

VOTF takes part in association of priests' assembly



ASSOCIATION OF
US CATHOLIC PRIESTS

VOTF leaders attended the Association of U.S. Catholics Priests' 2016 Annual Assembly in Chicago in June. They led a colloquium on clericalism and took part in a Vespers of Hope. This is the second consecutive annual assembly in which VOTF has been involved.

Three VOTF leaders traveled to Chicago in late June to take part in the 2016 Annual Assembly of the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests. VOTF also exhibited at last year's AUSCP Annual Assembly.

Donna Doucette, VOTF executive director, Svea Fraser, a founder and former trustee, and former trustee Mary Freeman made the trip to extend relationships and to present a colloquium on clericalism—a topic they were invited to present.

“Donna, Mary, and I were warmly welcomed by a group of nearly 200 priests, none of whom wore a Roman collar and all of whom seemed to share our Vatican II upside-down model of the Church as the People of God,” Svea said.

She and Mary agreed that, in this, they were ‘preaching to the choir,’ but the priests also “were interested in sharing their views and seeking ideas to better collaborate with their parishioners,” Svea said.

At the Assembly, Donna helped lead a Vespers of Hope with two priests, Frs. Robert Cushing of Waycross, Georgia, and Lawrence Dowling of Chicago. The Vespers included laments and contrition for the sexual abuse scandal and was very moving, according to the three VOTF leaders. Donna was also on the committee that prepared the Vespers.

“The vespers service was absolutely wonderful,” Mary said. “Two of the priests work with survivors,” she said, “and

particularly poignant was hearing more than a hundred men singing ‘Bring Him Home’ from *Les Miserables*, a prayer for a young boy’s life.”

The VOTF leaders also led a colloquium on clericalism, “Clericalism: It Takes Two ...,” focusing on aspects of clericalism reflected in language, particularly in the liturgy, and in pastoral relationships. Clericalism has fueled not just the cover-ups in clergy sex-abuse scandals, but also many other ills we confront in the Church today, ranging from dwindling membership to financial scandals.

“We offered anecdotal evidence of clericalism by both clergy and laity,” Svea said, “and challenged each of them to make one small change in the way they relate to their community to strengthen the slow crawl of cultural change.”

“This doesn’t happen overnight,” Mary said. One of her examples was the Prayers for the Faithful that are said during Mass. “Why,” she asked, “do the prayers always start with the hierarchy and move down to the laity, who comprise the vast majority of the Church?”

Concerns about the newly ordained, who exhibit a sense of “separateness,” were raised, and all three commented on how different cultures, notably Hispanic, the largest and most rapidly growing demographic in the Church, are



Svea Fraser, VOTF founder and former trustee, distributes literature and talks with attendees at AUSCP 2016 Annual Assembly.

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deeply imprinted with the notion that the priest is always “Padre,” even when invited to be on a first-name basis.

“The earliest days of VOTF found us encouraging listening sessions and opportunities for dialogue with priests to support the Second Goal (supporting priests),” Svea said, summing up their experiences.

“But dialogue at any level was discouraged,” she added. “It was seen suspiciously as dissent, and it was very difficult to engage many priests in conversations about clericalism, celibacy, or collaboration. The passage of time, the award-winning *Spotlight* movie, and most of all, the election of Pope Francis has turned the tide. For me, being together in Chicago, working together as disciples on a mission was delayed gratification!”

VOTF Advisory Board member elected VP of largest Catholic theological society in America

Voice of the Faithful advisory board member Paul Lakeland, Ph.D., has been elected vice president of the Catholic Theological Society of America.

Lakeland was elected during the society’s 2016 annual meeting, which was held in San Juan, Puerto Rico. He serves as vice president for the next year. In June 2017, he will become president-elect and then president in June 2018.

Lakeland is the Aloysius P. Kelley, S.J., chair of Catholic Studies and director of Fairfield University’s Center for Catholic Studies, Fairfield, Conn. He has written and taught Catholic ecclesiology, liberation theology, and religion and literature for more than 30 years. Among Lakeland’s several Catholic Press Association awards is one for best book in theology for *The Liberation of the Laity*. Fairfield University awarded him the Robert E. Wall Faculty Research Award for the 2015-16 academic year.

“We congratulate Dr. Lakeland on his election as vice president and president-elect of the Catholic Theological Society of America,” said Mary Pat Fox, VOTF’s president, “and we feel fortunate and honored to have such an internationally renowned scholar and theologian advising us on Catholic issues. Over the years, he has been most generous with his time and talent on behalf of VOTF.”

VOTF’s Advisory Council advises its board of trustees on issues relative to the organization’s mission and goals, offers analysis and recommendations as solicited by the board, and counsels the board on issues it feels are pertinent to VOTF’s

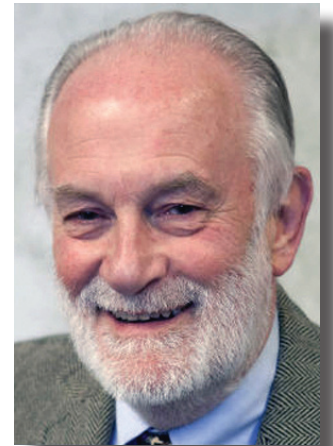
They closed their colloquium with this prayer, which Svea composed:

“Go forth in peace and courage to make our church a communion of holy collaboration, so that together we might share the joy of the Gospel in our thoughts, in our words, and especially in our actions, through the power of the Holy Spirit. May God bless us all in the name of God, the Migrant, and of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, and in the love of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

The Assembly approved a resolution to work closely with Catholic organizations who, together with the priests, support Vatican II’s teaching and pursue its vision reasonably and respectfully. They recommended pursuing this collaboration with VOTF, FutureChurch, and Leadership Conference of Women Religions on selected issues.

success. Council members combine their knowledge and experience in theology and institutional church dynamics with a unique understanding of VOTF’s origin, development and purpose.

The 1,300-member Society (www.ctsa-online.org), founded in 1946, is the largest professional society of theologians in the world and promotes theological research in the Roman Catholic tradition that is attentive to contemporary problems faced by the Church and the world.



VOTF has ...

- Held six Healing Circles and plans several more in 2016
- Completed its Diocesan Finances Database and continually updates the web portal
- Developed a working relationship with the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests and plans to expand that collaboration
- Updated guidelines and recommendations for child protection
- Promulgated policies and procedures to help make parish collections secure from theft

Mid-Michigan Voice of the Faithful engages community & diocese in educational program

The Mid-Michigan Voice of the Faithful has picked up on a survey of lapsed Catholics conducted in their Saginaw Diocese to develop an educational program. The affiliate's program provides an excellent example of how VOTF can engage the community—including the diocese.

The following letter to the editor of the local *Midland Daily News* explains what Mid-Michigan VOTF has been up to:

To the editor:

Many members of the Saginaw Diocese came together on the evening of May 3 at Assumption Parish Hall in Midland to discuss the topic of "Why are Catholics Leaving the Church?" Between 2005 and 2015, data showed that more than 18,000 Catholics no longer attended Mass and presumably have left the church in the Saginaw Diocese. This is a 37 percent decrease over the last 10 years and was based on information that was gathered by the Diocese through their October pew count.

One hundred twenty-five people listened to an introduction by Fr. Joseph Schabel and were encouraged to discuss the topic in small groups. Catholics from many parishes (as well



as non-Catholics) had lively discussions about the reasons people are leaving and each table shared a final consensus with the full group at the end of the evening. Data were collected and are being compiled to share with those who attended, as well as other parish and

diocesan clergy and staff. The second part of the program is to be scheduled for the coming fall. Watch the newspaper for the date and time. We hope to continue the discussion and to take action to keep our church vibrant and alive.

The evening was sponsored by the Mid-Michigan Voice of the Faithful which meets on the fourth Thursday of each month at 4 p.m. at a local Midland parish. For more information, contact MidMichiganVOTF@gmail.com

Joseph Schoren, President, Mid-Michigan VOTF

Online *Lamentation Wall* offers place for personal response to harm



Catholics have long been engulfed in revelations about the clergy's sexual abuse of children. Responses have ranged from

revulsion to confusion, fear, anger, and distress. Victims/survivors and their families are faced with revisiting deep wounds and traumatic memories.

Hierarchical responses on the other hand have resembled a corporate defense more than a model of Gospel teaching. Little has been done to address healing and reform. VOTF is offering Restorative Justice Healing Circles specifically to help redress this wrong and set anyone harmed by the scandal on a path toward healing.

In this spirit of healing, VOTF introduced a ***Lamentation Wall*** at its 10th Year Conference in 2012. Lamentations are a traditional response found in Christian and Hebrew scriptures, evoked by the prophets who call the community to "prayers of lamentation" in the face of immeasurable suffering and loss.

At the conference, attendees posted personal lamentations in response to the irrevocable harm, unhealed wounds, and resistance to Church reform the sexual abuse scandal has spawned. Lamentations poured from people's hearts, expressing sorrow over lives scarred from childhood abuse, as well as the wounds suffered as a result of the culture of clericalism that enables such deep harm to continue.

We have continued the ***Lamentation Wall*** since the conference on our website. You may post your personal laments at www.votf.org. Under Programs, click Survivor Support, and then click ***Lamentation Wall***.

Dear VOTF Family,

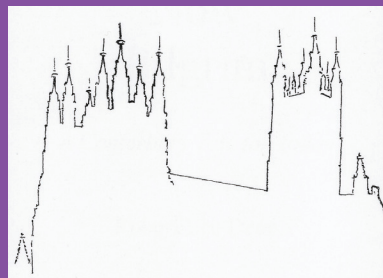
You often ask what you can do to tackle the immense task of changing an old and venerable institution like the Catholic Church. It seems daunting, but together we are making progress. Here are specific things you can do personally and in your own communities to make a difference:



1. Concerned about getting the word out? Include a link to VOTF on your website or Facebook page.
2. Praying for healing for survivors of clergy sex abuse? Help arrange a Healing Circle in your area (contact Bill Casey at b13909@comcast.net).
3. Worried about where your donations go? Join your parish's Finance Committee or contact one of its members and tell them about VOTF's Financial Working Group projects and encourage use of our Diocesan Finances Database. Take our Parish F-IQ test yourself to judge how financially secure your parish collections are. Go to votf.org and look under Programs and then Financial Accountability for information.
4. Anguished about the number of young people leaving the church? Host a discussion group about why this is happening.
5. Worried about the church you love? Talk to people in your pew and people on your street, sharing your concern for the Church and the urgency of assuring the safety of children and the transparency and integrity of parish and diocesan finances.
6. Worried about VOTF's future? Include VOTF in your own financial plans. For more information on how to do this and other ideas about how to do this, contact pdeck@votf.org. Contact your financial advisor for other ideas and for implementation.
7. Philanthropy, like prayer, is a habit. Donate to VOTF as often as you can. Your gifts are the life-blood of the organization

Information on these points is at www.votf.org. Look under the Program menu item at the top of the home page.

Autographed copies of Dean's *Now Pilgrim* available; make a donation to receive your free book



Canterbury Cathedral, stylized on cover of Now Pilgrim, has been a popular destination for pilgrim travelers for centuries.

We now have a limited number of autographed copies of *Now Pilgrim*, Robert L. Dean's recently published re-imagining of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as a modern-day pilgrimage. Through Dean's generosity, we are offering these books to donors while supplies last.

Anyone who donates \$100 or more to VOTF during our fall appeal will receive a FREE copy of the book.

Dean says about pilgrimages in his prologue, "The vitality of Christianity is nowhere more evident than in the continued popularity of pilgrimage ... A pilgrimage remains what it has always been: a journey of spiritual enlightenment ..."

Thank you for your continued support of VOTF.

Remember! Deep and sustainable change requires transformations in behavior among those who do not welcome the change. This is not easy—we need to work together, in faith, to bring a bright new day in our Church.

Priscilla Deck
Director of Development

VOICE
OF THE FAITHFUL

Keep the Faith, Change the Church

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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. We support survivors of clergy sexual abuse, support priests of integrity, and work to help shape structural change in the Church.

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