

Bishops' zero tolerance for clergy sexual abuse apparently doesn't always apply **Voice of the Faithful® contacts USCCB to clarify**

Zero tolerance for clergy child sexual abuse has been promised by U.S. Catholic bishops since 2002, adopted in USCCB documents, given the force of Church law and stated repeatedly by Pope Francis, but the policy does not always seem to apply, and Voice of the Faithful® wants to know whether zero tolerance has been abandoned.



Zero tolerance is an “essential norm” of USCCB’s 2002 Dallas Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. These essential norms have the force of canon law, which, in theory, bishops are supposed to obey. But several instances have been reported of priests who, though credibly accused of child sexual abuse, remained in ministry.

A California newspaper reports Fr. Eric Swearingen recently became pastor of a Visalia, California, parish, even though he had been found guilty of child sexual abuse in a civil trial.

Fr. Ted Szudera of the Great Falls-Billings, Mont., Diocese, was reportedly seen earlier this year saying Mass at a local Catholic college when he had been named in an unresolved child sexual abuse civil lawsuit two years ago. The diocese at the time reportedly conducted its own investigation, dismissed the allegations as unfounded and kept Szudera in ministry. Szudera also then served on the diocesan committee that handled clergy sexual abuse allegations.

Archbishop John Nienstedt of the St. Paul and Minneapolis Archdiocese has apparently ignored zero tolerance for several years. Minnesota Public Radio has documented the scandal in-depth in its four-part series *Betrayed by Silence*, available at minnesota.publicradio.org.

In a well known case, Robert Finn of the Kansas City-St. Joseph Diocese remains a bishop despite having been

convicted of failing to report a priest for child pornography. That priest, Fr. Shawn Ratigan, is serving a 50-year prison sentence after pleading guilty to federal charges of producing and attempting to produce child pornography.

VOTF suspects many more cases where the zero tolerance policy has been ignored and twice wrote earlier this year to Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, USCCB president, concerning the status of the zero tolerance policy. To date, VOTF has not received a response. **f**

2014 Assembly gathers faithful to focus on action

Voice of the Faithful® members gathered in assembly in April to “turn talk into action.” This is what VOTF member **Gary Chicoine** of Jeffersonville, Vermont, recalls:

The hour-long talk by John L. Allen, Jr., former Vatican reporter for *National Catholic Reporter*, now covering Catholic news for *The Boston Globe*, was the highlight. Of course, his topic was Pope Francis, whom an Italian magazine recently called “a miracle of humility in an age of vanity.”

From his direct observation and his Vatican contacts Allen characterized three pillars of the Francis Papacy:

- Leadership as service set through the pope’s example;

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John L. Allen, Jr.

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- Achieving a missionary Church with emphasis on the social gospels and a shift of focus away from sexual and reproductive morality; and
- Mercy as a core Christian virtue.

He closed by saying, the “Francis effect” is causing the world to refocus its attention on the Catholic Church. He also offered some advice—for progressives, who are hopeful but impatient with Francis, ‘Be patient and not too quick to wave the latest quote in the face of conservatives’; for conservatives who are not enamoured of Francis, ‘Do not be too quick to judge and fall into despair.’

Fr. Tom Reese, senior analyst at *NCR* and former editor-in-chief at *America*, followed Allen. His comments also focused on Pope Francis and compared his life while in Argentina and first year as pope to the life of St. Francis:

- Pope Francis’ hope is for a “poor Church for the poor,”



Fr. Thomas Reese, SJ

Fr. Reese ended with a challenge to read Sunday Scripture readings before Sunday, and then at Mass, listen to what the homilist says that penetrates to your heart. Do not be afraid to question anything that doesn’t so penetrate. **f**

similar to St. Francis’ love for the poor.

- The Church is to be a Church of reconciliation and forgiveness.
- The Church is to be a Church of love because the Gospel enters people through their hearts and not through rational argument. Christianity is spread by personal example, not reason.

VOTF’s Restorative Justice: helping to heal our Church



Pathways to Healing & Reform panel members are, left to right, William Casey, former VOTF board chair, Fr. James Connell, a founding member of Catholic Whistleblowers, and Prof. Thomas Porter, a Boston University theology teacher concentrating on conflict resolution.

Following up on wisdom coming out of the **Pathways to Healing & Reform** panel discussion at the 2014 Assembly, VOTF is collaborating on a **Restorative Justice** model for healing our Church expected to kick off this fall in Boston. Former VOTF board chair and panelist William Casey here answers several questions about such a model:

Why promote healing?

- Healing is a core teaching and practice of Jesus.
- Healing is critical to spiritual, psychological and physical recovery and wholeness.
- Healing has been lost in the struggle to redress sexual abuses and victimization of children by clergy, institutional leaders, and others in faith communities.

Why promote Restorative Justice?

- Healing without justice is not healing for most victim/survivors.
- Criminal and civil justice systems frequently pass over the healing needs of victims/survivors.

What is a Restorative Justice Model?

A Restorative Justice (RJ) model is ONE option that can enable healing from the harm caused by sexual abuse of children in the Catholic Church. The model involves:

- A facilitated conversation among those affected by a specific instance of abuse in which the participants are ready, willing, and able to acknowledge the harm, speak and listen to its effects, obtain answers to questions that inflame it, and seek to repair harm and restore relationships, as much as is feasible, in a mutual agreement.
- Participants include a professional facilitator, victim/survivor, abuser, abuser’s hierarchical supervisor, and others affected by the harm, such as family members.
- The facilitated conversation is based on RJ principles and practices that include:
 - separate meetings between facilitator and each participant prior to the conversation to ensure readiness, willingness, and ability to participate without further harm resulting.
 - voluntary participation during the conversation.

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- o a safe and respectful space in which participants can be honest and candid.
- o a level of mutually agreed on confidentiality regarding what is said in the conversation.
- o a good-faith effort to find mutual agreement on specific commitments to repair the harm and restore relationships, as much as is feasible.

How can the model fit the needs of participants?

The model provides an opportunity for:

- each participant to speak in a safe space, where each has equal value and where honest conversation about harm and repair of harm can occur with the assistance of a professional facilitator.
- victims/survivors to pursue healing needs, needs not addressed in criminal or civil proceedings—if they prefer to pursue their healing needs in a forum other than legal proceedings, needs like direct communication to the abuser of the effects of the abuse on their lives, or influence over the terms of any repair of the harm, including accountability.

- abusers to acknowledge harm they caused and its effects, answer questions victim/survivors ask, and have a voice in the terms of repair and restoration.
- each participant to maintain full control over continuing the conversation to conclusion and over any terms of agreement discussed in the conversation.
- all participants to seek repair of any harm and restoration of relationships with no expectations for either closure or forgiveness (even though one or both outcomes may occur).

When is the Restorative Justice model not appropriate?

- Participation would interfere with a judicial proceeding relating to the abuse.
- Victims/survivors are not interested in participating.
- The abuser, or hierarchical official responsible for oversight of the abuser, does not acknowledge and take responsibility for abuse, or is not willing to make a good-faith effort to repair the harm.
- Participants insist on expectations that are counter to RJ principles and practices. **f**

2014 Assembly workshops show VOTF in action

For those who could not join us at our **2014 Assembly: Turning Talk into Action** this past April, here are brief summaries of each of our workshops. More details are at votf.org, along with links to additional material.

Female Voices

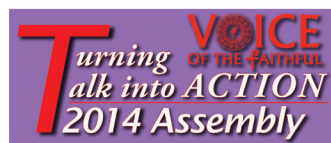
These sessions featured four women in pastoral ministries, who described their experiences and took part in discussions. A primary topic of discussion was how to make the Church look the way we want 20 years from now: women must shift from being victims to reformers, must develop a mature action conscience, and must capture the imagination and energy of youth, then engage and support youth.

The panelists provided some thoughtful summary reactions:

- Women are the doers of the "local" Universal Church;
- Women are not at the table, including sacrificial table;
- Women must operate supportively and "see it to be it";
- Women need to define their roles and make that space for those roles in the Church.

Optional Celibacy

Attendees framed discussion around closing of parishes and declining numbers of priests. They discussed reasons why and expressed distress that the Eucharist may not be readily available with fewer and fewer priests. All agreed on several solutions: allow married priests; allow women priests; return resigned priests to active ministry; use women deacons;



import Third World priests; and ordain permanent deacons to priesthood. Discussing VOTF's petition to the U.S. bishops for a

new Pastoral Provision to ordain married Catholic men, all agreed we need to push this forward now.

Clericalism

Stating, "We are the prime enablers of clericalism," elicited a debate about the indelible mark of baptism and the meaning of ontological (priests are taught, and believe, they are different and superior to other beings).

What can we do? Several priests said we need to keep sharing the love and warmth of Jesus, recognize the importance of laity being integrated into service and engender adult relationships between laity and clergy.

You will find a link at votf.org to *Are Clergy Nearer to God than Thee? Voice of the Faithful Takes on Clericalism*, a recording of a clericalism workshop by a reporter from the NPR station in Middletown, Connecticut.

Survivor Support: What You Can Do

VOTF's first Priest of Integrity Award recipient, Fr. Thomas Doyle, presented this workshop. He said the clergy abuse scandal is far from over and you can take steps to bring

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about change and greater healing for survivors/victims.

At this point, there have been enough meetings, discussions, symposia, etc. Instead, you can:

- actively support legislative reform;
- invite survivors and supporters to speak publicly;
- be present to support survivor demonstrations;
- challenge Church officials who speak or act harmfully toward survivors or harbor credibly accused clerics;
- donate to survivor support organizations.

Parish Finances: Protecting the Parish Purse

The vast majority of churchgoers assume incorrectly that whatever they place in the collection basket each weekend will be properly deposited into the parish account.


All parishes are vulnerable, regardless of size or the number of volunteers available to ensure secure collections. And hurting someone's feelings by suggesting collections are not presently secure should not enter the equation.

Any parish, at a minimum, can use serially numbered, tamper-evident polyethylene bags, or drawstring sacks, or zippered bags, along with serially numbered, tamper-proof seals to protect their collections. Visit churchsecurity.info.

Diocesan Finances: Montana Hustle, A Case Study

Attendees examined the case of a pastor in rural Montana who was implicated in misuse of funds and sexual abuse.

They also considered tools VOTF is developing to give Catholics an understanding of finance practices in their own diocese and how they compare with those of dioceses across the country. The tools will help answer questions like:

- does your bishop publish audited financial reports;
- have financial improprieties occurred;
- have resources meant for the poor been misused;
- does your bishop treat your donations as his money;
- Does he invoke Corporation Sole to forestall prosecution for financial malfeasance, as in Montana;
- does your diocese have an effective finance council. 

From the development coordinator's desk

The highlight of our year so far has been the VOTF 2014 Assembly in April. The theme was *Turning Talk into Action*, and that is exactly what VOTF is doing:

First, we continue to support priests, especially as so many of them are forming groups to project a united front, like the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests and the Catholic Whistleblowers.

Second, as a collaborator in the newly formed Restorative Justice Committee, VOTF will hold the first Healing Circle this fall in the Boston area. Involving perpetrators, clergy, and even bishops, Healing Circles, repeated nationally, will help to heal survivors.

Third, we are entering data for a web portal that, beginning this year, will allow all Catholics to see easily, and compare, the financial reporting of every U.S. diocese and eparchy. This is a critical step in making sure each diocese not only conforms to canon law, but also reports to all the faithful where their money goes. We will discuss this with Boston Archdiocese Vicar General Peter Uglietto late this summer.

Despite Pope Francis' reforms, we cannot abdicate our baptismal responsibility to ensure critical reforms are realized. To do this, we need your support. We particularly want to shift our fundraising efforts from simply covering operating expenses to focusing more on healing our Church. Please consider becoming a **Monthly Partner** (see votf.org). Your regular monthly donations are the best way to help ensure our office can continue to support our programs and initiatives.

Also, please continue to pray the our work bears fruit.

Voice of the Faithful® is a worldwide movement 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, to support survivors of clergy sexual abuse, to support priests of integrity, and to shape structural change in the Church.

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VOTF 2015 National Assembly—Mark your calendar for April 18, 2015, when we will return to Hartford for the **VOTF 2015 National Assembly**. Our featured speaker will be **Marie Collins**, Irish clergy sexual abuse survivor and member of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. Several workshops will help us continue our theme of **turning talk into action**. Stay tuned for more information.

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