



Parish Voice Communities: A New Domain for Prayer Based Affiliates

Presented at VOTF National Meeting June 10, 2011

Background

Voice of the Faithful is a unique organization ... because it is one of the few reform groups throughout all of history whose goal is to bring about change from the inside. If we are to achieve our goal we must do so in an atmosphere of community, spirituality and prayer. That is the reason why the Spiritual & Communal Growth Team is an integral part of our *Voices in Action* Strategy. And that is why there is a Prayer Resource Center on the VOTF website.

Now with that said, we all know that Voice of the Faithful has been an activist organization that seeks to bring about renewal within our Church, and justice for the abused. In fact, I suspect that most of us here today have signed petitions, written letters to the editor, joined vigils or picket lines, or lobbied elected representatives.

Progress has been slow, however, because Church leaders are determined to hold on to their power, whatever the cost, and even if it means that thousands of good people walk away from the Church each year in frustration. So, if we have learned anything these past nine years, it is that our fight for renewal will be a long one and that, in the meantime, other serious faults have appeared in the foundation of our Church that threaten its stability ... and urgently need attention.

Just a few examples:

- Unprecedented exodus of Catholics from the Church of their birth
- Treatment of women
- Financial mismanagement
- Exclusion of the laity from meaningful decision making
- Squandered moral authority of Church leaders
- Serious priest shortage

So what can we do about it?

Parish Voice Communities

The answer lies in Parish Voice Communities. Experience has shown that few people are born to be rebels and activists, even in a righteous cause. So if VOTF is to succeed in our quest to renew our Church from within, we need to energize the majority of Catholics who love the Church, see it in disarray; and yet cannot bring themselves to withhold donations or walk on picket lines.

What the Spiritual & Communal Growth team hopes to do is extend the mantle of renewal to those who love our Church but see the road to renewal as one going through prayer and the Holy Spirit. Here is how we see it working, and we are looking for your comments and suggestions.

Ideally, a Parish Voice Community can be likened to a parish ministry whose members come together regularly for the express purpose of:

- Exploring relevant issues and petitions that affect the Church and its members, and praying for God's guidance.
- Undertaking occasional projects and performing related services within the parish that enhance the shared community and "ownership" that flows from our baptism and our membership in the mystical body of Christ.
- Carrying-out joint projects with other affiliates, or with the national organization (such as national VOTF events or celebrations, days or evenings of prayer at a local religious community, retreats and seminars, etc.)
- Becoming part of the "fabric" of the Church.

Organization of Parish Voice Communities

Communities are a distinct type of affiliate, and would be organized as:

- Discreet stand-alone groups within a parish, or across several parishes as a "community cluster," or as
- Part of an existing affiliate (e.g., an affiliate prayer team that might also provide prayers and prayer services for regular affiliate meetings), or
- As part of a "virtual" parish voice community comprised of Individual members who sign up for the S&CG team's On-line Intercessory Prayer Group.

Parish Voice Communities would be linked for support to the national organization through the affiliate Leadership Team which would act as a "clearing house" for ideas and activities. They would also have direct access to the S&CG VIA team through the VOTF website. PVC leaders would also be included on the distribution of all additions or updates to the S&CG resource center.

Resources Available to Parish Voice Communities

1. The S&CG team section of the VOTF website is a primary, but not necessarily sole, source of materials that would be useful to Parish Voice Communities. The Resource Center:

-
- Explores the source of such topics as Spirituality, Prayer and Devotions.
 - Provides a wide range of prayer forms and services from devotional prayers such as Stations of the Cross, to liturgies, litanies, Eucharistic Services, Psalms, and novenas with background examples, sources and references.
2. Meeting formats might include:
 - Designated days or evenings of prayer
 - Topical prayer forms or services incorporated into a regular meeting
 - Presentation and discussion of readings for application to today's problems, and development of appropriate petitions that benefit the Church or its members
 - A day or evening of prayer led by an invited cleric or religious
 - Eucharistic services, retreats or book reviews and discussion groups
 3. Interested members of the community, especially those who are unable to travel or are confined to home, would be invited to participate in VOTF's Online Intercessory Prayer Group.

Launching Parish Voice Communities

Development and roll out of this initiative lies with the S&CG team for 2011. Following approval of the general approach by the team, we hope to follow this process:

1. Distribute a copy of the proposal for comments and recommendations to:
 - Members who attend the ACC
 - The Affiliate Leadership Team
 - The Local Action Team of the *Voices in Action*, and
 - The Officers and Executive Director
2. Following comments from the initial reviewers, we would ask the Affiliate Leadership Team to distribute the proposal to all affiliates, both active and inactive, for comments, suggestions and, if appropriate, incorporation into their respective affiliate organization structure or as in the start-up of a new affiliate.
3. Following announcement by the Affiliate Leadership Team to affiliates, we would ask the executive director of VOTF to undertake a VOTF-wide recruitment plan involving all available forms of VOTF communications, including *In the Vineyard*, *Focus*, the VOTF website, and the VOTF Facebook page and Twitter account.

Please send your comments and suggestions about our plan to Kevin Connors at fcon101596@optonline.net