

In the Vineyard

Mary 17, 2007

“As we sought ways to care for the victims of sexual abuse and for priests in ministry, we came of age as adult Catholics and are taking our responsibility in seeking the changes needed for the healing of the Church.” *Marie Doyle of VOTF Winchester MA, on the occasion of VOTF Winchester’s fifth anniversary. See Affiliate Highlight.*

VOTF NATIONAL News

VOTF “**Disciples in Action**” 2007 Convention update from Sally Vance-Trembath is [here](#).

VOTF Leadership Statement of Identity - Introductory remarks follow; read the full statement [here](#).

VOTF's Board of Trustees, Officers and most National Representative Council members recently adopted a statement to guide strategy and decision-making in the context of VOTF's experience since it was founded in 2002 and in light of the Church environment today and moving forward. The Statement of Identity reaffirms and clarifies VOTF's mission and three overarching goals. It provides a common foundation for developing strategic direction and for gaining consensus around the content and priority of proposals submitted for consideration and action. The statement reflects a balance of VOTF's three goals, it is grounded in the sexual abuse crisis, and it is reflective of VOTF's Catholic identity. It also replaces the Statement of Beliefs found on the VOTF website under the link Who We Are. The leadership team envisions this statement as a key framework in exercising leadership responsibilities in a productive, effective and collaborative fashion as we confront the challenges ahead.

VOTF National applauds **VOTF Winchester MA** on their fifth anniversary! If you have ever asked or been asked, “Why VOTF?” – here’s your answer. [As VOTF National marks its fifth anniversary, we invite all affiliates to share their own anniversary reflections. Send to pthorp.ed@votf.org.] PHOTO if available.

REMINDER: **SNAP National Convention** July 20-21 in Washington DC. Get details at <http://www.snapnetwork.org/>.

DIOCESE/State Watch: Additional diocese/state watch updates – VOTF Greater Cincinnati conference a great success; diocese of San Diego CA confronting parish ownership; Spokane WA diocese trying to block access to records; a New York parish is suing the diocese; Norwich CT editorial encourages the diocese to welcome VOTF.

Manchester NH: The *Union Leader* notes: “In its second court-mandated audit of the diocese, the state cited a lack of ‘acceptance or commitment’ on the part of church leaders. Attorney General Kelly Ayotte said progress has been made, but she remains

concerned about the ‘tone at the top,’ particularly in regard to the Rev. Edward Arsenault, who heads the diocese's efforts to prevent and report sexual abuse.” See <http://www.unionleader.com/article.aspx?headline=State+says+Manchester+Diocese+still+lacks+commitment+to+prevent+child+sexual+abuse&articleId=07f2336b-aeda-4aa7-92e6-86c72ec23289>.

Carolyn Disco chair of VOTF NH Survivor Support wrote an op-ed that appears on the Voice from the Desert blog at <http://voicefromthedesert.blogspot.com/2007/05/op-ed-on-new-hampshire-audit-report.html>. Disco says, in part: “The diocese is refusing to participate in two more annual state audits and the matter will likely end in court. The Agreement called for five ‘annual’ audits through 2007, but the diocese delayed release of the first state audit until March 2006 by objecting (unsuccessfully) in court to audits that evaluated effectiveness over a checklist compliance with policies and procedures. The state then reduced its request to four audits.”

See SNAP’s statement at <http://voicefromthedesert.blogspot.com/2007/05/snaps-clohessy-on-manchester-nh-audit.html>.

YOU can help toward a win for protecting children throughout the US. Learn more about the Coalition to pass the Child Victims Act in Delaware: Go to www.childvictimsvoice.com. As VOTF Representative and Minnesota SNAP director Bob Schwiderski said just before SB 29 was to be taken up by the House: “The most striking message from this bill is direct response to the civil justice rights of victims of sexual abuse – not a message about criminal law, the ‘Worst of the Worst,’ or a focus on bad people --- this bill focuses on victims.” Bill Synopsis: *This Bill would repeal the statute of limitations in civil suits relating to child sexual abuse cases and provide a two-year “window” in which victims can bring a civil action in cases previously barred by the current statute.*

Recent coverage details the politics, the people and the promise of bringing many voices to bear on this important legislative effort. The legislature is on recess until June 5 and supporters are readying for what Senator Karen Peterson calls “the next round.”

<http://www.delmarvanow.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070511/NEWS01/70511019/1002>.

The **Omaha, Nebraska** diocese is trying to regain the “fiscal faith” of its constituents. “Tamper-proof bank bags for collection proceeds, frequent audits of parish books and online accounting wired to Omaha Archdiocese headquarters are ... among the most recent of several measures the archdiocese has ordered in an effort to tighten financial controls in parishes and other Catholic institutions.” See the *Omaha World-Herald* at http://www.omaha.com/index.php?u_page=2798&u_sid=2380899/.

SITE-Seeing, Etc.

- **Book recommendation from Fr. Tom Doyle:** THE POWER AND THE GLORY: INSIDE THE DARK HEART OF JOHN PAUL II'S VATICAN by David Yallop. Carroll and Graf Publishers, New York, 2007. 530 pages.
- “Deliver Us from Evil” is now available for sale on DVD at www.amazon.com. *Boston Globe* coverage is at the Voice from the Desert web site at <http://voicefromthedesert.blogspot.com/2007/05/dvd-for-deliver-us-from-evil.html>.
- *National Catholic Reporter*'s Rome correspondent John Allen provides his own take on Pope Benedict XVI's book *Jesus of Nazareth*. Much of what Allen notes is evident in the Pope's recent remarks during his visit to Latin America. For Allen's April 27 column, go to <http://ncrcafe.org/node/1056>. [Allen has posted daily accounts of the Pope's Brazil visits May 9-13 to São Paulo and Aparecida, in conjunction with the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean (CELAM). Read Allen's daily reports at his [Daily News and Updates](http://www.ncrcafe.org) column on [NCRcafe.org](http://www.ncrcafe.org).]
- **An opportunity to listen** will be noted in the VOTF Boston Area newsletter: An upcoming Corpus conference will be held in Providence RI on June 22-24. Corpus, the national organization in support of an inclusive Catholic priesthood, will hold its conference "Prophecies, Dreams and Visions: Keeping Hope Alive." Those interested in attending may register online at www.corpus.org (<http://www.corpus.org>) or email allenmoore@esedona.net).
- Most observers know by now that the abuse of children by Roman Catholic clergy is not only an American problem. From its beginning, VOTF recognized that the behavior leading to these crimes is part of a systemic breakdown. Numbers speak more clearly, at times. See a recent ABCNews note about Dublin, Ireland at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200705/s1912820.htm>.
- Dan Sullivan of VOTF Bridgeport CT found a web site of **Detroit MI priests speaking out**. Their aptly titled site is “Elephants in the Living Room” at <http://www.elephantsinthelivingroom.com/>. See the group's mission statement in QUOTE for our time, below.

QUOTE for our time:

“We are an organization of priests of the Archdiocese of Detroit, strongly supported by participating laity, who seek renewal of the Church of Detroit. We do this by offering opportunities for education and creating an open forum for discussion and dialog that will lead to developing and advocating more collegial solutions to the challenges we face. We firmly believe these efforts will contribute to a greater solidarity among priests and a renewed Church of Detroit.” *Mission statement of Elephants in the Living Room at <http://www.elephantsinthelivingroom.com/>.*

The next issue of *In the Vineyard*: June 7.

VOTF National Convention 2007: DISCIPLES in Action

Update from VOTF vice-president Sally Vance-Trembath

Our upcoming convention October 19-21 in Providence RI, "Disciples in Action," will be a time for both celebration and education. We celebrate our first 5 years and share with each other what we have learned to inspire each other into greater action. Attendees will have the opportunity to attend two plenary sessions and choose two workshops and three panels from a variety of offerings.

One of the insights that emerged during our planning is that our members and their affiliates are at many different stages in the life of our organization. Some members are veterans who have been serving since the beginning in very active affiliates and working groups, others are just starting out, and the majority are someplace in between. We suggest that affiliate members strategize on how best to cover the available workshops and panels so as to maximize the tools and enthusiasm that they bring back to the affiliate.

All of our panels will emphasize the convention theme of action as the mark of discipleship. The more practical ones focus on the "action" part of Disciples in Action." Our more theological panels have been collected around the idea of "discipleship."

Service to the Gospel is not just another social program, an insight that our own Pope Benedict has been proclaiming during his time in Latin America. Discipleship flows from our experience of being loved by God and convinced of Jesus' proclamation of God's love for us. Discipleship requires actual change in the real world. Discipleship needs to be rooted in the depths of our inner experience of God's presence and displayed in our commitment to God's Church. One of the lessons of Christian discernment is that we need to be relentless in checking in with the community whom we wish to serve, so that we continue to provide something we need not just something we prefer doing.

Theologian, Michael Himes, in discussing discipleship asks the question, What am I good at? This is a question that we all ask ourselves, What difference can I make? Whether you are new to VOTF or have been around a long time, panels will be offered that invite you to discover that you are good at some activities you never imagined. These panels might also help you to decide that you are not using your gifts in ways that both spring from and feed the joyful experience of serving God's people.

In future issues if *In the Vineyard* we will highlight the various choices that you can make at the convention.

VOTF Identity Statement

VOTF MISSION

To provide a prayerful voice, attentive to the Spirit, through which the Faithful can actively participate in the governance and guidance of the Catholic Church.

VOTF GOALS

To support survivors of clergy sexual abuse.

To support priests of integrity.
To shape structural change within the Catholic Church.

VOTF STATEMENT OF IDENTITY

Voice of the Faithful (VOTF) arose in 2002 in response to shocking revelations in the life of the Catholic Church: widespread clerical abuse of children; silence of clergy in the face of known or suspected abuse; and the moral, governance and pastoral failures of Catholic bishops in response to abusers and survivors alike. In the face of such breaches of trust, VOTF emerged from the determination of Catholic laity to find their voice and to claim their proper role in the governance of the Church.

Drawing on their baptismal responsibility for the life and work of the Church, VOTF members commit themselves to supporting survivors; supporting priests who are helping to heal survivors and correct institutional flaws; and working to reform governing structures so that abuse of authority could not happen again. Nourished by its members' deep love for the Body of Christ, VOTF seeks full transparency and accountability in Church governance and full incorporation of lay Catholics in the life and work of the Church at every level.

The patterns that led to abuse and cover-up, and to increasing instances of clerical financial misconduct, still prevail. It is simply unreasonable to trust in exclusively clerical governance or to expect meaningful reform from the hierarchy acting alone on these issues.

Affirming their responsibility for the good of the Church, VOTF members continue to offer their experience of faith and their competencies in the Church. They willingly collaborate with bishops and clergy who welcome such relationships. They also pursue independent avenues to exercise their role of fully initiated lay faithful in the life and governance of the Church. In doing so, VOTF stands in full communion with the Church through sacrament, proclamation and service. It bases its work on the Gospel, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and on the rich sources of Catholic tradition, particularly the understanding of the Church articulated in the documents of the Second Vatican Council.

VOTF welcomes the active participation of all Catholics who share a commitment to assisting survivors, supporting priests of integrity, protecting children, and working for full lay participation in Church governance. VOTF will continue to seek structural reforms that will correct the problems that led to the abuse scandal, and that, if unchanged, could enable other scandals to occur. Joining VOTF is a commitment to work to strengthen and renew the Church, and to assume shared responsibility for its governance.

DIOCESE/State Watch

New York NY: One-stop information is available about the Archdiocese of New York closing of Our Lady of Vilnius parish. The parishioners are suing the diocese. See the Voice from the Desert postings covering the *Commonweal* blog site and the *New York Post* at <http://voicefromthedesert.blogspot.com/2007/05/nbny-parishioners-sue-archdiocese.html>.

Iowa: A recent *Daily Iowan* article offers a chilling trajectory of one priest's alleged path of abuse. For the full story go to the Voice from the Desert blog site at <http://voicefromthedesert.blogspot.com/2007/05/clergy-sex-abuse-in-iowa-by-bishop.html>.

VOTF Ohio: "A Gathering for Justice: Sexual Abuse, Secrecy and Healing," sponsored by Greater Cincinnati Voice of the Faithful (VOTF) drew more than 200 people on April 28. The gathering marked Child Abuse Prevention Month and was geared toward raising awareness and educating the community about sexual abuse. See coverage at <http://www.catholiccincinnati.org/tct/may1107/051107voice.html>.

- After two priests were defrocked following the Vatican's judgment of credible allegations, Kris Ward of VOTF Dayton said, "'Common sense, it seems, should have rocketed the case of a sex offender to the top of the Vatican's piles of cases.'" <http://www.daytondailynews.com/n/content/oh/story/news/local/2007/05/12/ddn051207priests.html>.

Spokane WA: Once again, it's not history: "Attorneys for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Spokane filed legal documents Wednesday in an attempt to block the *Spokesman-Review* from gaining public access to court records listing priest-abusers and damage claims expected to be paid as part of a \$48 million bankruptcy settlement." See <http://www.spokesmanreview.com/breaking/story.asp?ID=9840>.

- See SNAP posting at http://www.snapnetwork.org/legal_courts/stories/spokane_deal_secrets.htm.

San Diego CA to find out who owns parishes in that diocese. The online *Herald-Tribune* site, SignOnSanDiego.com reports: "The explosive issue at the heart of the Diocese of San Diego's bankruptcy case – whether its 98 parishes are separate entities or part of the diocese estate – will be settled in a trial, a federal judge decided yesterday." Go to <http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/metro/20070511-9999-1n11diocese.html> or the Voice of the Desert site at <http://voicefromthedesert.blogspot.com/2007/05/trial-will-determine-who-owns-parishes.html>.

Norwich CT: A Day.com editorial encourages the diocese of Norwich to welcome VOTF. Go to <http://www.theday.com/re.aspx?re=b3d1db9f-41ee-433e-8a46-cdf5beb9c154>.

AFFILIATE Highlight: Congratulations VOTF Winchester MA!

The Winchester Area Voice of the Faithful began meeting on May 13, 2002 at St. Eulalia parish in Winchester, Massachusetts. With the exception of holidays, the group has been meeting weekly on Monday nights since then, and on May 14, 2007, celebrated its 5th anniversary of weekly meetings. In that time, the group has, among other things, raised nearly \$10,000 to benefit survivors; met 3 times thus far with our regional bishop; hosted dinners and other events for area priests; conducted frequent prayer services; held regular

small group faith sharing meetings; and welcomed numerous guest speakers, including several from outside the Boston area.

The real significance of the group, however, can be found in the following comments from several members on the occasion of the group's 5th anniversary. *Bob Morris, Winchester Area VOTF*

Marie Doyle: In a very dark period in the life of our Church, VOTF has been a source of hope for me. It has given me an experience of a loving community deeply committed to something far larger than itself. As we sought the ways to care for the victims of sexual abuse and for priests in ministry, we came of age as adult Catholics and are taking our responsibility in seeking the changes needed for the healing of the Church. Through VOTF God has given us a joyful light in the terrible darkness.

Joan Cote: What has meant the most to me....Meeting and enjoying the company of faith-filled Catholics...being in the company of people who have great compassion for the survivors of sexual abuse....being part of a group that asks the survivors of sexual abuse "How can we help you heal?" and being in a group who rely on prayers and action to help the survivors.

Clare Keane: The words of many people fill my thoughts as we begin our 5th year as an active VOTF Affiliate. Fr. Cuenin's Italian – *piango, prego, spero*- expresses things well. We came into VOTF on a wave of **tears** and anger; we **prayed** for survivors, for faithful priests, for our church, and for ourselves; we found a committed community and reason to **hope**. We are less naïve than we were five years ago when we hoped to change the hearts and minds of the hierarchy. But we ourselves have changed – we have learned to listen, to pay attention, to empathize, and to prioritize our activities, which has kept us here returning week after week, because it is the most valuable thing we can do...

Alice Wadden: The true blessing of the Winchester Area VOTF has been to be part of an amazing faith community. The crisis in 2002 was like the tip of an iceberg. The church in the Archdiocese of Boston is in much better condition five years later than it was in 2002, but the struggle continues. We must never go back to expecting that the hierarchy will lead the laity as in the past. Transparency and sharing of the governance of the archdiocese is necessary. One specific area that we need to address is the generational divide – will our children and grandchildren be part of the Roman Catholic Church? We must continue to educate ourselves to be disciples of Christ and active, vigilant members of the Church.

Anne O'Connor: What has meant the most to me in the Winchester area VOTF is that I believe my attendance at the meetings is one minute step toward changing the church. Thanks to Bob Morris we have had inspiring meetings over the past five years, e.g., the recent tribute in memory of Rev. Bob Bullock.

Eva Arnott: What has meant the most to me in the Winchester VOTF is the opportunity to regularly come together with a community of people who accept the teachings of the

Church as the distilled wisdom of many inspired people over almost 2000 years and from many diverse cultures. At the same time, VOTF members have worked to have input from trained lay people in improving the efficiency and human resource management of the church as an institution run by fallible human beings. The challenge continues to be the need to separate that which is basic and should be decided by people from all over the world who come together for decision-making in Rome, and that which is a question of managerial competence where an MBA is more useful than a MDiv.

Louise Aleo: I was never out-of-love with my Church – but.... Like many families, we members may irritate each other on occasion. Often we just shrug our shoulders, grumble a bit and try to tolerate annoyances... We are family. Until, suddenly! We are stunned by a grievance so horrible... Five years ago on a Monday evening at a church in Wellesley, our family decided to make some changes. We took a name that signaled our intent. No longer quietly tolerant, we were Voice of the Faithful, a voice that our hierarchy had not heard in centuries. This Voice demanded Change! But, the change had to come from us, the laity, first. What changes have I seen in our five years together?

The most important change has been the gathering of laity in prayerful open discussions of the troubles of our Church. Along with the echo of our voices came those wonderful priests who had the courage to come out to conference with us adding their voices to ours. Together, we forced the exposure of those criminals who hid themselves among our priests and of those who protected them. And slowly, we are achieving the release of financial records.

We are still working toward our goal to shape structural change in our Church... a change that encourages the type of communication between the hierarchy and laity that should be a normal function of a stable family; a change that invites lay participation and inclusion in non-doctrinal decisions, sharing our talents and helping to find solutions to ensure a healthy Christian community. But I have noticed that change is creeping in ...slowly ... after all this is the Catholic Church.

John Gray: The formation, and continued existence of Winchester's VOTF, has provided a positive outlet for expressing deep disappointments and frustrations over our recent church scandals. It has also given opportunities for involvement by those who seek to address some of the issues that appear to have been inadequately dealt with by higher church authorities. The group has also provided numerous wonderful speakers on a wide range of topics of interest to a laity that wishes to become better informed about their faith and their church.

Millie Feloney: God is good. How fortunate I feel. St. Eulalia's welcomed me here to heal. I'm from Cambridge, a place of promise, But we couldn't find another Bob Morris.

Bill Murphy: I was raised in a church and in a family where denial was a major fact of life and an important technique for dealing with life. I really appreciate VOTF as a group of committed catholic Christians who create an environment where we are all affirmed in

our honest faith struggles, supported as we grapple as a community with them, and trust that the Spirit will guide us through them - although we may not know the way. It feels good to come on Monday nights, because there is less dissonance or disconnect between my real life and my faith life, and for that I am very grateful to our VOTF group.

Jan Dolan: What has meant the most to me in the Winchester Area VOTF is the camaraderie with the other members, many of whom I did not know and which for me has developed and flourished. It has provided me an opportunity to think more completely about our church, particularly its structure, and an opportunity to truly appreciate how very vital the church with all its perceived faults is to me. These 5 years have given me hope and, yes, frustrations. When I begin to ponder why we are spending these many hours on issues that seem to be moving slowly or not moving at all, I am reminded of an article in NCR, perhaps a year ago. The gist of it was: history will show that just as a pebble gains momentum as it rolls down a hill, Voice of the Faithful started slowly, but in time shook the foundation of the Church.