

In the Vineyard

March 8, 2007

"We urge other parishes to consider this new model of Spirit-driven dialogue.... We expect Archdiocesan leadership to hear us today and to provide channels for lasting communication and genuine collaboration. Today, we raise our voices to claim our place at the table. We are the Church...." *Voice of the Faithful statement at the Archdiocesan Convocation held by Cardinal Law in Boston MA on March 9, 2002*

VOTF NATIONAL News

Bishop Thomas Gumbleton was awarded a VOTF Priest of Integrity Award in Washington DC at an event hosted by VOTF at Holy Trinity. VOTF president Mary Pat Fox presented the award – read Mary Pat’s remarks [here](#).

Most VOTF regions have received the **Priest Support Working Group proposal**; read the proposal text and [NRC Update](#). (Do you know what VOTF region your state is in and your representative? If not, [click here](#).)

VOTF issued a [press release](#) on the **San Diego archdiocese’s decision to file for bankruptcy**.

SAVE the Date for the VOTF 2007 Convention – The theme: *Discipleship in Action*. The date: October 19-20, 2007. The location: Rhode Island Convention Center, Providence RI. Decisions on workshops/panels, speakers, keynoters, etc. are nearing finalization. Shortly, the VOTF web site will have a convention-dedicated page that will keep all of us “on the same page” as details and plans emerge. See the Convention Team’s “heads up” message in this issue at [VOTF Convention 2007](#). **NOTE**: Even our far-flung National Representative Council will be meeting that weekend in Providence, providing attendees with another opportunity to see “discipleship in action.”

DIOCESE/State Watch:

San Diego CA: Attorney Marci Hamilton asks just what is so complicated about accountability. “On Sunday, February 18, Roman Catholic Bishop Robert Brom distributed leaflets to the San Diego faithful in the pews. In the leaflets, he tried to make the case that the San Diego Diocese could be forced into Chapter 11 bankruptcy because of the 143 consolidated clergy abuse cases against the diocese for the hierarchy’s role in the cover up of child abuse. . The leaflets tried to cloud the simple issue that the plaintiffs’ suits really raise – whether the Diocese and its hierarchy will take responsibility for their wrongs to children.” For the full text, go to <http://writ.news.findlaw.com/hamilton/20070222.html>. Also note the following:

- SignOnSanDiego.com editorial noted, “... it is not cynical but painfully honest to assume that the bankruptcy warning is more of a legal and public relations tactic than anything else.” See http://www.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20070220/news_lz1ed2obottom.html.
- Beliefnet.com reports: “After four years of legal wrangling in the clergy-abuse scandal, attorneys for Bishop Robert Brom filed for Chapter 11 protection last

night, making San Diego the largest Roman Catholic diocese in the nation to declare bankruptcy.” Go to

http://www.beliefnet.com/story/213/story_21310_1.html.

- <http://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory?id=2910134>
- Read the VOTF statement [here](#).
- See Dr. Mary Gail Frawley-O’Dea’s take on the San Diego filing at <http://voicefromthedesert.blogspot.com/2007/03/true-meaning-of-san-diego-bankruptcy.html>. In part, O’Dea said, “Bishop Brom's bankruptcy does not seem to fit the pastoral bill.”

Additional diocesan/state news from Cleveland OH; Chicago IL; Bridgeport CT and Louisville KY is inside at **More DIOCESE/State Watch. AFFILIATE Highlight:** Cleveland OH where William Clark, SJ and VOTF Cleveland OH talked about the authority of the local parish. Fr. Clark’s book *A Voice of Their Own: The Authority of the Local Parish* was published in 2005 and is available at amazon.com.

SITE-Seeing, Etc.

[Message to readers: Some magazine/newspaper links we provide in connection to a story require a paid subscription; however, many sites simply require that you register (no charge). In the latter case, the site will “recognize” your computer the next time you click on a link to that site. We also suggest that if none of the above works for you, many libraries carry the magazine or newspaper we are citing.]

Need a break? A film to remember is coming to the Boston Area: “Into Great Silence” will open at the Kendall Square Cinema, Cambridge MA on March 16. The film is set in the French Alps at the Grande Chartreuse, considered one of the world’s most ascetic monasteries. “In 1984, German filmmaker Philip Gröning wrote to the Carthusian order for permission to make a documentary about them. They said they would get back to him. Sixteen years later, they were ready. Gröning, sans crew or artificial lighting, lived in the monks’ quarters for six months—filming their daily prayers, tasks, rituals and rare outdoor excursions.... More meditation than documentary, it’s a rare, transformative theatrical experience for all.” The *New York Times* reviewer A. O. Scott said, “I hesitate, given the early date and the project’s modesty, to call ‘Into Great Silence’ one of the best films of the year. I prefer to think of it as the antidote to all of the others.” To read more about the film, watch the trailer, and check show times, go to www.zeitgeistfilms.com/intogreatsilence and <http://www.landmarktheatres.com/market/Boston/KendallSquareCinema.htm>. For group sale information, contact Howie Sandler at 617-621-1202.

For an overview of US **parishes struggling with embezzlement** and other financial challenges, Frank Douglas (VOTF representative, Region 8) suggests a visit to Joe McMahon’s web site at <http://www.rcmmindex.blogspot.com/>.

Sharon Daly received the 2006 U.S. Catholic Award for Furthering the Cause of Women in the Church. The former Vice President of Social Policy for Catholic

Charities USA and previous director of domestic social policy for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) received the 2006 U.S. Catholic Award for Furthering the Cause of Women on February 13, 2007 during the USCCB Social Ministry Gathering in Washington. Go to http://uscatholic.claretians.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=12021&news_iv_ctrl=0&abbr=usc_&printer_friendly=1.

Protecting Our Children – the tragedy of Roman Catholic sexual abuse of children by clergy has had the good effect of consciousness-raising among non-Catholic denominations. SNAP is looking at the Southern Baptist record. See the Citizen-Times.com (NC) site at <http://www.citizen-times.com:80/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=200770224033> and CNN.com at <http://www.cnn.com/2007/US/02/21/southern.baptist.ap/>.

The *Advocate* (CT) reports on **how one parish regards young females**: “Although most area Catholic churches follow the modern practice of using altar girls, a Norwalk parish recently reverted to a traditional boys-only policy and started a program for girls teaching them to sew, cook and arrange flowers for the altar.” For this February 2007 story, go to <http://www.stamfordadvocate.com/news/local/scn-sa-altar.girls6feb24,0,2468753.story?coll=stam-news-local-headlines>.

QUOTE for our time: “Cozzens’s work raises valid questions about mandatory celibacy’s impact on the people of God and those of whom it is required. It is better to respond to the questions for the good of the church than to run from them at the church’s peril.” *America magazine review of Fr. Donald Cozzens’ book Freeing Celibacy*

Commentary

Convocation (2005) Implementation Team (CIT) **Lenten Actions** – a reflection on conscience: “How to Tell Right from Wrong? – Just Follow Your Conscience. Is It Really That Simple?” *NRC member Susan Vogt, Region 5*

LENTEN Reflections

How to Tell Right from Wrong? – Just Follow Your Conscience Is It Really That Simple?

By Susan Vogt

Yes, No, Maybe!

Yes, it’s simple; but, not quite THAT simple.

When faced with a moral decision, often people will say just follow your conscience and indeed that is what we all must do. But how do we hear our conscience and is it possible to follow one’s conscience and still be wrong? Although the Catholic Church teaches a

principle called “primacy of conscience” which means that conscience is the ultimate authority and we are compelled to follow it even if it conflicts with church teaching, the Church also teaches that we must make the effort to have an “informed” conscience. In other words, it’s not just a matter of doing what feels good. So how does a person of integrity develop a well-formed Christian conscience? Following are negative traps and positive steps to consider in coming to decisions of conscience.

Traps to Conscience Formation:

1. **Rationalization** – Sometimes we so strongly want to do something (or avoid doing something) that we talk ourselves into it. We might use logic to justify what we want to do even though an unbiased outsider could see the flaws in our logic. For example, when faced with paying our annual income tax, it’s tempting to think, “Hey, lots of rich people get exorbitant tax breaks, is it really so wrong for me to fudge a little on my income, especially when my family is struggling financially?” For VOTF members, it might mean avoiding the temptation to rant about past injustices or the hierarchy in order to justify mean spirited communication.
2. **Scrupulosity** – The opposite of rationalizing of course is being overly scrupulous about the letter of the law while missing its spirit. An example from my childhood was the practice of not eating meat on Friday. My dear godparents use to take me out for a lobster dinner every Good Friday. Technically we were keeping the law, but... For members of an organization, it might mean sometimes praying less “correctly” or putting aside a rule for the good of a member. This has pitfalls of course but when unsure, we go back to the old standby, “What Would Jesus Do?”
3. **Going along with the crowd** – How could so many people be wrong? For years most adults didn’t think twice about driving after drinking. Just because it’s common, doesn’t make it right. How could so many bishops be wrong? How could so many in my affiliate be wrong. Even when I am in the minority, I need to have the courage to use my voice respectfully. Decisions are stronger when many different voices are considered.
4. **If it feels good, do it** – Conscience is not an emotion. It may not coincide with happiness, at least not fleeting feelings of bliss. Eating a dozen donuts may feel good – temporarily, but long term it eats away at one’s health. Conversely, taking medicine or studying for a test might not be pleasant but are conscientious things to do. Sometimes dramatic actions (protests, irate letters to the editor, demonstrations) make us feel good because at least we’re DOING something. Sometimes, however, the action might be restraint.
5. **It’s my body; it’s my business** – Just because I’m not directly harming another person does not mean my action is good. Drug addictions or pornography may seem like victimless crimes, but they not only hurt the doer, they weaken the moral milieu of our society. The corollary to this is that at times I AM my brother’s keeper, and at times an injustice compels me to act. To do nothing to right a wrong of society or the Church can be a sin of omission.

Steps to forming a mature, responsible, Christian conscience:

Although there are probably many valid ways to check one’s conscience to avoid falling

into the above traps, using the STOP method is an easy to remember framework.

S – Study. Decisions of conscience begin with knowledge. It's not so much a matter of being smart but rather making a serious effort to learn the facts from credible sources, i.e. read what the Church teaches, consult experts in the field, and don't just go on hearsay or internet blogs. For VOTF, this might mean checking the source before repeating tantalizing but unfounded statements.

T – Think Together. It is best not to make decisions alone, in isolation. In marriage this means a couple should not make an important moral decision alone but rather discuss it together and come up with a mutually agreeable decision. In faith communities it means testing the decision out with fellow believers and trying to come to consensus. In both situations it includes evaluating and weighing the information that has been gathered in the Study phase.

O – Others. Not only is it necessary to get the objective facts, wisdom is also carried by others who have had experience with the issue one is deliberating. Consulting with those who agree, and even more importantly those who might disagree, is a way to check rationalizations.

P – Pray. Important decisions should always be brought to prayer so that we can check our rationalizations and be honest before God. Prayer provides us time to listen and sort. It is not the same as waiting for a magical sign from God of what to do, but rather noticing if I am at peace with the emerging decision.

Criteria for well-formed decisions:

Done all the steps? Checked for traps? Still not sure? The Cliff Notes version of conscience formation could be summed up by asking oneself two questions. Is my contemplated decision LIFE GIVING and GENEROUS? A well-formed conscience does not simply apply rules but brings the whole self to the decision and weighs how my decision will impact the common good.

That's not the end.

Decisions are meaningless without actions. It can be satisfying to some just to keep thinking, and sorting, and weighing, and even praying. There comes a time, however, when a person of conscience has to ACT in a public way. It might mean doing an action that stretches my comfort level or is inconvenient. It might mean taking a risk – financially, emotionally, physically. It could mean risking employment or embarrassment. It might mean acting when our affiliate would rather keep talking, or doesn't want to invest the self-discipline to come up with a concrete plan. We'd just rather complain. This is the cost of discipleship.

Susan Vogt is a VOTF Council representative for Region 5. Susan also has her own web site at www.SusanVogt.net.

VOTF 2007 Convention: Discipleship in Action

In Mark's gospel we read, "The Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to his disciples, was taken up into heaven and took His seat at the right hand of God. But the disciples went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs" (Mark 16:19-20).

This VOTF convention, our third in five years, will bring together members from all over the US to share the ups and downs of the work we share; to be re-inspired by each other and by the experience of others outside of VOTF; and to renew the sense of stewardship that fueled VOTF in the first place. Our speakers, panels, and workshops are the products of lessons learned and hope rekindled. We expect that all attendees will affirm Mark's message that indeed the Lord continues to work with us!

Over the next few months, we will be posting some recommended reading for those planning to attend the convention. For starters, we suggest *What is the Point of Being a Christian?* by Timothy Radcliffe OP; *Roman Catholicism after Vatican II* by Robert A. Burns OP; and *Living Vatican II, The 21st Council for the 21st Century* by Gerald O'Collins.

National Representative Council Update

The National Representative Council has been extremely busy keeping up with all the resolutions and proposals that have been put forward since our last Council meeting. Currently, the NRC is soliciting comments from all VOTF members on three different proposals: the Goal 2 Working Group Proposal for a study of mandatory celibacy and the "state of the priesthood and its ability to meet the needs of the faithful" (see text below); a resolution about renewed and increased support of survivors; and two resolutions which center on financial accountability.

The first of the financial accountability proposals calls for sound financial management systems, policies and procedures on both the parish and diocesan levels, spelled out in detail. The second calls for the writing of a "White Paper" to assist and motivate lay Catholics to participate in instituting financial accountability and identify basic Church financial references and "best practices."

As comments on these resolutions are collated, the Council is also discussing a resolution proposed by the officers which relates to the balance of where decision making should take place for particular issues, i.e., in the local/regional affiliate or on the national level. A thorough analysis, both structural and philosophical, from as many sectors of VOTF as possible, is being sought.

Many Council regions are also in the midst of elections. The first Council representatives were elected in 2005 for two-year terms, so about two-thirds of the members are now facing expired terms. (The other third have been elected sometime since 2005 to replace original reps who resigned due to illness or other reasons.)

The next semi-annual Council meeting will be held in the Boston area the last weekend in April. Developing the agenda for this meeting is also a current priority in Council discussions! Watch for more details in future issues of the *Vineyard*.

*At this time, about half of our Council representatives have indicated that the proposal below has been sent to their regional membership. If you have not received the proposal, contact your representative ([click here](#) to identify your representative). If you have received it, please let your voice be heard by contacting your representative with your support or your opposition to the proposal. **DEADLINE FOR COMMENTING ON THE PROPOSAL IS March 12.** The two-part proposal itself is in bold.*

The Goal Two National Working Group for Priest Support therefore asks the National Representative Council to approve a resolution calling for an ecclesiastical review of mandated celibacy, and to seek the concurrence of the National Officers and the Board of Trustees.

The National Working Group for Goal Two: Priest Support proposes that Voice of the Faithful, as a national organization and reform movement, add its voice to those individuals and groups presently calling for an ecclesiastical review of mandated celibacy as a requirement of ordination to the diocesan priesthood in the Latin rite.

The Working Group's research on this matter indicates that there is a mounting body of evidence regarding mandated celibacy and its impacts upon our Church at this time. An ecclesiastical review commissioned by and under the auspices of the Holy See is the optimal setting in which such a review can take place. In such a setting, the longstanding and respected practice of priestly celibacy will be honored. At the same time, mandated celibacy's effects, for better or worse, upon the ability of the Church to fulfill its mission in the 21st century, can be thoroughly explored.

We also ask the National Representative Council to approve a resolution endorsing a nationwide educational effort on the State of the Priesthood and its Ability to Meet the Needs of the Faith Community, as planned and implemented by the Goal Two Working Group for Priest Support, and to seek the concurrence of the National Officers and the Board of Trustees for this effort. This resolution should also include approval for the appointment of an Oversight Panel, as described below.

We also advocate that VOTF promote a conversation among the faithful, nationwide, exploring the current state of the priesthood and its ability to meet the needs of the faith community. Such a conversation could be facilitated through seminars and forums at the regional and national levels. This exploration would cover a range of issues, including

topics such as workload, morale, financial security, the impacts of mandated celibacy, justice for priests, pastoral practices, and the decline in vocations to the priesthood.

It is our belief as a Working Group that the actions described above are the best ways for VOTF to address our commitment to our second goal, Priest Support. Responsibility for the planning and implementation of this educational effort will be undertaken by the Goal Two National Working Group. For this effort, the Working Group will not request allocation of organizational dollars.

We request the appointment of a three member panel, consisting of one trustee, one officer, and one member of the National Representative Council, to provide organizational oversight of this effort, as well as to signal to our membership that this effort is endorsed by national VOTF leadership.

More DIOCESE/State Watch

Chicago IL: The long-awaited “comprehensive report concerning the Archdiocesan policies, practices and protocols for responding to allegations of clerical sexual abuse of minors” is available on the archdiocesan web site at <http://www.archdiocese-chgo.org/chancellor/AdHocCommittee/AdHocCommitteeReportWithAttachments.pdf>.

The *Chicago Tribune* reported, “Prompted by criticism surrounding the case of Rev. Daniel McCormack, the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago announced Wednesday that it has overhauled rules related to sexual abuse of children, including immediately removing any accused priest, reporting allegations to civil authorities and training church employees and volunteers.” See <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/chicago/chi-0702220121feb22,1,1349710.story>.

In the same article, “David Clohessy, national director of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, expressed frustration with the report, saying no archdiocese officials had been disciplined in connection with the McCormack scandal. ‘The report clearly says all personnel must be accountable for noncompliance,’ he said. ‘Well, the sad truth is that never happens.’”

Cleveland OH: The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* says, “Former Cleveland Catholic Bishop Anthony Pilla received \$177,000 in money and furniture over a decade from an off-the-books church account set up to hide the transactions, a former diocesan official said.” For full story, go to <http://www.cleveland.com/news/plaindealer/index.ssf?/base/cuyahoga/1171793127262820.xml&coll=2>

Bridgeport CT: To follow the climb toward accountability in the Bridgeport diocese, go to www.votfbpt.org and see the recent ad the VOTF affiliate placed in their regional newspaper.

Louisville KY: Vince Grenough of VOTF Kentucky circulated some good news in the form of a new bill that has been filed in the Kentucky Senate. Go to the Courier-Journal.com site at <http://www.courier-journal.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=200770222043>.

AFFILIATE Highlight: Cleveland OH

from Tom Byrne

Cold and damp evenings in northern Ohio seemed to energize a group of laity for William Clark, SJ's presentation of "A Voice of Their Own: The Authority of the Local Parish" at John Carroll University. Perhaps the recent rollout of the Cleveland diocese parish clustering plan was on their mind, and the boiling financial misdeeds of the diocese added to interest, but certainly it was about the laity being ignored by the bishops that propelled attendees into the auditorium on Feb 27.

Fr. Clark, a native of Maine, was sponsored by FutureChurch, who has partnered with VOTF in Ohio to help parish members exercise their rights and manage their communities as the priest count continues to plummet. Theology vs. Community creates tension for everyone, and in Clark's very diverse parish experiences it is perceived to be accelerating.

Focusing on the awareness of local network relationships, the parish teaches our whole church about genuine authority. The traditional hierarchical model has continually alienated the local parish in the USA. Drawing on the ecclesiology of Karl Rahner, the laity must exercise its right to build the local parish community in order to fulfill our baptismal promise and rebuild the model of church from the local level.

A Voice of Their Own: The Authority of the Local Parish by William Clark, SJ is available at amazon.com and local booksellers.