

MINUTES
Voice of the Faithful, Inc.
Board of Trustees Meeting, Oct. 17-18, 2014

Oct. 17, 2014

Board Members Present: Mark Mullaney, Mary Freeman, Margaret Roylance, Patricia Gomez, Larry Mulligan, Michael Ryan and Anne Southwood

Present via Conference Call: Mary Pat Fox

Also Present: Executive Director Donna B. Doucette, Public Relations Director Nick Ingala (taking minutes for Secretary Margaret Roylance), and VOTF COR representative Ron DuBois

Absent: Philip Megna

President Mark Mullaney called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

Opening Prayer: Mary Freeman offered the opening prayer and reflection based on Pope Francis' "Joy of the Gospel."

Announcement: Mark Mullaney announced that trustee Ed Greenan had resigned as of Oct. 10.

Consent Item: Minutes prepared by Secretary Margaret Roylance from Sept. 23, 2014, meeting were reviewed and discussed. The minutes were amended and approved unanimously (8-0) as amended.

Governance Committee Report

Mary Pat Fox presented the Governance Committee Report. Trustees discussed proposed changes regarding the election of board members. The discussion was suspended temporarily so that trustees could consider the Nominating Committee report [below]. After the Nominating Committee report and discussion, the Board considered ways to preserve grassroots participation while amending the bylaws to reduce ineffective election cycles. Trustees emphasized that members must continue to be asked for nominations for trustee positions. The Governance Committee will review comments and present amendments for vote at a later board meeting.

Nominating Committee Report

Mary Freeman presented the Nominating Committee Report. She asked trustees to consider whether we need an election when the number of nominees matches the number of open positions on the Board. She also described the obstacles encountered because of workloads, reluctance to "stand for election," time required for committee work, and so on. Trustees emphasized the need to maintain membership input for trustee nominations and to seek as much diversity as possible.

Discussion of the Synod on the Family

With this synod, the bishops are listening to each other, and some bishops have also listened to the people in their dioceses. With lay organizations present in Rome during the October synod meeting, the voices of lay Catholics are being heard as never before. So the answer to the question, “Are the voices of the faithful being heard at the synod?” is “yes” and “no.” However, although there is more transparency and honest exchange of ideas among the bishops, accountability is still in question.

Much opportunity exists between now and the synod in October 2015 to present additional lay voices to the bishops, and we must consider ways to present our message on the process so that as many lay voices as possible are heard. Trustees also emphasized the need to hear from the families of survivors—a type of family that appears to be underrepresented so far in the Synod.

Closing Prayer: Mark led everyone in the *Gloria Patri* to close the Friday evening session, which adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Oct. 18, 2014

Reconvene: 9:05 a.m.

Board Members Present: Mark Mullaney, Mary Freeman, Margaret Roylance, Patricia Gomez, Larry Mulligan and Michael Ryan

Present via Conference Call: Mary Pat Fox

Also Present: Executive Director Donna B. Doucette, Public Relations Director Nick Ingala, Development Coordinator Jayne O’Donnell (present via conference call), and VOTF COR representative Ron DuBois

Absent: Philip Megna, Anne Southwood

Opening Prayer: Led by Larry Mulligan, Psalm 31.

Discussion of Initiatives

The initiatives on the “Projects and Prospects in 2014: A Voice of the Faithful Scorecard,” developed during the February 2014 face-to-face board meeting, were discussed. This discussion was followed by project reports for the rest of the morning session.

Financial Working Group

Margaret reported that the Working Group has made progress gathering financial information on the 195 dioceses and eparchies in the United States. Since the start of data collection, there have been considerable changes. For example, many more dioceses are posting financial data

online, possibly as a result of Pope Francis' call for transparency and accountability. The planned VOTF financial transparency and accountability web portal will allow U.S. Catholics to assess such information, but we will need funding to keep the online database up-to-date and maintain the documents and links that provide additional information and guidelines. The group will submit a proposal for funding to various foundations.

Overall, the Working Group has a two-pronged approach to the financial transparency and accountability project: first, providing information online, with guides for assessment; second, a potential coordination with the Canon Law Society of America to determine whether dioceses are following Canon Law with regard to finance councils. (CLSA has completed a study on that question and will publish their findings.)

Mark reported that we already are using the financial database in bishop meetings. During a meeting with Bishop Blair in Hartford, Mark showed how other dioceses of the same size were reporting financial information while Hartford was not.

Mike Ryan's work on protecting the parish purse also will be an important aspect of the financial web portal. The portal also will include links on information available from other sources, such as the National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management

On her laptop, Donna demonstrated to the trustees how the FWG online diocesan finances database works.

Ordination of Married Men/Optional Celibacy

Mark introduced this discussion by saying that it and some of our other projects have lacked full attention because of our focus on financial accountability and transparency and the healing circle model of restorative justice. We must find ways to energize our members on these projects.

Ron said he had provided strong encouragement and support for members on this initiative, but members did not respond. Trustees suggested that perhaps we could find one married man who wants to be ordained and have him, with our help, go to his bishop to push for ordination using the Pastoral Provision we have described. But success of the initiative ultimately depends upon an individual bishop taking action, which we cannot control.

Ron would like to re-form the group that originally worked on this, with the aim of getting the U.S bishops to adopt their own protocol, the Pastoral Provision that is used to ordain married Protestant ministers as Catholic priests. We have an opportunity because the Pope has said that local churches (i.e., local bishops) may do this. Trustees then discussed ways to find bishops who may be interested in the proposal.

Clericalism

The Board discussed what steps to take next with the clericalism initiative. We have several efforts that can reduce clericalism: ordaining married men, ordaining women as deacons, etc.

We also need to watch how the curia in Rome is reformed. Although our theme at the 2014 Assembly was “taking talk to action,” some initiatives are not ready for action yet and clericalism might be one of them.

Bishop Selection

Donna reported that people are using the bishop selection web portal. As a way of spreading its use further, VOTF sends out news releases to dioceses where bishops are turning 75 and submitting their resignation letters. It was suggested that we might put a note on the planned financial portal that the bishop portal is also available.

Prayerful Voice

Donna said everything is online. The most recent paper is Ron’s on Eucharistic Origins. Donna said people click on these articles more than anything else on the VOTF website. Mary suggested that we open the Prayerful Voice pages with a request for prayer for our initiatives.

Lay Education

All of these resources are online. Nothing actively is taking place but we always look for new material to add.

Meeting with Bishops

Some meetings have taken place, and Mark is planning additional meetings with bishops.

Women Roles

Pat will be submitting material to the Women’s Roles pages on the new website, some of it centered on the goals made in 2011 when Pat began the initiative and the accomplishments since then. Pat said that this project had similar experiences to Ron’s with the workshops at the 2014 Assembly. Material and resources for increasing women’s roles were made available; people took them; every diocese was identified as needing a woman deacon. But they received no response.

Pat asked trustees for ideas on how we could identify women who want to be deacons. Margaret said women now are doing diaconal work but as pastoral associate employees of the dioceses, and associates may be reluctant to become deacons—they could lose their paychecks as well as be required to swear obedience to the bishop. Nonetheless, one advantage of being ordained is that a woman could preach; having women deacons would be advantageous to church unity.

Child Protection

The child protection portion of our website is anemic presently because it previously was bundled within survivor support. Resources are online, however.

Survivor Support

We are now focusing on the Healing Circle model of restorative justice. We are working with members of the Catholic Whistleblowers on this initiative. Bill Casey is the chairman. We have a couple of Healing Circles scheduled.

The Healing Circle potentially has a greater chance at garnering foundation funds than our other projects because it's not as Catholic-theology focused as our others.

The New Website

Donna demonstrated VOTF's new website and its benefits *vis a vis* the old website on her laptop. Trustees linked to the new site on their own devices and reviewed pages.

Financial Report

Donna provided the Financial Report. The match challenge has garnered more than \$20,000 to-date, which Mark said improved our financial picture. We have identified a person who may fund equipment for the financial database development. We need to get to the December appeal in good financial shape and then have good results to that appeal. Donna also outlined the equipment needs for the office and where we have already cut expenses.

Development

Mark noted that there are thin times from month to month in our funding during the year, as evidenced by the timeline for 2014-2015 that Jayne had distributed. A six-months reserve is important in getting through these thin times. Our goal is to get the six-month operating cash reserve and then work on securing an endowment for VOTF.

Jayne said the six-month operating expenses goal is challenging, and suggested we discuss the endowment while we're working on the operating expenses. Mary and Mary Pat have offered to help with the endowment project. Jayne talked about a range of fundraising events that could be held by the affiliates to benefit the endowment.

The Board discussed the Match Challenge, which was a good progression from a single donor, to the trustees, to the membership.

Jayne spoke about cultivation of major donors, and Mark reported on a positive meeting with a donor in New York regarding the website, which they liked very much. They talked about the range of initiatives and the one that got their attention the most was the Healing Circle.

Restorative Justice

Jayne reviewed the Healing Circle model of restorative justice; she serves on the coalition that has developed the project. VOTF will host the first Healing Circle in Boston Oct. 31/Nov. 1. The next one will take place in Alexandria, Virginia, and then Milwaukee, and then in the Cincinnati area, and then one potentially in Bridgeport.

Jayne estimated expenses for the Boston Healing Circle at about \$2,000. The cost could be \$4,000 to \$5,000 in the other areas because of transportation, meals, and lodging expenses. Jayne said the committee plans to approach foundations for funding and that we have received positive feedback from people who donated for the Healing Circle.

Other Items

Ron discussed the next COR meeting and will report on our Financial Transparency and Accountability project and the Healing Circle there. The Board again discussed what strategies we might use to influence the Synod on the Family in 2015. Among the suggestions: asking our members to write letters to their local bishops requesting a town hall-type meeting where the bishop could report his impressions of the synod; and asking members on our website to tell us what their thoughts, feelings, impressions about the synod in terms of their own families.

On parish financial accountability, Mike suggested that we post links on the website for direct access to resources that can ensure proper collection procedures in the parishes. He reported that a bishop in Miami said that cash collections went up significantly after they had instituted proper collection procedures in the parishes.

Mike has developed a security survey that can be used in parishes. We will make it available on the website. Mark suggested that someone on a parish finance council could be the one to initiate a survey.

Closing Prayer: *Gloria Patri*; the meeting was adjourned at 4:09 p.m.

Next Board Meeting: Nov. 18, 2014

Respectfully Submitted: Margaret Roylance, Secretary and Board Member

Future Meetings in 2014: Nov. 18. No meeting in December