

Saying farewell and hello to VOTF leaders

After 16 years, Donna Doucette retires as VOTF Executive Director. and Leslie Scales is named the new ED



Donna B. Doucette

Dear Friends,

“Friends” is a word I feel applies to all of you I have met these past 16 years whether in person, by email, or via Zoom.

August 31 is my official retirement from Voice of the Faithful. That is exactly 16 years since I began working as Executive Director. As much as I still love the work we do and, more importantly, the people with whom I do it, I am not

as young, or as healthy, as I once was, and the time has come to let someone else pick up the reins. You will be in excellent hands with Leslie Scales as your new Executive Director. This is only a farewell from my current role, however, rather than a goodbye to you, because I will continue working on VOTF’s Synod project—and to answer the phone if Leslie calls!

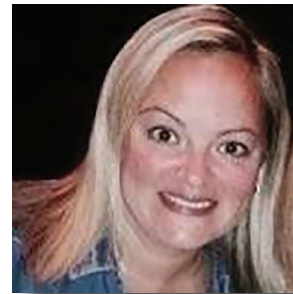
Looking back, I will remember not only our many accomplishments these past years but also, as I said, the wonderful people I have met. From the workers and volunteers at the office to the volunteers spread across the U.S. and into other nations, to the previous leaders who offered their counsel and support, to the many donors who trusted us to speak for them and who lent their own voices to our efforts.

There are too many of you to name, but please know that you are in my heart and in my thoughts and forever will remain there, under a huge tent named “people I have been blessed to know.”

(Continued on Page 3)

VOTF board chair welcomes new ED

I am happy to announce that VOTF has hired a new executive Director, Leslie Scales. Leslie is an experienced executive director,



Leslie Scales

with expertise in growing and leading non-profit and for-profit organizations. She comes to us with enthusiasm for our mission and goals. Leslie has proven experience working with a board, managing profit and loss, event planning and execution, establishing partnerships, and relationship management. I am excited to be working with Leslie, as I am sure you will be. Please join me in welcoming Leslie to her new position. Leslie’s email is LScales@votf.org.

Voice of the Faithful has been blessed for the past 16 years to have Donna Doucette as our executive director. Donna’s contributions to VOTF are too numerous to list. Donna ran our national office during a time when we evolved from being affiliate-based to being a more centralized organization focused on the efforts of the working groups.

She was responsible for some of our best fundraising, championed the annual conferences, and ensured that we grew with the times by posting videos of the keynotes on our website, as well as establishing VOTF’s

(Continued on Page 3)

Synod on Synodality update: for the first time, the laity will vote, including women

16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops takes place in Rome Oct. 4-29, 2023, and October 2024



The upcoming Synod on Synodality may very well be the most important event in the life of the Church since Vatican II, not least because this will be the first

synod in which the laity, including women, will vote. The 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will take place in two sessions in Rome in October 2023 and October 2024.

Considering Pope Francis' pick of delegates, the decisions made at the Synod could alter the course of the Catholic Church forever.

In April, the Vatican announced that, for the first time in history, the Oct. 4-29 Synod of Bishops will include lay men and women as full voting members of the Catholic Church's primary consultative body.

Each of the seven global regional bishops' conferences also has nominated 10 participants for the gathering, along with five religious women and five religious men from the two global umbrella groups representing men and women's religious orders.

The list of delegates, released this past July, includes noted LGBTQ+ advocate Jesuit Fr. James Martin and all four U.S. cardinals created by Pope Francis, offering a clear sign that despite often being a minority in the U.S. church, voices such as these—in alignment with the Pope's thinking on synodality and renewal—will become part of the discussion on the future of the Catholic Church.

Cardinals Blase Cupich of Chicago; Wilton Gregory of Washington, D.C.; Robert McElroy of San Diego; and Joseph Tobin of Newark, New Jersey, are among 48 persons hand-selected by the pope to take part

in the October Synod. The meetings there will consider a range of sensitive issues in church life, including the role of women, LGBTQ Catholics, clergy sex abuse and more.

In addition, Boston's Cardinal Sean O'Malley—a member of the pope's council of cardinal advisers—and Seattle's Archbishop Paul Etienne were among the pope's personal nominations.

The 10 North American delegates include:

- Sami Aoun, a Maronite Catholic from Quebec;
- Cynthia Bailey Manns, director of adult learning at St. Joan of Arc Catholic Community in Minneapolis, Minnesota;
- Catherine Clifford, a theology professor at St. Paul University in Ottawa, Canada;
- Richard Coll, executive director of the Department

CHURCH

The Synod on Synodality puts "U" back into Ch^urch.

of Justice, Peace and Human Development for the U.S. Catholic bishops;

- Sr. Chantal Desmarais, Sister of Charity of St. Mary;
- Fr. Ivan Montelongo of El Paso, Texas;
- Wyatt Olivas, a young adult musician from Cheyenne, Wyoming;
- Julia Oseka, a student at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia;
- Sr. Leticia Salazar, Order of the Company of Mary Our Lady and chancellor of the Diocese of San Bernardino, California; and
- Linda Staudt, recently retired director of the London District Catholic School Board in Canada.

You can find the entire list of participants on the Vatican website at press.vatican.va.

Saying farewell and hello to VOTF leaders (*Continued from Page 1*)

Donna's letter ...

I will also remember every step of the journey towards fulfilling our 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.

The Spirit heard us, I believe, and has invited us through the Synod on Synodality—through ongoing synodal work—to step up and do just that.

So, while taking a break and resting from the daily demands of my soon-to-be-previous job, I will be lending my voice to that synodal effort. I hope you will join me in doing so, wherever you are and however you can make your thoughts known.

I also pray you will continue your support for all our other projects. Leslie will be relying on you, as I did, to keep our Voice strong. We are being heard, now, today. Let's not lose our chance to make lasting changes that bring Church into the 21st century, renewing the synodal way of its earliest institution.

Peace and blessings,



VOTF Executive Director (until Aug. 31)

Board Chair's letter ...

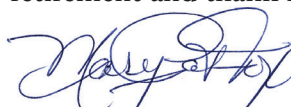


Donna (left) and Mary Pat at VOTF's table during the 2023 AUSCP National Assembly

working relationship with the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests; and spearheading the VOTF Synod process. In my opinion, we can all be proud of VOTF's Synod submissions.

Donna has decided to retire. We will miss her. Fortunately, she will continue to be involved in our relationship with the AUSCP (as she is the only lay person on their board) and the Synod process.

Please join me in wishing Donna all the best in her retirement and thank her for a job well done!



Chair, Board of Trustees

VOTF refresher course

VOTF seeks to address transform a Church where sexual abuse of our children proceeded unchecked by accountability; where the decisions of bishops to protect abusers and forsake the abused caused great human suffering and sapped the moral authority of the Church; where the mechanisms that should check this abuse have not been open to the People of God; and where the divide between clergy and laity impoverishes our efforts to live out the mission of Christ within the world. To address these excesses, to renew and reform the Church we love, we believe that participation of the laity is essential.

- We believe that the laity have the graced dignity, intelligence, responsibility, and obligation to cooperate in Church governance in a meaningful way, according to the norm of canon law (cf. Canon 129).
- We believe that meaningful lay participation is the only way to correct the flaws that have been revealed in the Church's institutional life.

- We believe that the council documents of Vatican II illuminate the pathway for lay involvement in the Church.
- We urge that the openness and mutual respect advocated by Pope John Paul II in *Ut Unum Sint* ("That All May Be One") be the model for meaningful dialogue among bishops and laity.

Our philosophy is centrist and inclusive. We are committed to providing an open and safe forum for ALL Catholics to freely and respectfully discuss the challenges of our Church, regardless of their views on specific issues. This inclusiveness commits us to collaboration and collegiality and to an organization that develops its actions "from the bottom up," with attention to all members of the organization and in communion with our Church.

We seek to model the behavior that we ask from our Church: centered in Christ, open to the gifts of all, inclusive and loving towards all, accountable to all members, and transparent in actions. Participating in VOTF requires a commitment to these principles.

Why give to Voice of the Faithful? *Try it. You'll feel better.*

We all know how great it feels to receive gifts. However, the joy of **getting** is short-lived. Our lives are richer when we share, and that inner joy comes from helping others. When you give to Voice of the Faithful, you are helping to raise the Spirit-led voices of the Faithful who believe that lay Catholics must speak up on issues of major importance to the Church, to the governance and guidance of the Church.

Such giving creates in you an intrinsic reward far more valuable than what you give, nourishing your soul. As Hebrews 6:10 says, "God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them."

We know that meaning, fulfillment, and happiness come from service, not from being self-centered. When you donate to VOTF, you may not be serving in the sense that Mother Teresa did, but you will be contributing to programs and projects designed and executed to help align the institution of the Church more to your spiritual goals and to create a space in the Church where you will find like-minded Catholics.

When people are asked why they donate to a particular cause, they might answer: God wants it; I feel better about myself; I want to share; it's only right. The fact is that, when you focus on giving to others, you are less likely to be consumed by your own concerns. When you give to Voice of the Faithful, you get the opportunity to be part of the future of your Church.

You are probably familiar with many of our programs, such as our three annual reports on accountability and transparency in diocesan finances, laity in Church governance, and protection of children, as well as our involvement with the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests, and our input into the Synod on Synodality,

which actually has been your input through our many Synod listening sessions. You can read about all our work on our website at www.votf.org, and you can make your donation there, as well.

True happiness or union with God comes from what we extend to others is a biblical truth. When you give to VOTF, you get to feel good about helping us achieve our goals of supporting survivors, supporting priests of integrity, and shaping structural change within the Church. We know that if people give just a little more of their treasure toward such goals, the Church can become more pastorally oriented.



Your gift to Voice of the Faithful will expand a hundredfold as we put it to use for the benefit of all the Faithful. You really will feel better about yourself. Try it. Go to www.votf.org and use the "Giving" drop down button at the top of the home page or scan the QR code below to make your donation.

Thank you in advance for your generosity.



Donate to VOTF

VOICE
OF THE FAITHFUL

Keep the Faith, Change the Church

P.O. Box 920408, Needham, MA 02492
781-559-3360, Fax 781-559-3364, www.votf.org

Voice of the Faithful® is a worldwide organization of Roman Catholics working to provide a prayerful voice, attentive to the Spirit, through which the faithful can participate actively in the governance and guidance of the Catholic Church. We support survivors of clergy sexual abuse, support priests of integrity, and work to help shape structural change in the Church.

KEEP UP-TO-DATE — Sign up to receive our free *In the Vineyard* e-newsletter at www.votf.org.