

Minutes (Draft)
Board of Trustees Meeting (at Wellesley College Club)
Voice of the Faithful, Inc.
October 28-29, 2011

Board Members Present: Dan Bartley, Bill Casey, Ron DuBois, Mary Freeman, Mary Pat Fox, Pat Gomez, John Hushon, Elia Marnik (presiding), Mark Mullaney, Jayne O'Donnell, and Ed Wilson.

Officers Present: Janet Hauter, Kevin Connors, and Nick Mazza.

Executive Director: Donna Doucette.

Public Relations Director: Nick Ingala (Saturday)

Prayer Services were led by Mary Freeman.

Friday, October 28, 2011

1. Consent Agenda Items: Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the Board approved the minutes, as amended, of the meeting on September 27, 2011 (11-0-0).

2. Finances: Treasurer Kevin Connors noted a continuing trend over the last several months—excellent expense controls but a shortfall in expected revenue. If the revenue trend continues, it will pose a significant challenge to VOTF's FY 12 financial targets.

3. Nominating Committee: Committee Chair Ron DuBois reported that the advance notice about the next election of national officers was sent to members on October 18th and that the official notice of the nominations period will be sent on November 7th. Given that the committee has not identified any potential nominees to date, the Board will have to be in a position to provide alternative arrangements should a slate of nominees not emerge by the close of the period on December 6th.

4. 2012 Conference Report: Planning Committee Chair Jayne O'Donnell indicated that the focus of the conference will be VOTF's 10th Birthday Celebration with a theme of "Celebrate, Rejuvenate, Accelerate." Committee members are looking at three potential venues in Boston, with potential dates between mid-September and mid-October 2012. Jayne is forming subcommittees to plan logistics, communications, registrations, programs and funding, and she solicited volunteers from the leadership for the subcommittees. The conference format will be major addresses or panels followed by round table discussions, but there will not be breakout sessions. Jayne will apprise the leadership of more detailed plans as they develop.

5. Emily and Rosemary Fund: Fund committee Chair Mary Freeman briefed the group on the committee's recommendations following the recent review of applications. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the Board approved the recommendations (11-0-0).

6. Youth Focus Group Update: Board Chair Elia Marnik reported that two focus groups with youth had taken place and asked Trustees Ron DuBois and Mary Freeman to describe the experiences. Ron indicated that a diverse group of 7 young people met at the Paulist Center and indicated a strong interest in social justice concerns and services as well as in the Eucharist, but they showed little interest in reforming the Church. Mary reported a similar pattern among students at the University of Rhode Island, including an inclination to accept the Church as it is and ignore those parts that do not make sense to them.

Elia and several other VOTF leaders will attend a symposium on November 2, 2011, at Boston College, entitled, *Catholics in America, Persistence and Change*. VOTF Advisory Council member Bill D'Antonio will present findings of his research team's 5th survey of American Catholics. Elia will report any insights that may help VOTF's efforts to connect with youth. In the meantime, no additional youth focus groups will be scheduled.

7. **Executive Director's Report**: Donna Doucette answered questions about the report she submitted in advance of the meeting regarding a wide range of activities. She also briefed the leadership on a tentative plan to present an initiative akin to a Truth and Reconciliation process at the 2012 National Conference. The idea arose from a major donor who believes that such a process could benefit the many survivors whose other options to tell their stories and have them recorded are unavailable. Leadership response was favorable to further exploration of the idea. Donna will work with conference chair Jayne O'Donnell and committee member Bill Casey to develop a paper on the benefits, challenges and resource requirements for such a process.

Saturday, October 29, 2011

1. **Membership Survey**: Survey Chairperson Mary Pat Fox led a discussion of the survey results sent to the leaders prior to the meeting. She indicated that the survey committee presented the data according to three categories of respondents in order to gain a clearer sense of respondent thinking: those who financially contributed since 2009 (even if they contributed before that time); those who contributed before 2009 but not afterwards; those who never contributed financially. Mary Pat summarized the responses relative to each of the Voices in Action and noted that each platform committee will review the responses related to their activities in more detail. One of the notable commonalities among all the respondents was how many read the *Vineyard* and *Focus* communications but how few look at the VOTF website (at least intentionally). VOTF leaders now have a significant frame of reference in setting future direction and plans, and they will next present the results with a leadership summary to the members.

2. **Public Relations Plan**: PR Director Nick Ingala presented a substantial framework for improving and enhancing the success of VOTF's initiatives through a best-practices approach to PR. He emphasized the importance of aligning PR efforts with the rollout of plans as well as the critical influence of research, funding and advertising on developing and marketing those plans. Nick also indicated that full PR efforts are costly but that his proposal can be scaled to available human and financial resources. He also noted that a PR plan can only be effective if it supports a clearly-defined set of plans.

3. Officers' Recommendations for Future Direction

President Dan Bartley introduced two potential future directions that the Officers developed but around which they could not reach a consensus. Prior to discussion of the two options, he asked the leadership to indicate their sense of the risk that VOTF faces in order to sustain itself over the shorter term (1-2 years) and the intermediate term (2-5 years). Most indicated little risk in the shorter term with a few indications of higher to much-higher risk. Most were less confident about their estimate of the intermediate term risk because of uncertainty about the future on many levels.

Treasurer Kevin Connors presented and answered questions about one of the potential directions—*The Emerging Role of Reform-Minded Catholics: Strengthening Our Approach to Christian Spirituality*. It focused predominantly on developing prayer-based centers of Catholics committed to

renewal of Church life through local or virtual affiliates. The VOTF national office would serve as a central clearinghouse and advocate for local efforts.

Nick Mazza and Janet Hauter presented and answered questions about the second potential direction—*A Catholic Spring: A 2012 Experiment*. It focused predominantly on engaging Catholics to become 21st century disciples of the Gospels by banding together with a common sense of vision, spirituality, community, and action. VOTF would foster this experiment in 2012 and then gather participants in a retreat in 2013 in order to process outcomes and align future efforts.

The presentation of both proposals led to some very energetic conversation, but most leaders did not alter their estimate of shorter-term risk as a result of the proposals. During the conversation, Trustee Bill Casey presented a mini-alternative to the other two. Dan Bartley sought to gain a sense of what the leaders thought about future direction, but no clear picture emerged before the meeting ended.

4. **Miscellaneous:** Chair Elia Marnik reminded leaders about the impending Officers' nominations period and the need to find candidates to run for office. The leaders agreed that they will have to implement an alternative plan if a slate of Officers does not emerge by the end of the nominations period on December 6th.

Next meeting: Tuesday evening, November 22, 2011 at 7:00PM EST.