Wall, no wall along a border to prevent aliens from entry. If the Church of Christ draws its self-understanding first out of the Scriptures and out of the ministry of Jesus, there are no aliens. There is no one to fear.

A Church of Servants

That same return constantly to the Word of God and to the ministry of Jesus must inform the way each member of the Body of Christ understands his or her own role. Saint Paul

emphasizes in his writings to the early churches that the community of faith is a variegated Body. It is joined in one faith, entered into by one baptism, listens for the guidance of one Spirit. But that one Spirit gives diverse, complementary gifts to each member of the Body. In Ephesians 4, among other places, the Apostle teaches that there are in the Church apostles, teachers, prophets and more; each undertaking his or her own role in the life of the Church. But whatever be the role you or I have been given by God in Jesus Christ, one thing we have in common is that we are called to serve.

This service, though singular, is distinguished into two spheres. We are called to serve one another in the Church. And the Church as a whole is called to serve the world.

There is no call in the Church, including the call to the most unique levels of leadership, which is not a call to serve. Jesus states that he has come to serve not to be served. He washes the feet of his own, according to John, on the night he was betrayed, and calls them to serve one another in the same fashion, out of love. This is to be the defining mark of the community that bears his name. It is a community of loving servants, each one in his or her own way seeking not one's own good, but the good of the other.

A Church marked by this kind of servant-leadership cannot help but do two things, each one crucial. First, this servant Church will stand in contrast to the world, where those in authority lord it over their own. Secondly, this servant Church will give a saving example to the world. It says in effect: do you want to know how to live effectively and well, how to accomplish something in the present moment which will have lasting good result? If you do, then live as a servant of all, beginning with the most powerless, with the least among you.

This way of service must characterize the Church of the future. To do any less would be to betray the inner life of the community, to mute its voice and dim its light. It would be to build a world that might as well not be touched at all by the saving presence of God. And in fact, that is often what the world can look like and feel like. When it does, it is because we as Church have failed to recognize in our individual lives and in our life as a community that we are called to show the world how to serve. To show service by simply serving, in every time and place and circumstance. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, recognized across the face of the earth as a servant of Jesus, never said to anyone whom she met, 'You I am not called to serve.' Rather, she knew her call to be universal, to be servant of all. In this she claimed no unique status. This is the fundamental identity of the whole Body of Christ, and of every part thereof.

An Invisible Church

A servant Church need not be an extraordinarily obvious reality. It never shouts: Look at me! I'm serving the world. What do you think? What accolades can you offer me? What thanks do I deserve?

Though it is made up of flesh and blood women and men, bathed in the blood of Christ; though there is in it and of it an institutional reality made of brick and mortar; though it

has its own laws and systems and ways of proceeding which are definite and determined, the Church of the future ultimately seeks invisibility.

It does not live to draw attention to itself- at all, ever. It lives to point to Jesus Christ, to what the Father has accomplished in and through him. It lives to proclaim the presence of the Spirit in the world and embedded in human hearts in lasting fashion. It lives to shout out the Gospel message into the world, to insist in every generation (even one where there is new technology and radical innovation unveiled every hour of every day) that the newest phenomenon of all remains the message of Jesus - always new, always renewing to all who allow that message to touch and permeate their inner person.

What the Church of the future strives toward is transparency. Look toward it yes, but only because through it you see the face of Christ. Hear what it says, yes, but because what you hear there is only the voice of Jesus. Whatever gets in the way of that transparency - property, modes of dress, ways of acting which may bear the imprimatur of centuries of usage, new ways which are suggested in the light of new needs - each of these must be examined without prejudice in the light of the single question: Does this help to make clear and accessible to the world the message and the life of Jesus? There may never be unanimity in the Church over the response to that question on a particular issue, but the very fact that the question is forever living and contemporary will assure that the Church seeks not its own glory but to fulfill the mission of Jesus.

A Person-Centered Church

From ancient times there has been both a philosophical and a practical struggle over which is to take precedence, the individual or the community. In the Israel of Jesus' time and before, the individual found his or her identity only as a part of, and in relation to, the community. God called Israel together as a people, and acted on their behalf and saved them as a people.

Christianity, in its theological struggle of the first centuries over how God is to be understood, gave birth in its Trinitarian theology to the idea of the person. Our western cultural idea of the person, of the worth of the individual, is largely owed to the Christian theological tradition.

Yet in our own times, very much marked by the primacy of the individual, the Church has stood for the importance of the community, and the community's significance for the individual. There is an easily demonstrated need for balance. The individual contributes to the community's good. The community supports and bears up the individual.

The Church of the future - structured community though it is - will be characterized by a marked gentleness toward each person. This high valuing of each individual is based first and fundamentally on respect for each as a creature of God, as one uniquely brought to be by the will of God and destined for salvation in the house of God. Every person, and particularly those who are least able to assert their own worth, will be valued by the community of the Church in concrete ways which demonstrate the innate dignity and

worth of each. Thus the poor, the lonely, the helpless, the distressed, the homeless, the broken-in-spirit, the children, the unborn, domestically abused women, victims of violence, victims of war (of whatever people or faith) - all of these and many more must be the concern of the Church community as a whole. In addition, these must also be the living and active concern of each individual believer. The resources of Church life - spiritual and material - must be placed visibly at the service of these brothers and sisters. How else could they ever know that they are our brothers and sisters?

The Church must be the place - be there only one in the world - where gentle regard for each person is the universal and unbreakable rule.

Such a Church can truly live in this way only inasmuch as it lives out of its own hard-won understanding of the inner life of God. God is not a monad, but a community of persons. The God we worship is a community of love, of mutually indwelling love. Out of the greatness of that love, each person of the Trinity is uniquely held up and the unity of their persons provides the very stability that grounds everything that is. This inner life of God, though we catch only the merest glimpse of its depth in our prayer, meditation and theologizing, is the everlasting model of what the community of the Church is called to be: a community of persons of equal dignity, of equal worth, each with their own proper work complementary to that of the others, all united in the perfection of love. This is true in the heart of God. It is our vocation to let it become truer and truer in the heart of God's Church.

A Church 'Ad Extra'

I have been saying for years, more or less without visible effect, that 'church' is not a noun at all. It is a verb. The word does not ultimately point toward a thing that is. Ultimately the word points to an action, to something that is done, to an activity that is ongoing. Seen from this vantage point the Church does not, properly speaking, have a mission. The Church is a mission.

This mission, defined by the action of Jesus Christ in the world, is a mission 'ad extra'. The Church's orientation is not to be toward itself, toward its own constitution, toward the protection of its own assets. The Church's orientation, and this must become more and more obvious in the future, is outward - toward the 'others' whoever they may be: the ones who are unlike us, the ones who have not heard the saving Word, the ones who stand in terrible need or terrifying fear, the ones whose experience of the Church till now has been one of hurt.

The Church must be oriented in three fundamental directions, each one (not by coincidence) directing the community's attention externally.

First, the Church must be oriented toward the world. The second Vatican Council's pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world (*Gaudium et spes*) makes it quite clear from its opening words that the Church is called to recognize and attend to all the cares of the world. The Church is called to bring healing to the deep and pervasive

wounds of this world. The rest of that document goes into particular detail about all the ways in which this service from Church to world is to be rendered. What the constitution is asserting as foundational is that we, as the Church, have been entrusted with the gift of the assurance of divine love and that this gift is not only for ourselves, but for us to generously share with all with whom we share the planet. This is as fundamentally true as is the statement that Jesus did not rise from the dead to new and lasting life for his own sake. He rose so that we all could share in that rising and in that new life.

It perhaps is quite telling that this document of the Council is not often cited as the years pass, and is sometimes looked upon with suspicion. The Church of the future must sit down again and allow the intent of this document to be written into our hearts and to energize the works of our hands. It says that we are not the Church for our own sakes. We are the Church for the sake of the world.

Secondly, the Church must be *oriented toward the Kingdom*. The Church does not live to build up a kingdom of its own, no more than we as individual believers live for our own sake. The Church lives as an instrument in the hand of God for the establishment of God's Kingdom. Scripture scholars examining the Gospels have noted again and again for generations that Jesus Christ preaches not himself, but the Kingdom of God.

It is true that within a generation or a generation and a half, the community gathered in Jesus' name was preaching him. This is both obvious and reasonable, that the disciples should place high emphasis on the Person who carried the message and on that Person's identity as Son of God, as Incarnation of God.

But in doing so, there is no reason to leave behind or to de-emphasize the message that the Gospels affirm Jesus himself carried: "The Kingdom of God is among you!" To carry this message in Jesus' name requires us, as the community of faith, to assess all that we do in the light of that proclamation. Does this undertaking, this commitment of resources, this new project, this renewal of an aspect of the tradition - do these proclaim outward into the world the truth that this world, wounded by sin, has been saved, and is destined for greatness? Does what we say and do as the Church constantly proclaim outwardly: you are more than you think yourself to be, and your end is not in the grave but in the presence of God?

These might be thought to be quite ordinary questions, or perhaps quite nebulous and difficult to answer. But the very posing of the questions is an assertion that we as the Church do not belong to ourselves; we belong among those who yearn for the fulfillment of God's reign over all.

This orientation to the Kingdom also helps to ground this truth, oft forgotten in practice in 21st century Church life: our call is to worship God. Our call is to give praise to God together. Not because the Kingdom has entirely come. Not because all is well in the Church. Not because we are particularly happy at any given time and place with our Church leadership or with our living out of the Christian life. No, our call always and everywhere to worship and give praise to God is simply there for one reason: God is

worthy of our praise. God is worthy of our worship. To put it even more simply, in words that will either be understood or not, but beyond which there is nothing else to say: we give worship and praise because God is God. The Church of the future, forward phalanx of the Kingdom, must be known as the people who constantly are opening mouths and hearts to give praise to God.

Thirdly, the Church of the future will be oriented from the southern hemisphere. There, in Africa and in South America is the growing edge of Christianity. This has been true for decades, and becomes more obviously true with each passing day. The poor churches of the third (and fourth and fifth) world, by their very existence stand as a challenge to the Church in Europe and North America. The challenge, put briefly, is this: do not give us money alone, as if solidarity in money would fill up what we owe to one another. No, rather listen together with us to what the Gospel of Jesus Christ has to say to our present circumstances and to our hopes and possibilities for the future. Act together with us to strengthen and grow the community of believers throughout the world. Become visibly and spiritually and emotionally one with us in Christ. Whether we share the same written and spoken language or not, let the language of God's Spirit, which is beyond words, sing out from us all.

In other words, in the orientation of the Church as a world-church, power and wealth cannot carry the day. To make that assertion would be to betray the Gospel of the Poor Man of Nazareth. The day must be carried instead by the open acceptance which is characteristic of the poor of the world, those who in ancient Israel were called the *anawim* (God's poor ones), those whose hearts are open and ready both to recognize and accept the call and the grace of God.

This orientation of the future Church 'ad extra', toward the world and the Kingdom, and from the poor churches of the earth may be uncomfortable to some. I have caused discomfort to some in recent years by holding that there is a problem when the Church is primarily concerned with itself, when a good portion of the energy within the community of believers is taken up either in agonizing over the state of affairs inside the Church or in looking fearfully toward supposed enemies outside.

But I mean exactly that. That is, whenever it is necessary for the Church to concentrate chiefly on putting our own inner house in order, this means that there is a problem, a problem in the house. This diversion of energy and commitment to inward problem solving must be made, but made as energetically and as swiftly as possible. Why? Because it is in turning our attention outward "ad extra" again that we will become most truly the Church living and growing in communion with its Founder and Guide. And that is what the Church in any future worth the wait will seek to become ever more profoundly.

A Joyous Church

Finally, the Church of the future will be a Church of joy! This does not mean a Church that ignores the pains of humanity. To do so would be untrue to the other marks I've

suggested of the Church in the future. But it does mean a community marked in every circumstance, whatever be the crises that those days will reveal, by absolute trust in the presence and the faithfulness of God. It means a Church - even when it knows itself to be sharing the darkness of the tomb with a war-weary, unkind, and wounded humanity - which shares in the joy of the Resurrection and preaches that joy (even when, and perhaps especially when it sounds ludicrous). It means a Church, though always attentive and committed to the needs of the moment in every epoch, which is eschatological in nature. That is, a Church which is looking forward and straining forward - always with confidence - toward the summing up and the completion of all things in Christ.

As VOTF looks from its fifth year toward its tenth: what is the definition of success?

The last five years we have lived together as Church here in Boston, in the United States, and beyond, have not been marked by this joy, nor by this straining forward in confident trust. This has been a staggering time for all who care for the Church and who are committed to the mission.

I have tried here tonight to outline the beginnings of a sense of the future we might, we should hope for. The characteristics of the future Church which I have sketched are just an opening, only an initiation. It is your work, and the work of all of us who are the Church, to develop this opening, to deepen this initiation. What we need to do, as simple and as daunting as it seems, is to begin again - ignoring nothing which has been happened, whether good or bad, encouraging or harrowing, carrying all of it with us - we need to begin again, all of us, together.

So I conclude tonight with a question directed to you, a question directed to the Voice of the Faithful as an organization and indeed ultimately to all the Church: for you, as you look to the future, as you look to the next five years and beyond, what will be the definition of success? What will it mean, when you look back from the perspective of a 10th anniversary or a 15th or a 20th, to say, "We have done the right thing? We have done well? We have achieved what we have been called to do? We have been blessed with success?"