



# VOICE OF THE FAITHFUL

## Chicagoland Affiliates Council

Dear Fellow VOTF Members,

On May 12, 2006, we eight members of the Chicagoland Affiliates Council (CAC) met with Cardinal George as parishioners of the Chicago Archdiocese. We viewed this meeting as an opportunity to build a relationship and to begin an on-going dialogue with the Cardinal. We discussed various points from the attached summary. We were encouraged to propose an agenda for a possible future meeting. The attached summary is an internal VOTF document, intended to communicate the talking points of our visit with the Cardinal to our membership.

Sincerely,

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Chicago North Suburban

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### Meeting of Cardinal George and Representatives of Chicago VOTF Affiliates , May 12, 2006

#### Meeting Summary: VOTF Proposals

##### 1. Meeting Context, Outcomes, Fundamental Focus

- Our church is in crisis. We all, laity, clergy and hierarchy, share a common responsibility based on our common Baptism, to rebuild our church according to the teachings of Jesus and Vatican II. As laity, we have sought community and focus by working with VOTF and pursuing the VOTF mission and goals.
- An angry national outcry over the McCormack incident and the Defenbaugh and Childers Reports have put pressure on Chicago affiliates of VOTF to call for your resignation
- Our choice: to seek collaboration with you as our bishop, and with our priests and other lay people, so we can *together* restore credibility and trust and can *together* build a Gospel inspired Vatican II church
- Grounds for our hope: your response to the reports and promises of vigorous changes
- Meeting outcomes: mutual understanding and trust and a shared commitment to build the church.
- The heart of our proposals is a fundamental, essential change in mentality, which only you can instill throughout all archdiocesan agencies and operations
- Reports of this meeting will be sent to our Chicago affiliates, National VOTF leaders, and the media.

##### 2. Priority Areas for collaboration in rebuilding credibility, trust, and faith

###### A. Full, vigorous response to clergy sex-abuse

###### 1) Healing Experiences

- Make public your desire to meet personally with victims to listen to their stories, at their homes if they wish. Encourage auxiliary bishops to do the same.
- Hold well-publicized prayer services at the Cathedral and in some parishes for victims, their families and friends, and for all Catholics grieving for their church and struggling to renew their faith. Follow these healing services with an open forum where parishioners could voice their concerns and ask questions.
- Sponsor healing retreats for victims, such as the Diocese of Lansing program and *The Healing Alliance Farm*. Encourage Bishops to support *The Farm* as you have.
- Establish an endowment fund for victims to use for these and other healing experiences.
- Hold gatherings in parishes, especially where a pastor has been removed, so that trained professionals can guide parishioners to face and express their grief and anger and find a way to heal. Offer parishes a list of resources for this (e.g., Cradock, Gardner & Associates; reading lists, etc).

- Up-date the published list of clergy sex-offenders. (Compare with Bishop Accountability website)
- Publish a Victim's/Survivor's Bill of Rights.

## 2) Educational experiences

- Hold meetings for priests, with trained facilitators, to encouraging honest discussion and sharing, so priests can express their pain *without fear* of reprisals. Support those who feel betrayed by their peers and their seminary formation and ignored by the hierarchy. Provide *ongoing* training in appropriate behaviors and boundaries for ministers.
- Make *Child Lures Program* mandatory (with sanctions) in all Catholic schools and religious education programs. This empowers our children and youth to protect themselves, to recognize "grooming," and to report inappropriate behavior. It also helps parents to instruct their children and to be ready to listen.
- Educate our Catholic people on the nature of sex-abuse, the damage it does to the victim, especially young people, and why it takes so long before victims can face their abuse and speak of it. Do this by speaking and writing, and by compiling a resource guide for parishes. Take positive steps to prevent victims from becoming victimized again by a church that now blames *them* for the scandals.
- Continue the *Virtus* program, making it mandatory for all paid and volunteer staff who contact children and open to all concerned adults.
- Commission a public visual memorial dedicated to the victims of clergy sex-abuse, such as the side altar in the Los Angeles Cathedral or a sculpture of the Child Jesus in the Temple or playing with friends, vulnerable but not abused.
- Undertake a collaborative study and discussion of the issues related to extending the Illinois statute of limitations in hopes of achieving consensus on a joint position before the next legislative session.

## B. Cardinal's pastoral leadership: local and national

### 1) Local – Archdiocese of Chicago

- Make *transparency* and *accountability* the hallmarks of your episcopacy, permeating all archdiocesan agencies. Make it the policy of the archdiocese to *do everything in the light*, documenting all transactions.
- Publish *ongoing* progress reports, informing parishioners of every action you take to correct the things that went wrong and to implement the recommendations of the Defenbaugh and Childers reports (not in 6 months or a year) to reassure Catholics that you are following up your promises of reform with action.
- Follow up with another published independent audit in a year and at regular intervals thereafter.
- Make the Review Board independent and binding, and publish the names with credentials. Appoint a member of VOTF and a survivor (as well as a parent of a survivor) .

### 2) National and International–USCCB and Vatican

- Encourage your fellow bishops to exemplify the servant leadership modeled and taught by Jesus.
- Influence the USCCB to call for *mandated* independent audits in *every* diocese in place of the system of self-audits that have proven so unreliable.
- Influence the USCCB to encourage or *mandate* independent and binding Review Boards in all dioceses.
- Make the National Review Board a truly independent and authoritative body, with names and qualifications published as well as their reports.
- Seek the prompt revision of the Charter and Norms to correct the deficiencies you have noted.
- Urge the USCCB to practice effective fraternal correction with bishops who fail to comply.
- Urge the USCCB to fully fund and expedite the *completion* of the John Jay Study, so we can begin to understand *why* these scandals occurred and make deep, lasting reforms.
- Use your position in the USCCB and at the Vatican to advocate for abused children within and outside of the church.

## C. Laity's baptismal responsibility to share in reform and renewal of the church

- Publicly support VOTF and promote the positive work their members do.
- Encourage pastors to support VOTF and to welcome VOTF to meet in parish facilities.
- Demonstrate your commitment to collaborate with VOTF and other concerned lay Catholics in building a healthy, vibrant church in Chicago, by providing a written response to our proposals and scheduling a follow-up meeting in mid-summer.
- Request lay-elected parish finance and pastoral councils, and lay-elected or recommended membership on archdiocesan finance and pastoral councils.

***VOTF Mission: To provide a prayerful voice, attentive to the Spirit, through which the Faithful can actively participate in the governance of the church. Goals: 1. To support those who have been abused. 2. To support priests of integrity. 3. To shape structural change within the church.***