

Catholic organizations join to encourage dialogue on women deacons *Urge U.S. bishops' support*

Voice of the Faithful®, The Association of U.S. Catholic Priests, and FutureChurch have initiated **DeaconChat** to foster education and conversation about women deacons, to bring Catholics, lay and ordained, into dialogue.



This initiative comes while a pontifical commission studies whether Rome should restore the early Church practice of ordaining women deacons. Last

May Pope Francis, responding to a question from members of the International Union of Superiors General, said that he would establish such a commission. That commission was formally announced in August 2016 and began its work in November 2016. The next commission meeting is expected this fall.

"Already in 2013, AUSCP had called for consideration of ordaining women deacons. As the papal commission continues its work, it is important that Catholics, lay and ordained, undergo their own study and discernment of the history and present possibility of ordaining women to the diaconate," said Fr. Bob Bonnot, Chair of the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests. "**DeaconChat** provides that opportunity."

"This initiative is designed to foster educational efforts to enrich dialogue about women deacons," said Voice of the Faithful Executive Director Donna B. Doucette. "The program has three important components: *learning, sharing, and connecting.*"

FutureChurch Executive Director Deborah Rose-Milavec said, "The initiative includes important educational materials, a link to purchase Phyllis Zagano's book *Women Deacons: Past, Present and Future*, and guides for inviting clergy to dialogue. We hope Catholics in the United States and around the world will be inspired to start a conversation in their parish."

Detailed information about **DeaconChat**, how you can participate and links to materials you can download are online at www.votf.org/content/deaconchat.

(Continued on Page 2)

Voice of the Faithful enhances priests' association relationship



Voice of the Faithful was once again an exhibitor at the annual **Association of U.S. Catholic Priests' Assembly**,

this year in Atlanta at the end of June, and featured the **DeaconChat** initiative, while enhancing relationships with AUSCP members.

VOTF Executive Director Donna B. Doucette had these reflections on the 2017 Assembly:



From opening session to closing blessing, the assemblies hosted each year by the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests are equal parts exhilarating, informative, faith-filled ... and exhausting. This year's Assembly in Atlanta, June 19-22, was no exception.

(Continued on Page 2)

DeaconChat *(Continued from Page 1)*

Voice of the Faithful® and FutureChurch also have issued a public statement urging U.S. bishops to openly support the restoration of the ancient practice of ordaining women deacons and to petition the Holy See to allow women to function in our Church as permanent deacons.

The statement pointed out that women traditionally have carried out as much as 85% of the lay ministry of our Church, with many being leaders in such ministries, yet they have neither equal access to all positions within the Church nor equal voice in decision-making.

Women, like men, the statement noted, are made in the image and likeness of God and should not be denied the grace of the sacrament of ordination to the diaconate.

"Indeed," the statement said, "women, as well as men, have served in *persona Christi servi* throughout Church history and continue to do so today."

What gets easier with age?

We're guessing you didn't answer donating to Voice of the Faithful. But maybe it does.

If your retirement savings are invested in plans like IRAs or 401Ks, you must start to take at least "required minimum" distributions by age 70½. The IRS website has all manner of Q&As on the subject where you can easily learn more about these distributions.

We see this as an opportunity for you and us. Depending on your financial situation, you might have extra cash to help support VOTF.

Your distributions will be like getting a raise. So, before you get used to spending the extra money on something else, consider becoming a VOTF Monthly Partner and donating a set amount, big or small, every month. See our website, votf.org, under Giving for more information about being a Monthly Partner.

So, donating to VOTF could be something that gets easier with age.

VOTF enhances priests' relationship *(Continued from Page 1)*

Keyed to the theme of Peacemaking in Our Fractured Society, the Assembly provided thoughtful and provocative presentations pertinent not only to the life of the Church but also to pastoral perspectives priests could bring to difficult societal disruptions.

If you were wondering whether our hopes for Church reform would ever gain traction among the clergy, if they will work with lay people to reform the Church, the answer is Yes. They can and they do, and they are as committed to the full implementation of Vatican II as any of us.

Priests across the U.S. share the same desires and concerns that we do, the same yearnings for a better Church, and even some of the same proposed solutions. It's not every priest in the U.S. But then, it's not every lay person who seeks to fully implement Vatican II, ordain women deacons, allow married men to be priests, halt parish closings, support survivors of sex abuse, examine diocesan finances, and so on.



Our Lady of Lourdes church, where 2017 AUSCP Assembly attendees heard Mass presided over by Atlanta Archbishop Wilton Gregory, is the first African American Catholic Church in Atlanta.

learn to actually become pastoral. I have heard Assembly attendees rue the failure of the Church to-date to fully implement the reforms of Vatican II.

Progress continues. Working together, it can accelerate.



Attendees at the 2017 AUSCP Assembly, "Peacemaking in Our Fractured Society," visited the Ebenezer Baptist Church (sanctuary above), part of the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic site in Atlanta, where Dr. King preached and was co-pastor.

At the Assembly this year I heard, as I have each year, provocative presentations and insightful observations from the invited speakers, as well as interesting discussions in response to those presentations. I've seen priests ask pointed questions of a bishop after his speech, and then, when the bishop avoided a forthright response, ask equally pointed follow-up questions on the same topic.

I have heard priests worrying that they may be guilty of clericalism and wondering how they can avoid it. I have heard retired pastors wonder if newly ordained priests would ever

Understanding diocesan financial reports

Wouldn't you like to know where your money goes?

Accountability and transparency are Voice of the Faithful® bywords. This is true with clergy sexual abuse, Church finances, and truly any Church endeavor bearing on our mission and goals.



Only with accountability and transparency in diocesan finances can the laity exercise stewardship of the resources that we provide the Church. Also:

- Lack of financial transparency at diocesan levels allowed crimes of clerical sexual abuse to fester unnoticed for decades.
- Without transparency we faithful, who provide all the funds for diocesan and parish good works, have no idea how our donations are spent or even if they are spent for the intended purposes.

Financial transparency and accountability thus become powerful pathways for rebuilding lay trust in Church leadership.

The good news is that, since 2002, many dioceses have made significant progress in opening up their finances. The not so-good news: more can, and should, be done, not just by bishops and pastors to report how they allocate your money, but also by us, the ones who should be monitoring that spending.

VOTF promotes greater transparency in financial reporting, greater lay awareness of diocesan finances, and more lay involvement in diocesan

and parish finance councils. We want to know how often, and how clearly, a bishop reports on his diocese's finances? Are his financial reports complete? Audited? Does each revenue center

in the diocese report its finances, or only the central office?

VOTF maintains a Diocesan Financial Database, accessible at votf.org, that helps answer these questions. Using it, every Catholic can locate publicly available information about each diocese's finances and determine which dioceses,

despite canon law, fail to report their finances publicly and transparently.

But once you are looking at this data, how can you tell where your money is going? Reading financial information is not straightforward, so VOTF offers an explanatory document, "What to Look for

- Includes all three of these statements: Statement of Financial Position; Statement of Activities; and Statement of Cash Flow.
- Has extensive **notes** (i.e., footnotes that may be referenced on either the Statement of Financial Position or the Statement of Activities and that can give a clearer picture of what's happening in the statements.)
- Allows you to assess the transparency of the financial affairs of the diocese.

If your diocese has no reporting at all, your first task is to request such accounting. **After all, it's your money the diocese spends.** But a transparent report about finances is only the first step. The second step and any that follow are your responsibility. This online document will help you learn how to review the information in the financial statements and the footnotes.

Once you have completed the checklist and determined whether the three statements are present,

Financial statements are big scary documents with lots of numbers, lots of footnotes, and too many words only accountants can understand.

But there is a way through the thickets, and these guidelines will help you. We promise.

When Reviewing Diocesan Financial Statements," that also resides on our website. This document will help you examine a diocese's financial transparency and assess its financial health.

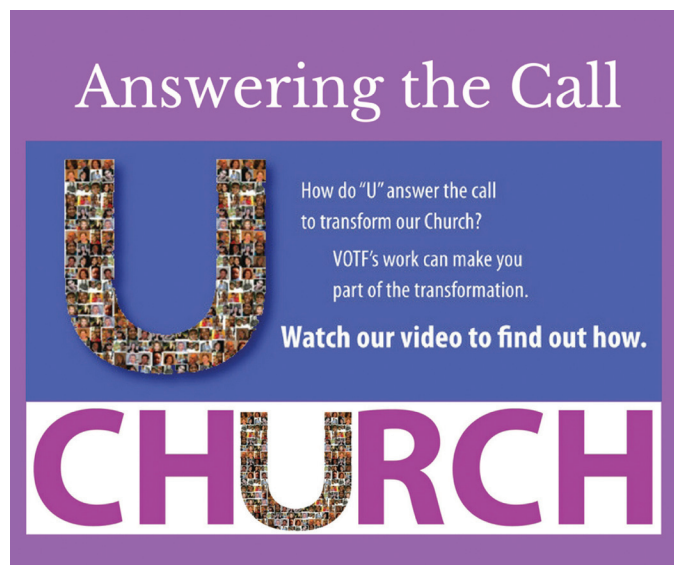
The document starts with a checklist. Good financial statements have these characteristics:

- Audited by an **independent** public accounting firm.

the document will help you review the contents of each statement and assess the notes in detail.

To see our how-to for reviewing diocesan financial statements or our Diocesan Financial Database, go to votf.org. Under Programs, click Financial Accountability. On the Financial Accountability page, click the link for "Need tips on reading a diocesan financial statement?" or "Already know all about the Finance Database web portal?" respectively.

VOTF takes Ch[^]rch to Facebook

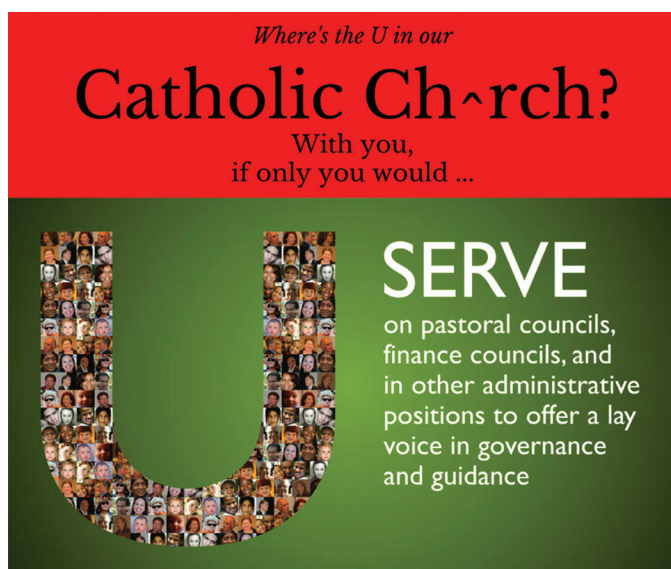
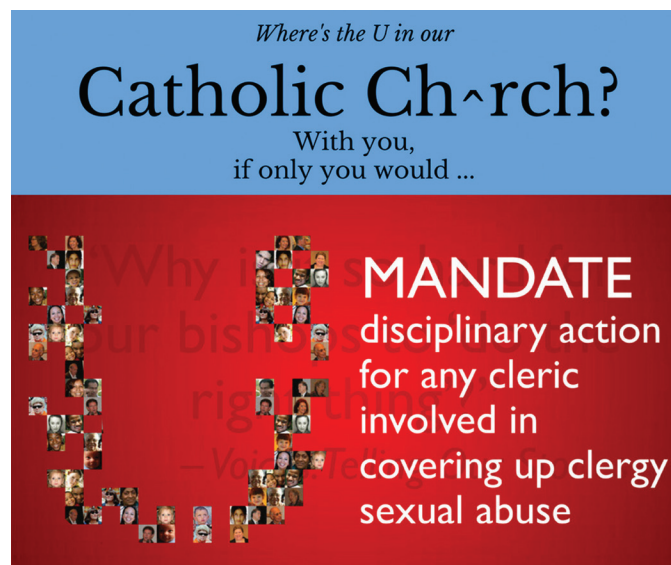


If you have been around Voice of the Faithful® for any length of time, you are familiar with our mission—to *provide a prayerful voice, attentive to the Spirit, through which the Faithful can actively participate in the governance and guidance of the Catholic Church.*

But where are you? Is your Spirit-led voice being heard on important Church issues? How do “U” answer the call to transform our Church? To offer answers to such questions, we created a video called “Where Is the ‘U’ in Our Ch[^]rch,” which resides on our website, votf.org.

We developed this video shortly after Pope Francis’ election in 2013 to build on his vision of leading the Church into the completion of Vatican II. With Catholics leaving the pews in ever-increasing numbers, even though we now had a Pope with an ear for reform and the idea of a magisterium of all the people of God, we searched for ways “U” could actively work for Ch[^]rch healing and reform.

The video begins with an empty “U,” which is filled with people as the video progresses. We selected 13 slides from the video with various reform themes (like SERVE



and MANDATE shown above) and will post them on Facebook periodically throughout the fall. We are taking advantage of Facebook to communicate with you because we know you do not like too many emails and because nearly 53% of you use Facebook every day.

Look for our series and decide where “U” are in our Ch[^]rch.

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.