

## In the Vineyard

March 9, 2006

“The Spirit sent Jesus out toward the desert. He stayed in the wasteland forty days, put to the test there by Satan.” *First Sunday of Lent, Mark 1:12-15; see Lenten Reflections in Vineyard 2/23*

**NATIONAL VOTF anniversary:** Four years ago today, twelve members of the new Voice of the Faithful group attended the Archdiocese of Boston’s annual convocation for parish leaders in Boston. This was the meeting held by Archdiocesan leadership (Cardinal Law) with the various regions and parish representatives of the archdiocese. The original agenda had been derailed by the insistence of priests and parish administrators to focus on the newly emerged clergy sexual abuse crisis. At the diocesan-wide meeting, VOTF read a statement that for the first time publicly identified the organization by name, as well as our new group’s goals. Read the 2002 statement at <http://www.votf.org/vineyard/anniversary/convocation.html> and let us know what you think of those words today. Write to [pthorp.ed@votf.org](mailto:pthorp.ed@votf.org).

**Highlights in this issue:** Newly elected VOTF officers map a coast-to-coast profile for VOTF; **Campaign for Accountability Update** – “connect the dots” between Diocese Watch and VOTF’s campaigns; **VOTF Chicago** reacts to the **breakdown in the their archdiocese**; **Structural Change, Anyone?** See Working Group Updates; in Denver, CO, a survivor helps Bishop Imesch’s memory – see Commentary.

### NEWS FOCUS – Eyes on Chicago, II

**Protecting our children in Chicago failed** after four years of talk and commitment by US bishops. VOTF Chicago affiliates wrote a **letter to Cardinal George** and discerned their way to consensus on a response to the failure of Cardinal George to protect children. Read the letter and “VOTF Chicago in Discernment” under Commentary and More.

- If you’re just catching up on the Chicago situation, go to *NCR* at [http://www.natcath.com/NCR\\_Online/archives2/2006a/030306/030306i.php](http://www.natcath.com/NCR_Online/archives2/2006a/030306/030306i.php) for Robert McClory’s March 3 story “Abuse scandal erupts in Chicago”; see VOTF president Jim Post’s letter to Cardinal George.
- As VOTF members discerned the breakdown of the USCCB Charter to Protect Children and Young People in Chicago, National secretary Gaile Pohlhaus wrote and distributed a timely prayer. See “Discernment in Chicago” under Commentary.
- According to the *Boston Globe*, Boston isn’t where it should be, either – on protecting children. Read Survivor Community News.
- Another failure to protect a minor in New Mexico is reported. Begin at the *National Catholic Reporter’s* (*NCR*) Abuse Tracker page at [http://ncrnews.org/abuse2005b-archives/2006\\_02.html](http://ncrnews.org/abuse2005b-archives/2006_02.html).)

### NATIONAL News

**Campaign 2006 Update** – VOTF ads for the 2006 campaigns for accountability and protecting our children have begun to appear in *National Catholic Reporter*, which also features two articles about VOTF. Subscribers can visit [www.ncronline.org](http://www.ncronline.org).

- The evolving campaign web page is ready for visitors at <http://www.votf.org/2006/index.html>; to view our ads for the campaigns, click on the campaigns; to use these ads locally, contact John Moynihan at [jmoynihan@votf.org](mailto:jmoynihan@votf.org). Please put Campaign Ads in your subject line.
- Reminder: Area coordinators, affiliate and affiliate members' training weekend is coming up – deadline for registering is March 10. Check the VOTF web site at Campaign for Accountability and contact Susanna Gregory at 617-558-5252 or by email at [sgregory@votf.org](mailto:sgregory@votf.org).

**NATIONAL Representative Council Notes** – Confused about statutes of limitation and “windows”? NRC representative Frank Douglas has identified an outstanding reference tool at <http://www.stopsexcrime.org/> adding, “It’s well organized and written in understandable, straightforward English. It has information about civil statutes of limitations (SOLs), criminal SOLs, tips for talking to legislators, phone scripts for talking to legislators, easy questions and answers (FAQs), links to editorials and columns, etc.”

- Another excellent resource is [www.answers.com](http://www.answers.com).
- *National Catholic Reporter*: March 3 editorial – “Of Business Practices and Accountability” and cover story “Churches for sale.” Go to [www.ncronline.org](http://www.ncronline.org).
- Don’t forget the Protect Children Through Legislation Yahooogroup website/listserv. See the Feb. 23 *Vineyard* for details.

## Working Group Updates

**SURVIVOR Community News** – with thanks to Steve Sheehan for survivor-related news and developments.

- AFFILIATE ALERT: Help SNAP help survivors and place an ad in the SNAP Support Survivors Ad Book. Go to [www.snapnetwork.org](http://www.snapnetwork.org) for details.
- How does it happen that priests have hurt so many children? Experts will say that access to young people is a first. One victim’s suit against the diocese where the priest allegedly abused him highlights this particular priest’s access. Go to Survivor Community News in this issue – “One priest’s resume”.
- Joliet, IL: A painful and graphic story to tell and to read comes from columnist Tim Placher of the *Daily Southtown*, following the deposition of Joliet Bishop Imesch. It is re-printed with permission of the author in Commentary – “Bless me father, for you have sinned”; a follow-up article calling for the resignation of Bishop Imesch is at <http://www.dailysouthtown.com/southtown/dsindex/05-ds2.htm>.
- As they have done at Christmas time, VOTF Winchester, MA is selling note cards. These are designed by two of affiliate members, Harvey D. Cote and Francis I. Baratta, both of Arlington. All proceeds will benefit clergy abuse survivors. The cost is \$10 for a package of 8 cards, with two cards each of four different designs. To view the cards and order, go to [http://www.votfwinchester.org/WAVOTF\\_Notecards\\_Order\\_Form.pdf](http://www.votfwinchester.org/WAVOTF_Notecards_Order_Form.pdf) Print the order form and mail in with your check.

**Goal #3: STRUCTURAL CHANGE Working Group** – Independent Judicial Review of Actions by a Diocesan Bishop? Diocesan Mutual Visitation as a Mechanism for Renewal? See “Structural Change, Anyone?” in Working Group Updates.

### **PRAYERFUL Voice**

LENT – Click here for current readings and reflection (Feb. 23 *In the Vineyard*). Be sure to share your own Lenten reflections at [pthorp.ed@votf.org](mailto:pthorp.ed@votf.org).

- Retreats – Graymoor Spiritual Life Center, Garrison, NY/March 24-26. Go to [www.graymoorcenter.org](http://www.graymoorcenter.org).
- VOTF Prayerful Voice retreat – link to web site.
- March 6 *America* magazine is the “Lenten Spirituality Issue”; the Feb. 27 issue takes another look at laypeople and parish leadership in “A Prediction Fulfilled.” To visit their site, go to [www.americamagazine.org](http://www.americamagazine.org).

### **DIOCESE Watch:**

**Denver, CO:** A *Denver Post* story “Child protection has to take precedence” said, “It’s astonishing when a champion of morality protects those who have violated our most sacred trust, caring for our children. Denver Archbishop Charles Chaput delights in chastising Catholic politicians who disagree with him on moral issues, claiming they must be held accountable for disobeying church doctrine.” Go to at [http://www.denverpost.com/search/ci\\_3544816](http://www.denverpost.com/search/ci_3544816).

- Denver Archbishop Charles Chaput is striking back – at Senate Bill 143; SNAP’s David Clohessy says, “There’s no state in the union where the bishop has been as hard-nosed and vicious as in Colorado. None. I wouldn’t even be able to name the second-worst.” Go to [www.snapnetwork.org](http://www.snapnetwork.org) for additional details; the *Denver Post* reports, “The Colorado Catholic Conference has hired a high-powered lobbying firm with ties to Gov. Bill Owens in an effort to defeat bills that would give victims of childhood sex abuse more time to file lawsuits.” Go to [http://www.denverpost.com/portlet/article/html/fragments/print\\_article.jsp?article=3579383](http://www.denverpost.com/portlet/article/html/fragments/print_article.jsp?article=3579383).
- *Rocky Mountain News* reported on March 2: “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 *National Catholic Reporter Abuse Tracker* is following this story at [http://ncrnews.org/abuse2005b-archives/2006\\_03.html](http://ncrnews.org/abuse2005b-archives/2006_03.html).
- The Denver archdiocesan web site is [www.archden.org](http://www.archden.org).

**Joliet, IL** – The stunning story of one victim’s abuse has riveted attention on Joliet’s Bishop Imesch. Read Tim Placher (*Daily Southtown* of the *Chicago Sun-Times*) “Bless me father, for you have sinned” – reprinted in Commentary with permission of the author. See more in Survivor Community News.

**New York, NY:** Signs of the times among in-the-pew Catholics – A Scarsdale, NY parish withheld enough money from Sunday collections to draw Archdiocesan attention and a subsequent re-assignment for their pastor. The parish “crisis committee” had concerns over the pastor’s alleged financial mismanagement and alienation of staff. Read more in the *Journal News* at

<http://www.thejournalnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060303/NEWS12/603030369/1028>.

- The *New York Times* reported, “New York's highest court refused yesterday to waive the statute of limitations and allow dozens of old sexual abuse claims against the Roman Catholic Church to go to trial.” Subscribers can access this Feb. 22 story at [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)

**Boston, MA: Statute of Limitations: “State House Hearing Tuesday, March 14<sup>th</sup> –** On Tuesday, March 14<sup>th</sup>, at the *State House*, there will be a hearing on Statute of Limitations repeal bills. It is scheduled for **1:00 p.m. in Room B1**. *Let’s get those bills out of the State House Judiciary Committee and moving.* For details, contact Dorothy Kennedy for the VOTF Boston newsletter – [kendor713@yahoo.com](mailto:kendor713@yahoo.com).

- Follow events at Our Lady Help of Christians – where Fr. Cuenin was removed and his successor resigned as pastor. Go to [www.ourladysfriends.org](http://www.ourladysfriends.org) or email [ourladysfriends@yahoo.com](mailto:ourladysfriends@yahoo.com).

**Des Moines, Iowa –** Earlier optimism after an “unprecedented” meeting between Iowa bishops and survivors’ groups is waning. The meeting concerned questions about now-retired Bishop Soens. See the March 3 *National Catholic Reporter* at [http://ncronline.org/NCR\\_Online/archives2/2006a/030306/030306j.php](http://ncronline.org/NCR_Online/archives2/2006a/030306/030306j.php).

### **AFFILIATE Focus**

Peter Davey of **VOTF Oakland, CA** alerts us to the results of a “Survey of the laity” conducted in June and September 2005 by VOTF East Bay, CA. Go to [www.votf-oak.org](http://www.votf-oak.org).

- Another survey currently in the works invites your participation. See Site-Seeing, Etc. below.

Also, visit the outstanding web site of **VOTF Atlanta, GA** at [www.votf-atlanta.org](http://www.votf-atlanta.org) and check out other affiliate web sites under the Parish Voice directory on our National web site at [www.votf.org](http://www.votf.org); see VOTF Winchester, MA’s survivor fundraiser initiative in Survivor Community News.

### **SITE-SEEING, ETC.**

- Envisioning the Church we want to be has been engaging Catholic interest for decades. Recently, programs such as Boston College’s Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Center (C21) (“Envisioning the Church Women Want”) are being replicated in a variety of ways and settings. If you are new to this kind of consideration, an excellent starting point is the FutureChurch survey. Click here for details - <http://www.futurechurch.org/downloads/index.htm>.

- VOW – Voices of Women: This is a small group of VOTF women and men interested in exploring ways to educate ourselves on the role of women in our Church. If you would like to be part of the conversation, please write to Peggie Thorp at [pthorp.ed@votf.org](mailto:pthorp.ed@votf.org) and please put VOW in your subject line.
- Fr. Tony Ercolano's commentary "Letter to my family and friends" in the *Vineyard* (Oct. 20, 2005 issue) drew dozens of appreciative responses. Readers might want to visit Tony's new web site at [www.tonyercolano.com](http://www.tonyercolano.com).
- BOOK WATCH: *Good Catholic Girls* by Angela Bonavoglia is now available in paperback. Check amazon.com and your bookstores. See *Vineyard* review (March 2005) and check Angela's web site at [www.angelabonavoglia.com](http://www.angelabonavoglia.com).
- Keep an eye on *US Catholic* magazine at [www.uscatholic.org](http://www.uscatholic.org)

## Commentary and More

"Bless me father, for you have sinned" – Tim Placher, *Daily Southtown*

"Where Is the Outrage?" commentary

"One, holy, catholic and apostolic" – What does it mean to you?

"Structural Change, Anyone?" – Working Group Update

"SOL reforms are not enough" – Mary Collingwood, NRC

## WORKING GROUP Updates

### SURVIVOR COMMUNITY NEWS

#### Our Children, Our Call

In the past few months, allegations of the recent abuse by clergy of two more children in Chicago are drawing nation-wide attention; the following excerpt from the February 28<sup>th</sup> *Boston Globe* gives cold comfort to parishioners in the RCAB.

*Four years after the clergy sexual abuse crisis exploded, the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston has yet to put in place some key parts of its plan to detect and prevent abuse of children by church personnel, according to a top aide to state Attorney General Thomas F. Reilly.*

*The archdiocese, like most dioceses around the country, has yet to come up with a method for overseeing or tracking the whereabouts of allegedly abusive priests, and has not completed sexual-abuse prevention programs for all children, according to a letter from Alice E. Moore, chief of the Public Protection Bureau at the attorney general's office.*

Protecting our children is part of the VOTF Campaign for Accountability. It couldn't be better timed, as ads begin to appear in *NCR* and are being made available to affiliates for

their use in local publications. Go to web page for details at <http://www.votf.org/2006/index.html>.

## One priest's resume

*A story in the Rockford River Times (Illinois) notes a lawsuit against the Rockford, IL diocese and the Conventual Franciscans. The article detailed the accused priest's parish history and, consequently, the many access routes to children that might be available in an abuser's work. For the full story, go to <http://www.rockrivertimes.com/>.*

1958—Ordained; 1959-1961—St. Thomas Church, Arlington, Calif.; 1962—St. Paul the Apostle, Pismo Beach, Calif.; 1963—St. Bronislava, Chicago; 1964-1968—Queen of Angels, Riverside, Calif.; 1969-1973—St. Anthony's of Padua Church, Rockford; 1974-1975—Our Lady of Guadalupe, Riverside, Calif.; 1976—St. Thomas, Riverside, Calif.; 1977-1978—Queen of Angels, Riverside, Calif.; 1979-1980—St. John of God, Norwalk, Calif.; 1982—St. George, Stockton, Calif.; 1983-1988—Queen of Angels, Riverside, Calif.; and 1989-1991—St. Thomas Aquinas Cathedral, Reno, Nevada.

## Bless me father, for you have sinned

*by Tim Placher*

JOLIET (IL), *Daily Southtown*, March 5, 2006 – excerpted

The sentence was buried deep within the 247 pages of the recently released deposition given by Joliet Bishop Joseph Imesch as part of a priest-abuse lawsuit pending against him and the Joliet Roman Catholic Diocese. In the glare of the deposition's sensational revelations about priests hot-tubbing and playing "games" in the nude with young boys, the five simple words on page 201 went unnoticed by nearly everyone.

Everyone but me.

At one point in his deposition, Imesch was asked by the victim's counsel to list the Joliet priests he believed had been credibly accused of sexual abuse. After the bishop rattled off 17 names, the attorney inquired about a priest he hadn't mentioned. "Ruffalo," he said. "What about Ruffalo?" "I'm not sure of that," Imesch answered.

"Not sure," Imesch said, despite the fact the Joliet Diocese previously had paid a settlement to a man who claimed he'd been abused by the Rev. Richard Ruffalo when the priest was pastor at St. Mary's Parish in Park Forest in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Perhaps I can clear up Imesch's uncertainty about Father Ruffalo.

Far too attentive

I hadn't wanted to go to Las Vegas with Ruffalo during the summer of 1979. I was 17 years old and had grown increasingly uncomfortable with the priest's advances toward me. He had been far too attentive to me for years, ever since he'd first met me as a fifth-grade choirboy and altar server at the Cathedral of St. Raymond in Joliet.

He was an obese man with dark hair shaved into a crew cut. He said masses at my parish and taught religion in my grade school. He first introduced himself to me after hearing my boy soprano voice belting out a solo from the church choir. Soon after, he started talking to me at length whenever I'd serve at mass.

Within a few months, he began to put his hands on me. He would touch me, rubbing my back and giving me hugs in the sacristy when no one else was around.

He'd invite me to the parish rectory, where he'd take me to his private room and ask me to massage his neck and back. He'd buy me gifts, write me cards and give me money. He'd assign me to prominent roles in the diocesan church services at the cathedral. Later, when he taught my eighth-grade class, he made sure I had the seat right in front of his desk. He even had a special term of endearment for me: "My Tim."

When I got a little older, he'd take me to fancy Chicago restaurants where waiters would serve me drinks. He'd let me drive his car before I was old enough to have a license, rubbing my leg while I was behind the wheel. He gave me a couple of his credit cards and told me to use them whenever I wanted.

He'd tell me my parents didn't understand me. He, of course, assured me he understood me better than anyone.

There's far more I could tell you, but you get the insidious drift. In retrospect, it all seems so painfully obvious. The man was courting me for sex. But I was too young to know it.

My entire being would recoil

At 17, I was still naive about sexuality. When that Las Vegas invitation was extended, I couldn't conceptualize the leap from Ruffalo's unwelcome touching to sexual activity. And I was clueless about the existence of homosexuality or pedophilia in the world.

I did know one thing: Ruffalo's attention to me always made me feel a little nervous and uncomfortable. Now that I'd gotten older, that discomfort had greatly intensified. Whenever he put his hands on me in any way, my entire being would recoil. When he called my mom to ask her permission for me to travel with him, I prayed she would say no. But when the priest told her a couple of other boys my family knew also were going, she decided it would be a good experience for me. My mother trusted priests implicitly.

I tried to work up the nerve to tell her how uncomfortable Ruffalo made me feel, but I never found the words. Priests were respected in my family. I didn't know how to express the tension and turmoil I was feeling. I was embarrassed and confused and, ultimately, said nothing.

So off to Vegas I went. But, I reasoned, at least two friends were going along for the trip. I figured there'd be safety in numbers. Ruffalo had a vacation house in Las Vegas. Among the Joliet priests and bishops, it was common knowledge he traveled there several times a year, often with boys in his company. I knew several of them. And while I'd heard tales of drinking and parties, no one had ever mentioned any sexual advances.

When we arrived at Ruffalo's house in Las Vegas that June, he was quick to organize the sleeping arrangements. The other two boys would bunk down in the front bedroom. Ruffalo, however, had other plans for me. He took my bags and put them on one of the beds in the back bedroom -- his room.

That first night was filled with lots of drinking. Ruffalo -- a most accommodating host -- made sure his teenage guests had an ample supply of Coors in the refrigerator. Ruffalo, though, had too many drinks and wound up going to bed before the rest of us.

The second night, however, he didn't make the same mistake.

After we boys spent the afternoon at the complex's pool, Ruffalo rounded us up for a night on the town. Early in the evening, the four of us -- three teenagers and a priest in a Roman collar -- arrived at the Las Vegas Hilton. We walked into the casino and sat down at the bar. As underage kids, we had no business being on the casino floor, let alone pulling up a barstool and ordering drinks. But we were with a priest, and nobody seemed to mind.

In fact, everybody on the hotel staff seemed to know Ruffalo from his frequent trips to the city. The concierge called him by name as we walked by. Waitresses said hello. The bartender knew his favorite drink -- Bombay gin -- without asking. The hotel manager came to the lounge to greet us and set us up with a free meal and tickets to that night's floor show.

The liquor flowed freely all evening. Every time my glass was empty, Ruffalo made sure I got a refill. And the more I drank, the more he touched me. He rubbed my back and massaged my neck. He called me "My Tim."

After the show, even though we'd been drinking for several hours already, our group went back to the hotel lounge. A new bartender had come on duty since our earlier visit. He knew Ruffalo, too. He took one look at me, smiled and said, "Father, he looks just like your young friend John who comes with you sometimes. I remember how John likes to drink boilermakers. Shall we give your new friend the same, Father?"

I'd never even heard of such a drink. The next thing I knew, a shot glass of Southern Comfort bobbing in a glass of beer was pushed in front of me. I remember downing that drink and two more.

After that, the lights went out.

I remember

I don't remember the next few hours. I don't remember how long we stayed at the bar. I don't remember how we got back to Ruffalo's house. I don't remember getting undressed. I don't remember going to bed.

But at some point during the night, I woke up from my drunken fog. And I remember exactly what happened. Ruffalo was sitting on the bed next to me. He was stripped down to a T-shirt and a pair of jockey shorts. He was gazing at me and caressing my face. I remember the overpowering smell of his stale cologne.

"I love you, My Tim," he said. Then he reached out and stuck his hand into my underwear and began rubbing my penis. I remember feeling utter despair. I was 17 years old, 2,000 miles from home, and a fat, smelly priest had his hand down my pants.

I didn't know what to do. I wanted to cry. I wanted to haul off and punch the life out of the pervert's face. But I did nothing.

The truth was out

I didn't want to cause a commotion and wake up the other guys. I was too embarrassed to risk them finding out what he was doing to me. So, I tried to pretend I was asleep. But it didn't work. His hand wouldn't stop.

But then, I was overcome with sickness. Whether it was due to Ruffalo's probing hand or the parade of boilermakers, I'll never know. But I bolted up and ran to the bathroom, where I emptied my stomach over and over into the toilet. Ruffalo, always the helpful one, was there to "comfort" me by rubbing my back as I wretched.

Finally, he left me alone in the bathroom. I stayed there for what seemed hours. I didn't sleep the rest of the night. I feared closing my eyes on the priest. In the morning, I confronted him in the kitchen and told him to arrange an immediate flight home for me. He reached out to try to hug me. I backed away. We didn't speak of what he had done during the night, but my message was clear.

At some level, I was relieved. Finally, I knew all the discomfort I had felt was not my imagination. The truth was out: Ruffalo was a disgusting freak who had courted me relentlessly for years, waiting for his big opportunity to try to have sex with me.

When I got home, I didn't tell anyone what had happened. I was too ashamed. I didn't tell my mother. My faith in the church was already shot to hell. I didn't want to ruin her faith, too. Also, I didn't want her to bear the burden of knowing her permission to go on the trip had put me in harm's way. Besides, I had survived the ordeal. And after all, it was only one priest, right? One isolated incident?

I wish I hadn't been so wrong about that.

Over these last few years, I've seen and read about the seemingly endless procession of men who've had experiences like -- and far worse -- than mine. The thing is, in nearly all those cases, the actions of the priests are generically characterized in media reports as "abuse" or "molestation." Seldom are specifics mentioned.

Well, for me that "abuse" isn't nonspecific. It's as plain as this: Some of my first sexual contact in life was at the hands of a priest who courted me for several years, purposely isolated me from my home and family by half a continent, got me blind drunk, and groped my genitals against my will hoping to have relations with me. Is that specific enough?

But the repercussions of that abuse are far more involved than that. Father Ruffalo carried out a great deal of his manipulation and courtship of me at St. Raymond's. Many other boys weren't as lucky....

But in the end, I consider myself one of the lucky ones. I was a smart kid. I was strong. I was able to finally extricate myself from Ruffalo's advances and get on with my life. So many other boys were not as lucky.

Ruffalo died in 1997. But he served in active ministry for 18 more years after that Vegas trip. And all that time, I kept my mouth shut, telling no one other than a few very close friends in recent years. And not even they were told the specifics. I remained too embarrassed to tell them the truth.

But when I read Imesch's deposition and learned of his supposed uncertainty about Father Ruffalo, I wasn't embarrassed anymore. I was just mad.

Ruffalo was notorious around the diocese for his Vegas trips. He was also well-known for having "special" friends. In fact, the lawsuit filed by the man from St. Mary's in Park Forest involved stories of Las Vegas trips depressingly similar to mine. For Imesch to claim he's "not sure" about Ruffalo is laughable.

Perhaps the leader of the Joliet diocese is not a bad man, as many angry members of the faithful would like to believe. Maybe, he's just truly that naive. Either way, his handling of Joliet's priest abuse problem has done damage to the local church that might not be healed until the sixth generation of my family is carrying schoolbooks into St. Ray's.

In the meantime, I'm fully aware of the Joliet Diocese's process for reporting claims of abuse. Well, be assured, I won't be partaking in it. I don't want them to offer me counseling. I don't want to file a lawsuit. I don't want their money. I don't want an apology from anyone.

I simply want the guy who's been running the Joliet Diocese for the last 25 years to admit the problems that occurred under his leadership are so extensive, they won't begin to go away until he goes away -- by resignation, revolt, or most likely, retirement.

And until the day you do, Bishop, perhaps you ought to move Father Ruffalo over to the "Yes" column on your list.

*Tim Placher is a music teacher and a weekly columnist for the Daily Southtown. This essay first appeared in the Southtown, a member of the Sun-Times News Group. This article was reprinted with permission from Tim Placher for one-time use in this e-newsletter*

**STRUCTURAL CHANGE, ANYONE?**

*Update from Margaret Roylance, Group Chair*

In response to the ongoing discussion concerning VOTF possibly calling for structural change, which begins to address the lack of checks and balances in diocesan governance, I would like to point out that the VOTF National Structural Change Working Group has put forward two proposals which do just that. These two proposals are entitled:

1. Independent Judicial Review of Actions by a Diocesan Bishop
2. Diocesan Mutual Visitation as a Mechanism for Renewal

These are included in the Structural Change CD that was available at the Convocation in Indianapolis. The Structural Change Working Group requested that the members of the National Representative Council distribute the proposals to members of their regions for discussion and feedback before they are sent out to the U.S. bishops and voted on by the our National Representative Council.

These proposals are based on consultations with Canon Lawyer Ladislav Orsy, S.J. They represent a middle ground, since they would not necessarily require a change in the 1983 Code of Canon Law, yet they might provide important mechanisms for providing limits on the currently unlimited executive, legislative and judicial authority of the diocesan bishop within his diocese.

If any VOTF members have questions or comments on these proposals, please send them to one of your regional reps or directly to me at [roylances@comcast.net](mailto:roylances@comcast.net).

## **COMMENTARY and More**

### **Where is the Outrage?**

*by Casey Serra*

Several years ago, when the scandalous cover-up in Boston was unraveling and Cardinal Law's world was collapsing around his ears, Catholics, and for that matter, good people everywhere, said "Never again!" A group of parishioners in Boston met in the basement of a church and started an organization called "Voice of the Faithful" (VOTF). Their outrage was manifested in several demonstrations in the Boston area directed at the criminal behavior of Cardinal Law and other clerics who participated in the shameful cover-up. The entire nation was informed of the progress of the efforts of VOTF by the wire services. It was news! The results of their efforts are well known. Cardinal Law resigned in disgrace and fled to Rome where a Pope and a Vatican totally out of touch with the people in the pews, awarded Cardinal Law a prestigious position there. *The outrage was strong.*

The "old boy" network got busy. The bishops (who still don't get it) insisted that the worst was over. The bishops set up a system of audits, which would "prevent" this type of cover-up from ever happening again. The audit system lasted all of one year. The bishops then decreed that since everything was going so well, each diocese would audit themselves! Incredibly, they set the fox to guarding the henhouse! *Where was the outrage?*

Now we have unbelievable events transpiring in Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Hartford, Chicago and Ireland. In Philadelphia, scores of priests would have been indicted as pedophiles were it not for statutes of limitations. In Los Angeles, over 100 priests have been identified as pedophiles. The Cardinal has stonewalled and refuses to turn over records to investigators. There is a \$22 million payout in Hartford to be divided among 43 survivors. So far, 14 priests have been identified as sexual abusers. The shameful record of abuse and cover-up goes back into the 1970's. Worse yet, one of the identified pedophiles, Father Louis Paturzo, was reported to be no longer a priest, but he was listed on the Norwich Diocese web site as a prison chaplain in Brooklyn, CT, as of November 1, 2005. His residence was listed as Immaculate Conception Rectory in Hartford. This information was taken off the web site on November 2. The shameful events in Chicago are being exposed on a daily basis. In Ireland, it is estimated that the cover-up of clerical sexual abuse of children is decades old and was abetted by officials of the Irish government. Why have we not seen more news of these horrifying events in the local press? Has the "old boy" network effectively silenced the Fourth Estate? *Where is the outrage?*

In our own diocese of Norwich, the bishop has set up a very good program for protection of children known as "*Call To Protect*." It is administered by the Office of Safe Environments in Norwich. This office is woefully under-staffed and, as it appears, apathetic. A survey of VOTF of Eastern Connecticut members revealed that only one parish in ten was complying with the bishop's directives regarding the implementation of this excellent program. No effort has been made to follow up and insist on compliance by pastors. What has become of the vow of obedience? Has it become selective? Has the directive been issued with a "wink, wink" by Norwich? *Where is the outrage?*

With the current policy of self-audits, the bishop can now check the box that says that there is a program in place to protect children. He is correct. It is in place. Unfortunately, it has NOT been even remotely implemented. Why? Is it the fault of understaffing in the Office of Safe Environments to the extent that follow-up is not possible? Is it the fault of pastors who ignore the directives of the bishop? Is it intentional? *Where is the outrage?*

The "old boy" network has successfully silenced the press and has told the people in the pews that the problem has been solved and there is nothing to worry about. Contrary to what the bishops would have us believe, however, the problem has not been solved. We cannot "put it behind us" and start anew. As Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Hartford, Chicago and Ireland have proved, the problem is still with us. The cover-up is real and continues. **WHERE IS THE OUTRAGE?**

## **Discernment in Chicago** *from Janet Hauter, VOTF Chicago*

There was a great deal riding on our Upper Room discernment meeting in Chicago (03/05/06) and feelings were piqued as we settled in with one agenda – whether we believed that the time was right to call upon Cardinal George to resign. The pressure from the media and well-meaning people within VOTF was strong to do so. The question "Where is the outrage?" permeated our local media and because of that pressure many new faces attended the meeting. We called for great prayer and discernment before gathering and began with prayer at the start of the meeting.

We proceeded, as we often do in VOTF gatherings, with rounds (introductions and response to a question). Our reflection question was: “What response have you personally felt called to take through your own prayer and discernment?” Responses elicited confessions from many that a call for resignation was the nexus of our discontent. There was concurrence that such a call was not out of the question and could be exercised at any moment – that the Cardinal failed by violating Article 2 of the Charter is an uncontestable fact. As one of the chief architects of the document, he knew that he was violating the Charter. The issue of “zero tolerance” applies to perpetrators as well as enablers and there was no question that Cardinal George is now an enabler. As each of the 18 attendees responded, there was a palpable shift in responses from controlled anger to the question “What would his departure prove?”

We spent time addressing the fact that as VOTF Catholics we chose not to meet anger and arrogance with the same spirit. We mused about the fact that removal of one offender only kept conditions the same for his replacement and the problem would only be perpetuated. While some (outside of our Upper Room) believe strongly that demanding resignation is a matter of principle, it only addresses the symptom, we concluded, and not the root cause. We were trying to keep our “eyes” fixed on the prize, as Jim Post so eloquently directed us prior to the meeting. The prize, we concurred, is systemic change. Cardinal George is only one player in a broken system, broken universally as well as locally where even the Charter’s author chose to ignore his own document. Removing one cardinal does nothing to correct a wrong while our children continue to live at risk.

We arrived at our meeting with potentially 18 different viewpoints and differing temperatures to our rage. We left calm in the arms of a discernment process that worked leaving every individual at peace knowing that the Spirit worked a miracle in our hearts and in our outcome. Our plan is a simple one:

1. Regardless of whether Cardinal George responds to our letter of Ash Wednesday, we have a resolve to become very public with our displeasure of the events in Chicago calling loudly for reform in a dysfunctional system where even the authors of documents violate their own written promises. Cardinal George **will** be held accountable.
2. We will continue our prayer vigils in Lent to reinforce the Lenten message of introspection and search for spiritual guidance to do the right thing focused on systemic change. Steeped in prayer, our vigils will serve to enlighten those who are angry with the Church but who are unfamiliar with the chronology of our discontent. Our prayer will call for reform of the clerical system.
3. We are in the process of developing a late Spring/early Summer event that will galvanize our position on the Accountability Campaign focused on building a groundswell of support from across the Archdiocese to act. A committee is formulating a plan to be presented at our next meeting on 4/19. Another committee has formed to handle media releases and an education campaign requesting Catholics to rise up and respond to very specific “mini-actions” that will be available throughout Lent and beyond.
4. We all agreed that we need to evangelize the VOTF message for reform and engage those who are disgruntled and have no venue to respond. We are on the march to build critical mass. Toward that end, we will have developed “business cards” with contact information to actively and aggressively build a base of support.
5. Only when we believe we have Catholics across the Archdiocese knowledgeable about the failure issues of our “leadership” and a directed venue to respond *in community*, will we revisit the resignation question again. Without a following, a leader cannot lead!

We are already hard at work on implementing that Spirit-prompted plan. More to report after our 3/19 meeting.

**Prayer distributed by Gaile Pohlhaus during VOTF's discernment process:**

*Let us pray.*

*Good and gracious God, we thank you for your many gifts to your Church and your people. We ask your forgiveness for those times when we have forgotten about you or ignored you or turned from your way. We turn to you now for help and direction in how we should proceed in a time filled with difficulties. We know that judgment is yours alone and we also know that you have given all Christians the charge to protect others. We are faced with a dilemma in what is the appropriate response of a national organization to a local problem with national implications. Give us the wisdom and light to come to an action which will be healing and helpful for all. I ask this, as I ask all things, in the name of your son, Jesus, through the assistance of the Holy Spirit.*

[The following is the letter VOTF Chicago affiliates sent to Cardinal George, Archbishop of Chicago, prior to the meeting reported above.]

Dear Cardinal George,

We in Voice of the Faithful are encouraged by the pastoral initiative you have taken to speak to and listen to the parishioners of St. Agatha's and to take public responsibility for your actions. We recognize the steps you have taken to respond to the evolving crisis in the Archdiocese, specifically by:

1. Appointing one person to deal with ALL abuse cases;
2. Hiring Defenbaugh and Associates to probe classified procedures concerning the McCormack and Bennett cases, including the lost letter from the Principal of Holy Family;
3. Hiring Terry Childers, a social worker at Loyola University, to examine monitoring practices and to make recommendations;
4. Setting up the procedure to report all abuse allegations to DCFS, whether founded or unfounded, whether new or old cases. As you suggested, discreetly removing a priest from ministry while an allegation is being investigated would safeguard the reputation of the priest and the welfare of our children.

The revelations of the past week, however, appear to signal a return to the pre-Dallas pattern of protecting an alleged priest-perpetrator and the institution while endangering children. Only complete openness and transparency can restore your credibility and our confidence.

Can the Chancellor, who reports directly to you, have the necessary objectivity and independence to restore the credibility of the archdiocese? His harsh criticism of fellow Catholics who showed concern about the recent failure to act promptly only intensifies this question. Therefore all guidelines for monitoring an accused priest and the criteria used in making decisions to remove or not remove need to be published on the archdiocesan web site.

Likewise, since the consultants have been chosen by and will be paid by the archdiocese, it is imperative that this investigation be quick and thorough and the complete reports and recommendations also be placed on the archdiocesan web site. The credibility of the study would have been enhanced if the consultants had been selected by an independent group such as the National Lay Review Board.

We ask you to follow the pastoral approach of Bishop Skylstad and support legislation that would extend the statutes of limitation in all cases of sexual abuse of minors, and by posting on the archdiocesan web site the names of all known, admitted, proven or credibly accused perpetrators of sexual abuse (clergy and religious).

We are praying for you and we stand ready to offer our assistance. We expect a response within two weeks. This is no time to put new wine into the old wineskins. If we have courage, this could be a moment of grace.

Sincerely,

The Chicagoland Affiliates Council  
Voice of the Faithful

Chicago West with members from 11 parishes  
Arlington Heights Area from 7 parishes  
Chicago NW Suburbs from 18 parishes

City of Chicago from 7 parishes  
Chicago North Suburban from 22 parishes

## **“One, holy, catholic, and apostolic” – What Does It Mean to You?**

Write to [pthorp.ed@votf.org](mailto:pthorp.ed@votf.org)

John Chuchman writes:

My Church

ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC, APOSTOLIC

ONE

Not in structure, organization, culture, or practice,  
But as Jesus, in Love and Forgiveness.

HOLY

Not in common external signs of piety,  
But in the pursuit of internal Spiritual Growth.

CATHOLIC

Not as members of one universal organization,  
But reaching out to serve ALL peoples of the world,  
especially the marginalized.

APOSTOLIC

Not in physical lineage to the Apostles,  
But living in the Holy Spirit as bestowed on them.

ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC, APOSTOLIC

Not in a limiting or exclusive sense,  
But in an Expanding and Inclusive sense.

**SOL Reforms Are Not Enough**

*Mary Collingwood, NRC, Region 6 MI/OH*

By supporting legislation that will extend criminal and civil statutes of limitation and advocating for look-back windows, things may appear hopeful for the victims of clergy sexual abuse. But things won't change for the Church. The Church will continue to act and react the same way it has for centuries; the reason being that the governing structure of the Church remains the same. The same structure that protected priest predators has been and will continue to protect other such scandalous behavior. Unless the structure is changed, Church governance as we know it will not.

In Fr. Tom Doyle's commentary (*Vineyard*, Dec. 15, 2005), he states that the Church's governing structure will not change. He implies that we are spinning our wheels in keeping this hope as part of our mission statement. In fact, Tom Doyle goes so far as to say we can do nothing about it, so let's just focus our attention on advocating for the abuse victims. And I say if there were even one God-fearing layperson in a governing position within a diocese, this abuse would have been uncovered a long time ago. It would never have reached these proportions nor have gone on this long.

It is time to think outside the box. We need to create new opportunities to express ourselves. Our creative imaginations must work overtime alongside the spiritual promptings of our hearts. The campaign proposed is but a small part of our mission and must not be construed as the only avenue for reform. All our effort must not be focused on one issue. We must allow ourselves the perspective of seeing the foundational imperfections so that we can repair them before rebuilding the house. Immediate measures may be advocated, but long-term perspectives must be generated. Our mission statement provides such a perspective. We must keep our wide-lensed focus and not be deterred no matter what influential voice tries to redirect our efforts.