

VOTF WORKSHOP SUMMARY
Transparency and Accountability in Diocesan Finances
Montana Hustle - A Case Study

This workshop was attended by a total of 30 people, with attendance divided equally between the first and second session. We examined the case of a parish in rural Montana whose pastor was implicated in both misuse of funds and sexual abuse. After their pastor was removed from the Parish and suspended from ministry, the new Pastor established a Parish Finance Council (PFC). We learned from a member of that PFC how they uncovered the situation and the lessons they learned as they tried to work with their Bishop to achieve a just resolution. With her, we reviewed their situation and considered their possible courses of action.

We also considered tools being developed by VOTF to allow individual Catholics a better understanding of how their Diocesan finances are handled and how those practices compare with those of Dioceses across the country:

- Does your Bishop publish audited financial reports showing how your contributions are being used in the spirit of Pope Francis for the mission of the Church?
- In the absence of such reporting, have financial improprieties occurred and resources meant for the poor been misused?
- You will be able to go the VOTF website to learn more about each diocese.

Further considerations: Perhaps your Diocesan Bishop treats any funds received from the faithful in his Diocese as his to do with as he wishes without any accountability. Perhaps he fails to publish financial reports and invokes Corporation Sole as the basis for refusal to prosecute financial malfeasance, as did the bishop in Montana.

According to Canon 492, the Diocesan Finance Council (DFC) should allow the faithful a significant role in the use of financial resources, but perhaps your Diocese has no DFC or one with no real power.

What can the faithful do if the Bishop ignores Canon 492 and/or fails to provide adequate financial reports?

One suggestion is to write the following on the pledge slip for the Cardinal/Bishop's Appeal, put it in the envelope and return it:
"I cannot in good conscience contribute to the Diocese until the Diocese publishes audited financials. Sincerely, Your Name."