

## In the Vineyard

March 23, 2006

“Collective discernment and decision-making is the most important lesson learned over the last forty years . . . .” *Fordham University theology professor Bradford E. Hinze in his new book. See Site-Seeing, Etc. in this issue.*

*VOTF Campaigns for Accountability: How our Church made our case. See “Facts and Figures”; visit the VOTF web site additions to the Campaigns for Accountability page; and see where you fit in!*

**In this issue:** Chicago’s Cardinal George apologizes following investigation findings of rampant failures in the application and intent of the USCCB Charter; **audits** for abuse prevention training and background checks find failures in Boston, MA and Portland, ME; in NY, the priests’ group Voice of the Ordained proposes mediation between Abp. Murphy and **LI VOTF**; **VOTF Ireland** is welcomed by local bishop – see “Message from Ireland” in Commentary; **VOTF Atlanta**, GA finds a “new day” with their archbishop; **Lent’s reflection** riches; **VOTF working groups** – re-introduce yourself. See “Have you met?”; children are a little safer in **Virginia** – legislatively; not only VOTF National but VOTF affiliates are using **ads in their regional press** to get their message out – see Diocese/State Watch in NY, OH and CT.

### NATIONAL News

**Affiliate reminder** – A link from your web site to *In the Vineyard* will go a long way to keeping all of us on the same page.

**VOTF, Inc.** takes its own financial transparency seriously. Go to <http://www.votf.org/Financials/financial.html>. See “Who We Are” for Financial Statements.

**Survivor Community News** – See Kathy Dwyer’s message in Commentary – “A New Commandment: Honor Thy Children.”

- Go to the SNAP web site at [www.snapnetwork.org](http://www.snapnetwork.org) for comments on the Chicago breakdown.
- Read the March 19 issue of New Hampshire’s *Union Leader* article “Protecting Children: The idea is to strengthen the law” at [www.unionleader.com](http://www.unionleader.com).

### DIOCESE/STATE Watch

**Spokane, WA:** According to the *Catholic Explorer*, “Bishop William Skylstad of Spokane, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, has denied a woman's claim that he sexually abused her more than 40 years ago when she was a minor.” Many observers are recalling the 1993 false claim of sexual abuse against now-deceased Cardinal Joseph Bernardin. It had been filed by a former seminarian who later dropped the lawsuit.

- From Associated Press: “The individual parishes of the Catholic Diocese of Spokane do not want to help pay for a \$45.7 million settlement offer made by Bishop William Skylstad to 75 victims of sexual abuse by priests, an attorney said Wednesday. The 82 parishes were expected to shoulder a hefty portion of the settlement costs, but instead will ask U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Patricia Williams to reject the settlement offer, said Bob Hailey, an attorney and spokesman for the parishes.”

**VOTF Dublin, Ireland:** No standstill in Ireland after abuse numbers are made public. The government and the Church in Ireland are working together with quick determination to put an end to decades of abuse of children by priests. Read more in the *Belfast Telegraph* at <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/>. See Sean O’Conaill’s update in Commentary “Message from Ireland.” Note that VOTF Ireland will soon have its own web site.

- There is excellent coverage of Ireland’s abuse crisis in the *Jurist* at <http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/paperchase/2006/03/irish-clergy-sex-abuse-study-shows.php>; see a March 9 column “Irish clergy sex abuse study shows many suspected, some sued, but few convicted” by Angela Onikepe.

**VOTF Dayton, OH:** VOTF Dayton, OH ad offers Catholics a hands-on, user-friendly approach to financial accountability in their diocese by sending a clear message to Archbishop Pilarczyk. See details at [www.daytonvotf.org](http://www.daytonvotf.org). Also, see the *Dayton Daily News* at <http://www.daytondailynews.com/localnews/content/localnews/daily/0317priest.html>.

**VOTF Northern Virginia:** Senate Bill 253 is awaiting the governor’s signature. Read how this bill got there in Commentary “Success in the Virginia Legislature” from Bill Casey, VOTF Northern Virginia.

- More good news in Virginia – According to the *Washington Post*, ‘Catholic parishes across Northern Virginia will be allowed for the first time to use girls and women as altar servers, Arlington Bishop Paul S. Loverde said yesterday, leaving Lincoln, Neb., as the nation’s only Catholic diocese barring females from that role.’ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/03/21/AR2006032100948.html?referrer=email>.

**VOTF Atlanta, GA:** The 1/12/16 *Vineyard* reported that Archbishop Wilton Gregory had lifted a ban on VOTF meetings on church property. VOTF member John Dearie reports in Commentary that there is “A New Day in Atlanta, Georgia.” Visit the VOTF Atlanta, GA web site at <http://www.votf-atlanta.org/>.

**VOTF Maryland:** Hearings have been held before the House Judiciary Committee on two bills that would significantly ease restrictions on the reporting of sex abuse. One bill, would allow victims to file suit until age 42. A second bill would open a two-year window during which victims of any age could file lawsuits. According to the *Washington Post*, both bills are being opposed by local Catholic Church officials. VOTF Baltimore and SNAP spoke in favor of the bills.

**Portland, Maine:** “Maine's Catholic Church is falling short on two fronts in its battle to rid the institution of sexual abuse problems, according to an annual audit of the diocese. The examination found the diocese needs to step up background checks on volunteers and employees and increase efforts to teach children how to protect themselves against sexual predators.” The story appeared in March 22 issue of the Portland Press Herald at <http://pressherald.maintoday.com/home.html>.

**VOTF Long Island, NY** is also using ads to get their message out – the ad launches a petition drive for financial accountability in the Rockville Centre archdiocese headed by Abp. William Murphy: *Newsday* reported, “The group... is asking Bishop William Murphy to create a finance council made up of elected lay members of the church. The group would work alongside an existing appointed council to ‘make sure that spending priorities reflect the values and priorities of the faith community,’ according to the petition.” For details go to [www.votf-li.org](http://www.votf-li.org).

- Cardinal Edwin Egan of the Archdiocese of New York has announced the recommendation by Church officials that three dozen parishes and a dozen schools be closed. A panel of 52 lay leaders and priests has been convened by archdiocesan officials to review the recommendations. Subscribers may access the full story at the *New York Times* (March 17) at [http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/e/edward\\_m\\_egan/index.html?inline=nyt-per](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/e/edward_m_egan/index.html?inline=nyt-per).
- The *New York Times* reports: “SAYING that Long Island Catholics cannot continue to endure deep divisions in their diocese, a group of priests is calling on Bishop William F. Murphy and an influential lay group, the Long Island Voice of the Faithful, to let a mediator help settle longstanding differences.” The Voice of the Ordained is the priests’ group. The story appeared in the Long Island, NY section of the March 19 issue of the *New York Times*.

**Chicago, IL:** A March 14 story on [www.cbs2chicago.com](http://www.cbs2chicago.com) reports that a nun’s warning to the Chicago archdiocese about a priest sexually abusing children was met with far less than concern for children. “‘If the parents aren’t pushing it, let it go.’ That’s what a nun ... was told by an Archdiocese of Chicago official, a lawsuit filed Tuesday alleges.”

- VOTF Chicago continues to listen, learn and discern actions. Read the letter sent to the Cardinal by VOTF Chicago and follow their meeting minutes at the VOTF Chicago web site <http://www.votf-nschi.org/>.
- Cardinal George’s statement of apology and the diocese investigation findings are available in full at the Archdiocese of Chicago website: <http://www.archdiocese-chgo.org/>.
  - In part, the published findings state, “An effective monitoring system geared toward reducing the further sexual victimization perpetrated by accused priest abusers does not exist.”
  - SNAP’s response is at [www.snapnetwork.org](http://www.snapnetwork.org). On Feb. 25, SNAP called for the resignation of Cardinal George as head of the Chicago archdiocese.
- Associated Press reporter Rachel Zoll noted, “Whatever trust the nation’s Roman Catholic bishops had restored with their response to clergy sex abuse has been badly eroded in recent weeks by a combination of missteps and outside criticism.”

The story at [www.kgw.com](http://www.kgw.com) also noted, “On Friday, Voice of the Faithful ... called for an independent investigation of George and Skylstad, and urged them to temporarily step down.”

- Individuals from several states are planning a Good Friday silent vigil in Chicago to demonstrate their hope that Cardinal George will step down from his vice-president position in the USCCB, as well as his leadership position in the Chicago archdiocese.
  - For more information, contact Jim Field at [fi7jm@aol.com](mailto:fi7jm@aol.com) and Sheila Boyle at [sheilaboyle@mac.com](mailto:sheilaboyle@mac.com). The vigil will be held on Good Friday, April 14, 2006, 2:00 p.m. CST at Holy Name Cathedral, Chicago, IL.

**Massachusetts:** In a *Boston Globe* op-ed: A “justice gap for victims of child sex abuse” might be narrowed, according to Jetta Bernier, executive director of Massachusetts Citizens for Children, and John Mackey, retired police chief of Tewksbury. Both are members of the Coalition to Reform Sexual Abuse Laws in Massachusetts.

- A *Boston Globe* editorial on March 15 noted: “The urgency of lifting the statute of limitations... is shown by the case of a Maynard high school teacher accused in January [‘06] of abusing a teenager three and four years ago. But other people, now adults, say Magno abused them when they were in high school decades ago, and their cases are now beyond the law.”
- On March 14, hours of testimony before a Joint Judiciary Committee may produce a step forward in legislation that will offer children more protection than they have today. VOTF, survivors, and survivor support organizations took to the floor at the Boston State House on March 14 for hearings on the reform of state sexual abuse laws. Speaker after speaker “urged lawmakers to pass bills extending the civil and criminal statutes of limitations and lifting immunity protections afforded to charitable organizations” according to the **SNAP web site**. “By the time some survivors are ready to come out and admit they were sexually abused, ‘the clock has stopped ticking,’ said Jetta Bernier. The vast majority of survivors will never be able to bring their abusers to justice.”
- Disturbing news from a vibrant faith community – they’ve been “absorbed.” See Commentary – “When a Faith Community Works – Beware”. To receive the VOTF Boston newsletter twice monthly, contact Dorothy Kennedy at [kendor713@yahoo.com](mailto:kendor713@yahoo.com).
- From the *Boston Globe*, March 22: An independent audit found the Boston archdiocese in compliance with most requirements of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People adopted by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2002. However, the audit also found that 40 percent of Catholic school children did not receive the safety training mandated by the plan. “Passing the audit as presently constituted does not guarantee that child sexual abuse will not continue,” said Ray Joyce, executive director of Voice of the Faithful. “The Archdiocese of Chicago was found to be in full compliance in their last audit, and yet the Chicago media is right now full of accounts of clerical sex abuse and the failure of the archdiocese to supervise their priests who were known to be abusers.”

**Denver, CO:** In the *Rocky Mountain News*: “A sex-abuse bill in the legislature was endorsed Wednesday by Colorado’s three Catholic bishops. HB 1088 gained their approval after Rep. Rosemary Marshall, D-Denver, axed a provision that lengthened the statute of limitations for filing civil cases against sexual predators of children and their nonprofit or church employers.... Now, the amended bill addresses only the issue of lifting the statute of limitations on crimes against children committed on or after July 1, 1996.”

- The Denver archdiocesan web site notes: “The California law changed the civil statutes of limitations for childhood sexual abuse, allowing a disastrous one-year revival period for expired claims. This has brought forward cases from as far back as 63 years ago. In many of the cases, the alleged offender and all witnesses are long deceased.” See [www.archden.org](http://www.archden.org).

**VOTF Mid-Michigan** is sponsoring a healing prayer service with a talk by Bishop Thomas Gumbleton on April 2. Details are available at [www.blessed-midland.org](http://www.blessed-midland.org). **On April 4**, Bishop Gumbleton will speak at the Paulist Center, Boston, MA. For details, go to [www.paulist.org](http://www.paulist.org).

**VOTF Bridgeport, CT:** The affiliate’s ads are promoting the April 29 Symposium on “Elect Our Bishops? Why Not?” Go to [www.votfbpt.org](http://www.votfbpt.org).

## **SITE-Seeing, Etc.**

From an Associated Press report that appears at [http://www.beliefnet.com/story/186/story\\_18670\\_1.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/story/186/story_18670_1.html): “Pope Benedict XVI said Thursday he will consider increasing women’s ‘institutional’ role in the church, but reiterated that they would remain barred from the priesthood....”

*US Catholic*, April 2006 issue: The magazine conducted a survey of Catholic readers on the qualities they would like to see in a candidate for Holy Orders. Go to [www.claretians.org](http://www.claretians.org), click on “About the Claretians,” and choose “Publications.”

The March issue of the quarterly Catholic Common Ground Initiative publication *Initiative Report* includes an excerpt from *Practices of Dialogue in the Roman Catholic Church* (New York, Continuum, 2006) by Bradford Hinze, Fordham University theology professor. Hinze confirms a VOTF practice when he notes, “Collective discernment and decision-making is the most important lesson learned over the last forty years in all of these practices.” For more information, go to [www.nplc.org](http://www.nplc.org).

**PRAYER: LENTEN Reflections** – The season is rich with prayerful moments – on our **web site**; in this issue (see Jack Rakosky’s “The Lenten Call to the Desert”); and in publications noted below.

*US Catholic*, March 2006: “Women’s words for the 40 days” is made up of prayers for the weekly Lenten journey. The reflections cover a wide range of writing – from the 14<sup>th</sup> Century mystic Julian of Norwich to contemporary Joyce Rupp.

*America* magazine, March 13, 2006: “Polluted” is the second essay in a series for Lent and Easter. This one addresses a tale told by the 13<sup>th</sup> Century Sufi poet Rumi.

- Please remember in your prayers Donna Doucette and her family. Donna’s husband Gene died suddenly on March 18. Donna is an NRC representative from Region 1 (CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, VT) and co-chair of the Voice of Renewal/Lay Education Working Group. Gene was a supporter *extraordinaire* of Donna and her work in VOTF. Gene’s obituary appeared in the *Boston Globe* at <http://www.legacy.com/BostonGlobe/DeathNotices.asp?Page=Lifestory&PersonId=17167610>

**COMMENTARY** – your comments and inquiries are welcome. Write to Peggie Thorp at [pthorp.ed@votf.org](mailto:pthorp.ed@votf.org).

[**March 19, 2006, *New York Times***: “Mr. Donohue [Catholic League] said that church reforms in the wake of the priest sex-abuse scandal left groups like Voice of the Faithful that were formed in response to the scandal without a purpose. ‘Once the reforms were instituted, that meant groups like Voice of the Faithful should pack their bags and say ‘mission accomplished,’ he said.” *Comment*: It seems Mr. Donohue hasn’t read about the Archdiocese of Chicago breakdown.]

“A New Commandment: Honor Thy Children” – Kathy Dwyer, survivor

“What Will Bishop Skylstad Do?” – *Spokesman Review*

“Message from Ireland” – Sean O’Conaill, VOTF Ireland

“Success in the Virginia Legislature” – Bill Casey, VOTF Northern Virginia

“When a Faith Community Works – Beware” – Diana Draheim, in VOTF *Boston Council News*

“A New Day in Atlanta, Georgia” – John Dearie, VOTF Atlanta

“Have We Met?” – links to Structural Change Working Group, Voice of Renewal/Lay Education, and Prayerful Voice

**QUOTES for our time**: “It’s a sign that nobody’s in charge,” *Illinois Justice Anne Burke, former chairwoman of the National Review Board, commenting on developments in Chicago, IL*

“When the welfare of the institutional Church takes precedence over the welfare of God’s people and fidelity to the Gospel, we find ourselves at the very borders of idolatry.” *Fr. Donald Cozzens in his book, Faith That Dares to Speak*

### **Raising the Bar in Boston**

*Comment from Ann Carroll, VOTF Paulist Center, Boston*

It is increasingly clear to me that the events in Chicago are reverberating in dioceses across the country (most pew Catholics outside Chicago have no idea what is transpiring

in the Windy City, but members of the hierarchy, from the US to Rome, are clearly paying close attention.) Two noteworthy examples appeared in a press release from Boston's Cardinal-designate O'Malley yesterday. The press release announced that the annual audit by the USCCB's Office of Child and Youth Protection (OCYP) revealed that Boston was in compliance with 16 of the 17 Articles of the Charter. Boston was deemed to be in non-compliance of part B of Article 12, which requires safe environment training for all children.

What is significant is that the OCYP is raising the bar for compliance.

In the 2004 audits, which were released on Feb. 18, 2005, a diocese was considered fully compliant (with Article 12b) merely if safe environment programs had been "selected and scheduled, but not fully implemented." Hence, since Boston had a plan for training children, it was deemed fully compliant. Now, it appears the rules have changed - the OCYP's new threshold for compliance is that the training must have occurred.

VOTF has long voiced concern that the Charter standards were too low, and not sufficiently expansive. To their credit, the OCYP, through their recommendations in their annual report, have shown progress towards bolstering the entire process. Since Chicago was also deemed to be compliant in the 2004 audit (although only after taking required actions to develop plans for safe environment training and background checks), the OCYP/NRB must now explain how it is possible that Chicago passed the 2004 audit, in light of the numerous deficiencies revealed in the Defenbaugh Report. (Did the OCYP's auditors overlook the problems, or were they auditing the wrong things?)

Now is the time for National VOTF to put pressure on the OCYP and National Review Board to push harder for stricter and more comprehensive audits.

In a related move, the other noteworthy news in Sean O'Malley's press release is his announcement that he has asked a local (lay-dominated) Advisory Committee to conduct an assessment of the Archdiocese's own procedures. In essence, he is calling for a Defenbaugh-like review of Boston's procedures. This seems like a preemptory move, since no one can read the Defenbaugh Report and not wonder if similar problems exist in their own diocese! The OCYP has long acknowledged the need for audits which would test the efficacy of diocesan programs - now is the time to demand this be done, in every diocese.

In the meantime, I urge VOTF affiliate leaders to examine the Defenbaugh Report and their own diocese's child protection and survivor support policies and determine if your affiliate/council ought to call for a similar efficacy audit in your own diocese.

Ann Carroll

## **COMMENTARY**

## **Message from Ireland**

### **BISHOP HEGARTY WELCOMES VOICE OF THE FAITHFUL INITIATIVE**

*Report from VOTF Ireland Coordinator Sean O'Conaill*

The Bishop of Derry, Dr. Seamus Hegarty, has expressed his support and welcome for a request from Voice of the Faithful (Ulster) for parish prayer services on behalf of all those hurt and bewildered by instances of clerical child sex abuse. These included especially the victims of this abuse and their families, as well as innocent priests shocked by what had happened.

Responding by letter to a request for his support for such prayer services in February, Bishop Hegarty wrote: "not only would I 'like' to be associated with your initiative, I would welcome it." He also offered to meet with representatives of Voice of the Faithful "to progress this further."

This meeting took place on March 10<sup>th</sup> in Derry at Bishop's House. Bishop Hegarty declared that he would propose to an impending priests' conference on March 23<sup>rd</sup> that such services be held at parish level, to be inclusive of the whole parish community.

Voice of the Faithful had written to Bishop Hegarty in February 2006 in response to the Irish bishops' document "Towards Healing" of February 2005, which had called for a whole-church effort to meet the challenge of abuse generally in Irish society. VOTF Ireland welcomed the document and declared itself ready to respond to that challenge.

At the meeting on March 10<sup>th</sup> there was a frank exchange of views on a variety of challenges facing the church at present. VOTF representatives strongly expressed the hope that the Irish church would soon adapt its structures to give a sense of inclusion to those many lay people who presently feel excluded from its deliberations. They also expressed serious concern about the disillusionment and departure from the church of so many young people and stressed the need for a whole-church response.

### **SUCCESS IN THE VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE**

*Update from Bill Casey of VOTF Northern Virginia*

As the battle for extensions of SOLs and retroactive "windows" rages in several state legislatures, the Virginia General Assembly, for the fourth consecutive year, considered the "radical proposal" to require clergy to report suspected abuse or neglect of children. The only opposition to this bill was from the Independent Baptists, but for three years they successfully pressured legislators to kill the bill as an intrusion of the state in religious practice, despite an exception for information obtained in sacramental or counseling forums.

Accepting the political realities, a dozen or more members of the Northern Virginia affiliate (along with leaders of the Tidewater Virginia affiliate) put on a full court press to

advocate passage of SB 253, in collaboration with the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy and the Virginia Catholic Conference—direct contacts with legislators, with constituents in key districts, a press release to all state newspapers, Op-Ed pieces, etc.

This year, the legislators blinked but they could not swallow their Church/State concerns. As a result, they passed a compromise bill that requires any citizen (in addition to other state-mandated reporters, such as teachers, doctors etc.) to report suspected abuse/neglect of children, provided they have completed training approved by the state Department of Social Services. Without the compromise, the bill was doomed for another defeat. With the compromise, it passed unanimously. The bill now awaits the expected signature of the Governor. The effective date is likely to be July 1, 2006.

Although affiliate members were deeply disappointed that clergy are not specifically mandated to report, they know the outcome is a breakthrough and that they have leverage to push the two Catholic dioceses to train their clergy and become mandated reporters. In fact, the training already received by Catholic clergy under the Charter will most likely satisfy the requirement and the Virginia Council of Churches is expected to call for all Churches to meet the training requirement.

We're well behind the other states in child protection and survivor justice legislation, but we broke a formidable obstacle nonetheless.

### **A New Commandment – Honor Thy Children**

*from survivor Kathy Dwyer*

[Kathy began her message with definitions of respectful (“marked by showing respect or deference” outrage, (“an act of violence or brutality”).

The VOTF affiliates that speak words of support but do not act in supportive ways, not necessarily of only survivors but of all children, is getting old. There is just too much information out there and too many of us who have come forward and told you of our histories. I am grateful for the women and men who belong to VOTF and who do get it – what happened to me and what will happen to many more children, without meaningful change. I am grateful to those of you who do keep speaking and challenging your religion to behave morally. To the small, but wonderful and strong number of you, I say thank you.

As for the others, I have found it best to interact with you as little as possible. But, because I so want a safer and more sacred place to be created for those yet to come, one more time I will offer a suggestion.

Just once, try an exercise using all of who you are – your emotional, physical and spiritual self.

Imagine emotionally, physically and spiritually what it would be like for you if a child you know and love was sexually abused by a priest (or any other “respectable” figure). Imagine what the child’s face might look like at first when this person, so much bigger than they starts perhaps to tickle the child’s tummy. Of course you must keep in mind that this child you know and love knows the priest who is tickling her/him and has been taught that not only is he next to God, but he is also a “friend.” There is no reason for this child to fear this person. After all, they have interacted before. How could the child know he has just been “prepping” her/him to be sexually abused. Perhaps at this initial stage of what will become a life-altering day for this child, imagine the child giggling and maybe crunching up her/his body in order to “protect” it from being tickled.

When it’s over, how do you imagine the child’s face looks now?

Suffice to say that the bottom line of this exercise is a challenge for each of you to do your own work before you start making organizational decisions of what action you will or will not take. (This may be a surprise to some, but survivors aren’t the only ones who have work to do.) In the end, calling for accountability and change is not about helping me or anyone else who has already survived. It is about helping those yet to come to just “survive” but to live and become all they are able to be.

**At almost 61 years old I still must say a one-liner I created twenty years ago – “Surviving is what I know...living is what I am learning.”** For me, it’s okay. I’m doing it. I’m learning how to live and how to heal into wholeness. My healing is my responsibility and I am just lucky that I have been blessed with some wonderful people who continue to support my healing, a big part of which is to use the horror I experienced to help create a safer and more sacred place for all children.

Some of you may know someone you love that was sexually abused; many of you simply know you’ve read and most of you know these stories are true. For all of you who continue to show deference to the powers that be, all I can say is that I do not understand your respect and tolerance for those who keep allowing it to happen.

One more thought: What about taking a look at the Ten Commandments. Have you noticed the one that says “Honor Thy Father and Mother” but with no instructions what to do if “Father or Mother” does not act “honorably.” There is no commandment to “Honor Thy Children.” Do you suppose it wasn’t considered necessary to say? Wrong!

## **When a Faith Community Works – Beware**

*VOTF Boston Area Newsletter*

Diana Draheim, a longtime VOTF member, submitted this disturbing story about the shutdown of their vibrant faith community in Bridgewater”

For over 40 years the Campus Ministry at Bridgewater State College served a vibrant Catholic Community. We were financially and administratively semi-autonomous and managed our affairs separate from surrounding parishes. As laity, we consistently

participated in the selection of our campus ministers and for years we had been served by fine priests, both diocesan and from several orders. In recent years, we constructed a lay-led self-governance structure that was collaborative in nature.

But in swift strokes last September, the RCAB ordered that we be absorbed by the local parish. The local parish, itself under a new pastor, eventually blended our finances with the parish, superseded our governance structure and even folded our weekly bulletin into the parish bulletin. We were assigned a new campus minister. All of these changes were made without lay involvement. Our existing campus minister, a Sister of Notre Dame who had been a member of our community for many years, saw the handwriting on the wall and resigned. Like errant sheep and against our will, we essentially disappeared into the RCAB fold.

We in Bridgewater, like the faithful in vigiling churches, experienced a new [to us] adult way of being Church. We were a lay-led intentional worshiping community and we have been forever changed by the experience. We're sure that this was how the Church was in the beginning and we're sure that the Church will someday be this way again, though perhaps not in our lifetime. It was an exhilarating ride while it lasted.

## **A New Day in Atlanta, Georgia**

*John Dearie*

When we met with Wilton Gregory, the new Archbishop of Atlanta, in April 2005, he said he was inclined to allow VOTF to meet in "welcoming parishes" and that he would probably bring the subject of VOTF to the archdiocesan Council of Priests. We waited patiently until September, when we wrote to remind him of his words. That same month, he did bring VOTF to the Council, and a committee of two priests was appointed to meet with and learn more about us. We met with the committee in October, the issue was debated at the Council in December, and at the end of that discussion, the Archbishop announced that he would allow VOTF-Atlanta to meet in parishes where we were welcome. He indicated he wanted the pastors to attend the meetings. The first meeting was held Saturday, February 18th at St. Thomas Aquinas parish in Alpharetta, a northern suburb. About twenty-five members attended. Pastor Msgr. David Talley was there, actively participated, and seemed supportive. The survivors present were pleased to finally have an opportunity to meet with a clerical representative of the Archbishop, and pled for counseling and support groups for victims in the area, regardless of where the abuse took place.

Last week our VOTF meeting notice was published in the archdiocesan paper, the *Georgia Bulletin*, for the first time, and the director of the archdiocesan Office of Child and Youth Protection has agreed to attend our meeting next month.

It seems to be a new day in the Archdiocese of Atlanta! If you would like more info, go to our web site at <http://www.votf-atlanta.org/>.

## The Lenten Call to the Desert

Mark 1, 1-15 which includes the gospel for the first Sunday of Lent

*The prologue of this Gospel, like many other literary units in Mark, takes the form of a sandwich. Two slices of bread, “the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ” in the first verse and “repent and believe in the gospel” in the last verse, bracket the unit. Verse 8 in the center contains the meat of the sandwich: “I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” This neatly divides the prologue into two parts: baptism from the perspective of the First Covenant, then according to the New Covenant. The word “desert” occurring twice on each side of the sandwich is the landscape upon which we are to understand baptism. The word “voice” occurring once on each side of the sandwich is even more critical to our understanding of baptism and indeed of the whole Gospel of Mark. “Voice” defines the largest sandwich of Mark’s literary structure (almost the entire gospel). The other side is the “loud voice” of Jesus when he gives up his Spirit, rending the temple veil even as the heavens are broken asunder when the Spirit descends upon Jesus. The center of this great sandwich is the transfiguration where the voice from the cloud says, “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.”*

Each year we are called to the desert, to the wilderness, the uncultivated land, the uncivilized land, the lawless land.

**The Voice of Moses** leads us to exit from the comfortable enterprises of our cultural captivity and hear in the desert God’s saving view of how we should conduct our lives, order our social institutions and transform our culture. **The Voice of Isaiah** calls us to leave the contented rituals of our solemn liturgies and answer God’s demand to do justice to the poor and powerless of our society. **The Voice of John the Baptist** summons us out of the security of the church establishment in Jerusalem to rediscover ourselves as the Kingdom of God.

But most of all we follow Jesus to the desert. We hear **the Voice of God**. “You are my beloved child. You are graced. You are gifted. With my Spirit, I surround you.”

We follow Jesus into the uncharted territory of the future. For we have the power of the Gospel to completely transform our church and our society. Like Jesus, God has filled us with his Spirit and more gifts than we could ever use.

And like Jesus, we meet Satan in the unexplored land of possibilities. This Satan quotes scripture and tempts us under the appearance of good. This Satan gives us many good reasons for doing the lesser good, or even doing nothing at all. This Satan encourages us to fight among ourselves about what is the greater good, and encourages us to compete about who is doing the more important things. So, like Jesus, we will need to fast, pray, and center ourselves upon our mission.

As Christ, we learn to discern among the many spirits in this new world. As Christ, we prepare to proclaim the Gospel. As Christ, we recognize that we will have to give our whole lives for the Kingdom. As God’s anointed ones, we keep vigil this Lent: awaiting the revelation of God’s will, eager to discover God’s way, expecting the dawning of God’s Time. “Thy Kingdom come! Thy will be done!” Jack Rakosky, <http://www.votfleveland.org/>