

Voice of the Faithful® 10th Year Conference— Attendees learn: “We never needed you more”

Our 10th Year Conference Sept. 14-15 in Boston brought together influential speakers intimately familiar with the clergy sexual abuse scandal, the Catholic Church and Voice of the Faithful®. They discussed how VOTF has affected survivors, priests, the Church, lay and clerical attitudes toward the Church and being Catholic, and explored what paths might lead to healing and renewal of our Church.

We also heard how much our decade of hard work and commitment has made a difference.

Our opening speaker Sept. 14 set the tone. In her speech, *Voice of the Faithful—Next Steps*, Illinois Supreme Court Justice, former NRB chair and first St. Catherine of Siena Award recipient Anne Burke

“I am here today, to salute you and your sense of imagination and creativity, two critically important components of Christian discipleship ... [that] give you your ‘voice.’ And now, after 10 years, we realize that without your voice, here in the United States, everyone’s freedom as a Catholic would be more threatened. Everyone’s liberty as a disciple would be more contained. We never needed you more.” — Illinois Supreme Court Justice Anne Burke

spoke about our dedication and perseverance. “And now, after 10 years,” she said, “we realize that without your voice, here in the United States, everyone’s freedom as a Catholic would be more threatened ... We never needed you more.”

The first speaker Sept. 15 was John Morgan, Chairman of the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland. Morgan stressed Ireland’s and the U.S.’ solidarity on the clergy sexual abuse issue and how devastating Ireland’s civil commission findings were.

“The scandalous revelations of the four (Irish) civil authority commissioned audits ...,” he said, “so destroyed



By Jason Bergman © Voice of the Faithful

Illinois Supreme Court Justice Anne Burke addresses VOTF 10th Year Conference.

the credibility of the institutional dimension of the Church that nothing less than a full examination of all files under the control of the bishop or congregational leader dealing in any way with child abuse was warranted ... Nothing less would suffice for survivors of abuse, for priests and lay faithful.”

Prof. Thomas Groome, Chairman of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry at Boston

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Order 10th-Year Book & Video



The book *Voices: Telling Our Stories*, written by VOTF members, and the video *Voice of the Faithful: A Retrospective*,

presented at the conference, were produced to mark our 10th year. To order your book and video, go to www.votf.org, click the Purchase VOTF Books, DVDs in the left-hand menu or the brochure icon on the right-hand side of the page, and follow the directions. You may purchase the book and video individually or as a package. The book and video are \$20 each, and \$35 as a package.

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College, spoke next on *What Faith? The Best About Being Catholic*. “The best is Jesus!” he said. “The new awareness of the centrality of Jesus to the Catholic Christian faith. Not the Bible, dogmas, sacraments, church laws, but at the heart, we find a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth ... I hope when we gather for the 25th celebration of VOTF, we say ‘Jesus.’”

Next to speak was Fr. Donald Cozzens of John Carroll University, recipient in 2009 of a VOTF Priest of Integrity Award. He took a priest’s look at VOTF at its 10-year mark. “Wouldn’t it be great,” he said, “if above every sacristy door, it said ‘Servants Entrance.’ I

considered what Catholic traditions might be viable for future generations.

Before concluding the conference by saying Mass for the assembly, Fr. James Connell, a Wisconsin parish priest,

“I pray for a holy indifference to the question, ‘have we (VOTF) made a difference? Yes, you did. You have. You are. What you have done for the last 10 years is ministry, and ministry should not be judged on any human measure.’” — Rev. Donald Cozzens, John Carroll University and recipient of VOTF’s Priest of Integrity Award in 2009

Canon lawyer, and courageous advocate of abuse survivors, called for Church leaders to reveal the complete truth about the clergy abuse scandal. He took the title of his talk from the Book of Proverbs 31:8: “*Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.*”

Fr. Connell addressed urgent issues and made recommendations. Among his urgencies were loss of voice, the need to reveal the whole truth, flawed review and audit of allegations, and scandal. Among his recommendations were developing a “keep the pressure

on” initiative, an association of priests, restorative justice initiative, and prayer.

Considering our post-Conference work, VOTF President/Chairman Mark Mullaney set our course: continuing support for survivors; increasing our understanding of clerical culture; promoting women’s rights in the Church, beginning with restoring the women’s diaconate; fostering financial responsibility, according to Canon Law; and seeking lay input into bishop selection.

[also] pray for a bold indifference to the question, ‘have we made a difference?’ Yes you did. You have. You are. What you have done for the last 10 years is ministry, and ministry should not be judged on any human measure.”

“Just a short note to thank all of you for the excellent and well run 10th Year Conference I just attended. You had a very informed, interesting and balanced group of speakers who complemented each other wonderfully. The facility and overall process was terrific and made it a very enjoyable, as well as informative and inspiring, experience.” — 10th Year Conference attendee

David Clohessy, Executive Director of SNAP, the nation’s largest and oldest self-help group for clergy sexual abuse survivors, followed a lunch-time preview of the HBO® documentary *Mea Maxima Culpa: Silence in the House of God*. His remarks revolved around the scathing view of the Church’s abuse scandal portrayed in the film.

Attendees next heard Jamie Manson, award-winning *National Catholic Reporter* columnist. Considering how important young people are to the Church, Manson spoke appropriately on *The Church and Young Catholics: Is There a Future?* She explored the unique impact the clergy sexual abuse crisis has had on young adult Catholics and



By Jason Bergman ©Voice of the Faithful

VOTF 10th Year Conference attendee interacts thoughtfully during a speaker Q&A—held after each presentation.



By Jason Bergman ©Voice of the Faithful

VOTF 10th Year Conference attendees read messages posted on the Lamentations Wall, where they found “in this sacred space whatever form of lamentation flows within you ...”

Jim Post, VOTF cofounder and former president, recently summed up the Conference. “As it now stands,” he said, “the leadership of the Catholic Church—in the U.S. and in the Vatican—is woefully in need of reform. To the 500 VOTF members who

gathered in Boston, the mantra still holds: *Keep the Faith, Change the Church.*”

VOTF Initiatives: Petition to Ordain Married Men as Priests; Clericalism Defined; Argument for Ordaining Women Deacons

Two key initiatives for VOTF's "Acceleration," as our 10th Year Conference motto proclaimed, are optional celibacy for the priesthood and the ordination of women deacons. Both efforts are key outcomes from our Conference. The following report highlights excerpts from the position papers distributed there. You can read the papers at www.votf.org—look for Conference Outcomes in the left-hand menu on the home page.

Ordaining Married Men as Priests

Every Catholic understands the need to receive the Eucharist regularly. We also understand the responsibility of our clerics to make the Eucharist widely available. Sadly, the decline in the number of priests and increase in the number of the faithful means the Eucharist will be less frequently available.

To help avoid this problem, Voice of the Faithful is petitioning American Bishops to ask the Vatican to allow the ordination to priesthood of married Catholic men. The ordination of married men as priests also would provide one counterbalance to the clerical culture (see clericalism below) many see as a foundation for clergy sexual abuse.

The ordination of married Catholic men could be allowed by applying the procedures used in Pastoral Provisions that have allowed married Episcopalian, Anglican and other Protestant clergy to be ordained in the Roman Catholic Church. We are asking the American Bishops to ask the Vatican to allow use of one of the following options:

1. **A New Pastoral Provision**—The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops would petition the Holy See to grant a new pastoral provision in favor of the grave ministerial needs of the Catholic faithful resulting from the scarcity of celibate priests in the United States, similar to the dispensation for former Episcopal sacred ministers.

2. **Support Actions of Individual USCCB Members**—If the USCCB refrains from action by the entire body, the group might resolve to provide fraternal support to brother bishops who individually might seek from the Holy See dispensations to ordain married Catholic men. This model parallels actions of bishops who have received permission to ordain ministers of Christian communities not embraced by the current provisions.

Defining & Heightening Awareness of Clericalism

How could our priests who were often so caring to the neglected and marginalized, so outspoken on issues


of human rights and justice, put the interests of the clergy above those of innocent children and above those of the People of God? VOTF considers that the normal support system of the ordained is often corrupted into a clerical culture of elitism. Many professions have support "cultures" which usually have checks and balances to ensure competence. In contrast, many priests have often employed the protective side of the clerical culture to provide a safe hiding place for their incompetence and even crimes.

According to David Gibson in *The Coming Catholic Church*, "Clericalism is the reflexive notion that clerics are a privileged fraternity whose sacred status guarantees them eternal protection from the reproaches of the world, even when they do wrong." This culture has allowed the abuse of children and the cover-up by the bishops. In addition, it seems to represent a mentality common to recent generations of clergy. Unlike other professional groups, no checks and balances exist in the clerical culture of the Catholic Church. The pope and the bishops hold absolute executive, legislative and judicial power.

Women as Ordained Deacons

One of the best kept secrets of the Catholic Church is that for the first half of its history, that is, for more than eleven centuries, women were ordained to the diaconate by bishops. Since then, the church has never quite dismissed nor promoted the notion of women deacons. Numerous bishops have brought it up to numerous popes over the years. Yet, since the close of the Vatican II, the Vatican has not moved to restore the female diaconate in the Catholic Church, even though other recognized churches have retained or restored women deacons. Independent of the discussion concerning women priests, the church today has both the authority and the power to ordain women deacons.

Despite the Vatican's silence, a number of academics have actively pursued the issue of ordaining women as permanent deacons, including Drs. Phyllis Zagano, Gary Macy, and William Ditewig.

The key points in the conversation have been: 1) What did women deacons do? 2) Were women deacons ever sacramentally ordained? 3) Does the ordained diaconate share in the sacrament of order? 4) Does the ordained diaconate share in the sacrament of order in such a way that it is part of the sacerdotal priesthood? 

St. Catherine of Siena & Priest of Integrity Awards Presented at 10th Year Conference

Our 10th Year Conference saw the presentation of two St. Catherine of Siena Distinguished Lay Person Awards and the Priest of Integrity Award. Theologian and author Phyllis Zagano and historian and lecturer Joseph O'Callaghan received the St. Catherine of Siena Award. Fr. Patrick Bergquist of the Diocese of Fairbanks, Alaska, received the Priest of Integrity Award.



Phyllis Zagano, theologian and internationally recognized Catholic studies specialist, is research associate and adjunct professor of religion at Hofstra University and writes the "Just Catholic" column for *National Catholic Reporter*. She has written and spoken widely supporting women in the Church. Among the 15 religious studies


books she has written or edited, *Holy Saturday: An Argument for the Restoration of the Female Diaconate in the Catholic Church* received the 2002 Catholic Press Association and College Theology Society Annual Book awards. She is founding cochair of the American Academy of Religion's Roman Catholic Studies Group.

Joseph O'Callaghan, an historian, educator, philosopher, lecturer, author, and activist, has long been a champion for the wounded and victimized. As a founding member of VOTF in the Diocese of Bridgeport, Connecticut, he personifies the virtues of courage and honesty, humbly



speaking truth to power while seeking justice for survivors, support for priests of integrity and change in the hierarchical Church. O'Callaghan is a professor emeritus of medieval history at Fordham University and former director of Fordham's Center for Medieval Studies. He is past president of the American Catholic Historical Association and the Academy of American Historians of Medieval Spain.



Drawing on the potency of the long and dark winters of the Alaskan wilderness, **Fr. Patrick Bergquist's** book, *The Long Dark Winter's Night, Reflections of a Priest in a Time of Pain and Privilege*, grapples with the seemingly endless darkness of the sexual abuse crisis. Fr. Donald Cozzens, award-winning author and noted international commentator on religious and cultural issues, said of Fr. Bergquist's book: "I know of no other work that has so insightfully captured the grieving spirit of Catholic priests in the current vale of tears wrought by the clergy sexual abuse scandals. *The Long Dark Winter's Night* gives way to the morning light of hope that always follows honest grieving. In his poetic prose, Patrick Bergquist grieves for us all." Fr. Bergquist provides pastoral care for Holy Mary Guadalupe Parish, St. Theresa's Parish, Clear Air Force Base, and the native villages of Tanana and Huslia. 

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Voice of the Faithful® is a movement of 35,000 concerned mainstream Roman Catholics worldwide 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. Our goals are to support survivors of clergy sexual abuse, support priests of integrity; and shape structural change in the Church.

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