

November 5 *In the Vineyard*

News from National

Responding To Our Members: Building a Powerful Future Together

Last Spring, Voice of the Faithful began conducting a member survey in which we asked for feedback on how VOTF was doing in terms of living up to our potential as a voice for change within the Catholic Church. We received feedback from the Board of Trustees, the new officers, the National Representative Council, and the Working Groups as well as more than 500 members who took the time to fill out a fairly extensive analysis of VOTF's strengths and weaknesses. Beginning with this issue, *In the Vineyard* will be running a three-part series on the results of this membership survey, culminating in a new strategic plan for VOTF. **Here is Part 1** of the series, on results of the Membership Survey.

Part 1: Responding To Our Members: Building a Powerful Future Together

From the National Officers

This is the first in a three-part series on the future of VOTF that we are all creating. This series will report on the results of a SWOT survey—Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats—sent to all VOTF members and leaders across the country, and on how this analysis leads us to the new Strategic Plan.

The summary of the SWOT survey constitutes Part I of our series. Part II will cover the guiding principles that allowed us to filter all information we received. Every response caused us to ask ourselves, “Will this input further the mission and goals of the organization?” Part III will unveil the new strategic plan itself, which was recently presented to the Trustees (10/18/08) and received strong affirmation coupled with applause. We welcome your comments once you see the plan its entirety. Thank you all who contributed their voices to help create our future.

We began our survey efforts in late Spring 2008, following the incredible successes of meeting the papal visit head-on with our full page ad in the New York Times. You funded that ad nearly overnight. It was a clear message from a majority that we need to move forward boldly supported by irrefutable data spoken in a respectfully firm, unmistakable and consistent tone.

As new officers we are committed to building a strategic direction and plan for the future. To do so, we wanted to truly listen to all our constituents and the wisdom they have to share. Our goals were to shore up what's working so that it can continue even better in the future; to fix what's broken; to anticipate a healthy, results-centered future, and to keep a watchful eye for future plan obstacles and perceived impediments.

Engaging in an organization-wide SWOT analysis was a huge job. But to fulfill our national potential as a strong church reform organization, we must identify and build upon our successes while learning from our mistakes.

To conduct the SWOT surveys, we reached out to the Board of Trustees, the new officers, the National Representative Council, and the Working Groups as well as our entire membership. The response from the latter was especially appreciated – more than 500 members took the time to fill out this rather detailed SWOT survey, a response rate that is considered good for email surveys.

The following summary from all those responses identifies the strongest and most frequent themes cited in the surveys regarding the VOTF Mission, Identity Statement and National Goals:

Current Strengths of the National Organization (in priority order):

- Sheer strength in numbers (largest reform group) with a core of active, Baptismally-committed Catholics who are intelligent and talented, with a passion for our shared mission.
- Our scope, centrist position and our brand concept (compelling cause).
- Our national voice coupled with strong local activities on the affiliate level led by respected individuals.
- Current leadership committed to make a strategic difference within the framework of a clear/consistent mission statement and goals.
- Many in the pews support our mission/goals but have yet to join us formally.

Current Weaknesses of the National Organization:

- Lack of needed funds. Financial strains.
- Lack of member initiatives.
- We operate often in a disjointed/non-cohesive fashion. Need a strong plan drawing disparate components together.
- Need clear bylaws and policies to lessen the complexity and delays in decision making/execution.
- Goals are left to interpretation.
- Our identity is unclear to many non-members.
- Governance model and organization structure, which arose organically, no longer meet current needs.
- Communication is a problem all around/all dimensions and forms.

Future Organizational Opportunities:

- Publicity!
- Synod!
- Outreach to other reform organizations.
- Brand distinction within the reform group community.

- Develop events that build interest, membership and support.
- Potential to be an organizing force within the reform community.
- Educate the uncommitted to understand their rights/responsibilities.
- Use the Papal visits (U.S./Australia), the reported financial irregularities and continued abuse headlines to call hierarchy to accountability using the Pope's own words.

Future (Potential) Organizational Threats:

- Financial instability—need exciting blueprint that arouses others.
- Waning media attention—they are interested when a new crisis flares but not in between.
- Insufficient results to show for our existence.
- We must be the moderate voice of change: committed, persistent, rational, clever & clear in a unified message that screams our brand—modeled by us. To call for VOICES, we must become superior LISTENERS!
- Leadership burnout coupled with member apathy.

In the next edition, we will share the context and the guiding principles that were used to filter information garnered from the hundreds of surveys received. These helped us synthesize findings so that we could move toward decision making on elements of the strategic plan.

Dan Bartley
Janet Hauter
Kevin Connors
Julie McConville

News from Working Groups

Priest of Integrity: Father Michael O'Connell

Submitted by Suzanne Severson

Twin Cities Voice of the Faithful presented its 2007-2008 Twin Cities Priest of Integrity Award to Fr. Michael O'Connell at the Basilica of St Mary on October 26, 2008. The award was given for Fr. O'Connell's work as Vicar General of this archdiocese early on in the abuse crisis. Father O'Connell established safeguards for children and a policy for education of church leaders. The award was also presented symbolically for all priests of integrity who had to refocus their ministry to deal with the burgeoning abuse crisis. Judge Michael Merz, Chair of the USCCB's National Review Board, gave the keynote address. Judge Merz addressed the American bishops' compliance with the Charter for the Protection of Children and the impact of the Pope's recent visit to the US.

Father Michael O'Connell: A Priest of Integrity

Father Michael O'Connell is the pastor at the Basilica of St. Mary in Minneapolis, MN. In addition, he ministers to an inner city Hispanic parish.

Father O'Connell's nominators report that he has created a safe and welcoming atmosphere which is evidence by tremendous growth in the parish (1400 families in 1991 to 5,400 today!). He helps organize a huge neighborhood Basilica Block Party held each summer which fosters great community building and evangelization. He is noted for his close relationship with the Jewish community, and for his commitment to justice.

The heart of Father O'Connell's nomination rests on his past role as moderator of the Curia (Archdiocese of St. Paul/Minneapolis). In 1984, Father Mike was faced with the first case of clergy abuse that was publicized in the newspapers. It was the beginning of a crash course in intervention, victim advocacy and education for Father Mike and many others in his position around the country. Through his efforts, the archdiocese was one of the first to have a policy on education of all church leaders as well as clear steps for reporting any abuse. (Had other dioceses moved as quickly and openly perhaps the abuse would have been mitigated much sooner than it was).

As his nominators note, "The nomination of Fr. Michael O'Connell is both symbolic and meaningful for all priests who had to refocus their ministry to deal with the burgeoning abuse crisis."

The Priest Support Working Group honors selected clergy with a "Priest of Integrity" award for their noted courage and compassion in their ministry. But there are many untold stories of priests doing heroic service in their communities. We hope that highlighting the ones we have come to know will give us examples to follow and build hope in the often-unseen goodness that abounds. Win a Turkey Dinner and Support VOTF!

Donate \$25 to Voice of the Faithful between October 20, 2008 – November 19th and as a thank you, your name will be added to a raffle for a Thanksgiving dinner that feeds 6-10 people. Winners will receive a turkey and sides from Hickory Farms, deliverable in the continental United States. Orders will be guaranteed by provider for a November 27th delivery date.

Your donation will support VOTF's new Strategic Plan– which includes projects for reviewing mandated celibacy, monitoring diocesan pastoral and financial accountability, organizing an American Catholic Council meeting, and much more.

To make your gift online at our website, use this link. Or mail your donation to:

VOTF
Post Office Box 423
Newton, MA 02464.

News from Survivor Support Working Group

Senate Bill 1738, "PROTECT Our Children Act" – Passed the U.S. Senate!!

On September 25, the PROTECT Our Children Act passed the Senate unanimously. Thanks to all of you who contacted your senators.

The PROTECT Our Children Act will:

- Authorize over \$320 million over the next five years in desperately needed funding for law enforcement to investigate child exploitation.
- Mandate that child rescue be a top priority for law enforcement receiving federal funding.
- Allocate funds for high-tech computer software that can track down Internet predators.

The next step to making this a federal law is passage by the House of Representatives. Now is the time to contact your congressman in support U.S. Senate Bill 1738, called the PROTECT our Children Act. You can contact your congressman directly via:
<https://forms.house.gov/wyr/welcome.shtml>

Site Seeing

Thoughts from Judge Michael Merz

In a heartfelt and wide ranging interview given last June and featured in the November issue of *Saint Anthony's Messenger*, Judge Michael Merz, chairman of the National Review Board, discussed the Report on the Implementation of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. He was remarkably candid about the report findings, what has been accomplished and what still needs to be done.
<http://www.americancatholic.org/messenger/Nov2008/feature3.asp>

Review of Mandatory Celibacy?

The Priest Support Working Group recently sent a letter to Cardinal O'Malley hoping to open a dialogue about mandatory celibacy. To see the correspondence between VOTF and Cardinal O'Malley
Boston.com also covered VOTF's correspondence with Cardinal O'Malley
http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles_of_faith/2008/10/voice_of_faithf.html

Official Recommendations from the Synod

Last week at the Vatican, the Synod on the Word ended. There were some surprises, including a recommendation that women be officially admitted to the ministry of "lector," as well as strong support for the role of laity – endorsing lay-led liturgies of the Word in the absence of a priest.

For a more complete report:

<http://ncronline3.org/drupal/?q=node/2356>

Thoughts on Cincinnati's New Bishop

<http://news.cincinnati.com/article/20081019/NEWS01/810190378>

Thinking About Christmas Shopping?

If you plan to do any online shopping at Amazon.com, please go to the VOTF website first and access Amazon through VOTF. Amazon.com will then donate a small percentage of whatever you buy (including gift certificates!) to VOTF. You won't be charged any extra and VOTF will be able to raise some money! Please follow the link: <http://www.votf.org/amazon/>

As always, thank you for your support – both spiritual and financial!

Quotes of Note

Archbishop Paul Cremona O.P., of Malta, President of the Maltese Episcopal Conference, speaks of why Catholics must let go of the nostalgia of the old church and embrace a new Model of “Being Church.”

Quote of Note from Archbishop Cremona

"I shall be speaking in the context of traditionally Catholic countries like Malta. Whenever we speak of a new evangelization, we find a stumbling block. Many of our faithful still live in nostalgia of, and compare the present situation, with the model of the Church that was present 30 to 40 years ago. Since the Catholic Church has not remained in a privileged position as it was then, they live in an atmosphere of shock when the Church, or its pastors, are challenged. Many times they stand in fear of speaking openly before this, many times, hostile culture. We need to go out of this traumatic experience to enter into a new evangelization. We have to help the faithful recognize that that kind of Church does not exist anymore, and it cannot be proposed again in this changed world. We cannot continue comparing our reality to that reality. We have to propose a new model of being Church and the model which corresponds most to today's reality is the primitive Christian community as it is described in chapters two and four of the Acts of the Apostles, and brought to life in the other writings of the New Testament. We have to compare the Church today to, and shape it on, that community".

Calendar

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

If you have something you would like to include in the calendar section, please send it to Vineyard@votf.org. To see the calendar of events, please follow the link.

Calendar

Winchester Area VOTF

MONDAY EVENING PROGRAM, sponsored by the WINCHESTER AREA VOTF, held at 7:30 pm at ST. EULALIA'S CHURCH, 50 Ridge Street, Winchester. For questions, go to the web site <http://www.votfwinchester.org> or contact Frances Shawcross, 781-729-8925, frances.shawcross@comcast.net.

Monday, November 10: Dr. Patricia Ewick of Clark University and Dr. Marc Steinberg of Smith College, sociologists who have been studying Winchester Area VOTF since 2007, will present an update of their study. The presentation is called “Rebuilding a Ship

at Sea: The Challenge of Changing the Church” and is the result of their study of an example of a grassroots organization, Winchester’s VOTF.

Monday, November 17: Prayer Experience with Bob Short, Director of Ministry at Youville Hospital.

SIXTH ANNUAL FAITH FORMATION PROGRAM sponsored by the LYNN, NORTH SHORE and SEACOAST AREA AFFILIATES of Voice of the Faithful in collaboration with the Department of Theology, Boston College. This year's theme is "THE LITURGICAL YEAR: SEASONS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH." Unless otherwise indicated, all events are on Sunday from 7:00-9:00 pm. Everyone is welcomed. Refreshments are served. Financial contributions always appreciated.

Thursday, November 20, at St. Rose of Lima, Topsfield. A panel of local pastors will speak about “What it is like to be a priest today!” The panel will include Rev. Mark Mahoney, Pastor of St. Rose of Lima in Topsfield; Rev. Msgr. Paul Garrity VF, Pastor of St. Mary’s in Lynn; Rev. Marc Piche, Pastor of Immaculate Conception, Newburyport; Rev. Wallace Blackwood, Pastor of Sacred Heart, Manchester-by-the-Sea and St. John the Baptist, Essex.

CONCORD AREA VOICE OF THE FAITHFUL (Acton, Bedford, Carlisle, Concord). Thursday, November 6, 7:30 pm, at St. Irene’s Church -187 East Street, Carlisle – “How to be a Catholic in a Changing World (and a Changing Church)”. This is the second of six lectures by Michael O’Laughlin. “If lay people are going to have a greater say in the Church, then we all have to do some homework to become more knowledgeable about the Church, its history and its core assumptions and concerns. Otherwise, how can we have much of a say?” Michael O’Laughlin, ThD, is a convert to Catholicism and trained as a theologian with four degrees in that field. (Sponsor: St. Irene Adult Education Program.) All are welcome. Questions: call Ernest Carabillo, 978-371-2166.

PAULIST CENTER FALL 2008 EVENTS, held at the Paulist Center, 5 Park Street, Boston, MA 02108, (617) 742-4460, 7:00 pm (unless otherwise noted). For more details or to find additional events, go to <http://www.paulistboston.com/calendar.asp>.

Tuesday, November 18: Boston University Professor Jennifer Knust speaks on “St. Paul and Women”. This is the second part of the Center's four-part series in observance of the Year of Paul. A donation of \$10 is suggested.

Friday, November 21, 6:00 pm: “Three Experiences of Prayer”. During this Friday evening mini-retreat, participants will be able to experience three forms of prayer: Jesus prayer, the prayer of petition, and lectio divina (prayer with scripture). There will be time for discussion and song. This is an excellent way to prepare for Advent. Paul Huesing, C.S.P. will lead the retreat. The cost of \$25 will include dinner. Pre-registration is required by Wednesday, November 19. Please call Vusi at the Center @ 617-742-4460.

Monday, November 24: "Hope in a Hopeless Situation: A Christian Reflects on the Arab-Israeli Conflict". Paulist Father Michael McGarry will offer an evening's reflection on his experience of serving 10 years as Director of the Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem. There, on the seam between Israel and Palestine, he has reflected on the meanings of memory, history, Christian values, and interreligious dialogue. Basing his reflections on the scriptures and cultural tensions among Jews, Christians and Muslims, he will invite those attending to a self-examination of the limits of intervention rather than a solution to this most difficult situation.

The following events are part of Boston College's Church in the 21st Century Center. For more information about the events listed, visit www.bc.edu/church21.

Tuesday, November 11, 2008 at 5:30 p.m.

C21 Women's Series presents: "Jesus, Prophet of Divine Wisdom"

Dr. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza from Harvard University,
responses by Dr. M. Shawn Copeland and Dr. Lisa Sowle Cahill
Boston College "Heights Room", Corcoran Commons.

Register by phoning 617-552-0470 or by email to church21@bc.edu.

Tuesday, November 11, 2008 at 8:30 p.m.

AGAPE LATTE: Conversation series for undergraduate students.

Presenter: Bienvenu Mayemba, S.J. from Graduate School of A & S
Boston College, Hillside Café

Wednesday, November 12, 2008 at 4:30 p.m.

Jesus Through the Eyes of Paul

Thomas Stegman, S. J. from Boston College School of Theology and Ministry
Murray Function Room, Yawkey Athletics Center

Friday, November 14, 2008 at 9:00 a.m.

Encountering the Risen Christ: The Primary Task of Catechesis and Pastoral Ministry
Annual School of Theology and Ministry Renewal Day

Presentors: Jane Regan and Thomas Groome, School of Theology and Ministry
Boston College, Gasson 100

These events are free and open to the public.

Letter to the Editor

I felt the same way as Ms. Ferraro (see *In the Vineyard*, October 23 issue) after reading a statement by the Bishops about the economy. Are they blind that they didn't see the similarity???? I think they are. I think they are the ones Jesus talked about, the ones who are blind. They had better put on glasses because their people are ignoring them.

B. Kishler

Book Corner

AN IRISH TRAGEDY: How Sex Abuse by Irish Priests Helped Cripple the Catholic Church

By Joe Rigert

Baltimore, Crossland Press, 2008, available at Amazon.com for \$10.99

Reviewed by Thomas Doyle

A number of books have been written about sexual abuse by Catholic clerics. Some are the gut-wrenching stories of victims themselves, told in their own words or through another. Some are polemical in that they confront the official Church for its hypocritical response while demanding both recognition and action to help solve the problem. Still others are scholarly ventures into the mysterious depths of this unique socio-cultural phenomenon by academics from a variety of disciplines. All are seeking answers as to “why.” The answers are much more complex and elusive than simply saying “celibate priests are sexually dysfunctional” or “bishops only want to protect their turf.” Both are true statements but there are many more “whys.”

To read more of Thomas Doyle’s review:

Review of *An Irish Tragedy: How Sex Abuse by Irish Priests Helped Cripple the Catholic Church*

Joe Rigert is an investigative journalist with an uncanny ability to ask the right questions and a tireless capacity to find the answers. With *An Irish Tragedy* he has moved into territory not yet explored by those seeking answers, namely the ethnic component to clergy abuse. The Irish clergy are natural subject of inquiry. I must admit that I underestimated and undervalued the causal relationship between the Irish Catholic culture and the fact that a significant number of clergy abusers in the U.S. are either Irish immigrants or of Irish descent. The author did much more than simply provide a well documented exposition of sexual abuse by Irish priests in the U.S. He went to Ireland to look at the roots and in doing so he became immersed in the Irish expression of Catholicism, especially the rather bizarre brand of sexual morality.

An Irish Tragedy is an apt title for this book because it describes precisely the end result of the continuum of excessive and superstitious piety, toxic clerical control and a twisted sexual morality which has all converged into too many cases of sexual abuse of minors and deceitful cover-up by bishops.

Sex abuse by Catholic clergy is not limited to a “church” problem. It is a deeply rooted, complex flaw in society in general because the results impact so many aspects of our daily lives. Many have arrived at the conclusion that expecting the official Roman Catholic Church to accomplish anything like a basic change of attitude marked by an honest recognition of the problem followed by concrete and realistic steps to help bind the wounds and reduce the chances of future abuse is completely futile. It is left to writers like Joe Rigert to probe deeply into the dark, mysterious and malignant shadows of the Church to find more answers.

This book is foundational to comprehending the breadth of sexual abuse, the rank duplicity of the hierarchy from the popes on down and the deep roots the causality has in our culture, both religious and secular. *An Irish Tragedy* will have a long shelf life because it will remain an invaluable resource for those who are compelled to probe deeply in order to find the answers to the “whys”. The answers are pivotal as we strive to move past the institutionalized dishonesty of the Catholic Church in order to create a religious environment where children and the vulnerable are safe, not only from dysfunctional clerics but from a dysfunctional Church.

Thomas Doyle, a Dominican priest, canon lawyer and author, is an international authority on clergy sex abuse; he has testified in hundreds of legal cases on behalf of abuse victims.

Baltimore, Crossland Press, 2008, available at Amazon.com for \$10.99

Questions? Comments? Please send them to Siobhan Carroll, Vineyard Editor at Vineyard@votf.org. Unless otherwise indicated, I will assume comments can be published as Letters to the Editor.