

## Voice of the Faithful 2020 Conference will be a virtual gathering

*Offering visions of a just Church for all the faithful*

The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic has affected Voice of the Faithful similarly to other organizations planning events during 2020. Out of an abundance of caution and concern for the well-being of our members and supporters, Voice of the Faithful will present an online Zoom conference for 2020. **VOTF Conference: *Visions of a Just Church*** will take place Oct. 3. Conference registrants can expect the same mix of interesting speakers and evocative conversation as always, albeit virtually. Together, we will seek visions of a just Church for all the faithful.

Two well-know Catholic scholars are scheduled to speak, and VOTF leaders are scheduled to present updates on initiatives and programs in child protection, financial accountability and transparency, and women's roles in the Church.

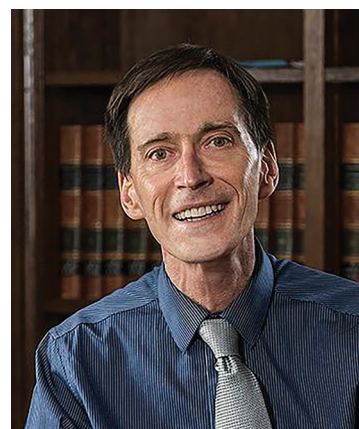
**Phyllis Zagano**, Ph.D., is an internationally recognized scholar in Catholic studies and women's roles in the Church and an advocate of an ordained women's diaconate. She has lectured widely throughout the United States and abroad and has shaped the discourse on gender and the history of leadership in the Roman Catholic Church. Zagano will consider ways these perspectives can inform our future, bringing us closer to realizing a fully just Church.

She has published hundreds of articles and written or edited 20 books in religious studies. Pope Francis appointed her to the Papal Commission for the Study of Women in



the Diaconate, which convened in Rome November 2016. Zagano presently is senior research associate-in-residence and adjunct professor of religion at Hofstra University.

**Fr. Richard Lennan** is professor of systematic theology and Professor Ordinarius in the School of Theology and Ministry at Boston College. Lennan spoke at last year's conference and, continuing on the themes he discussed then, he will talk about the draft document on Australia's future Church governance and the potential for a more lay-participatory Church. A native Australian, Lennan helped develop the document and will present his own visions of a just Church.



Lennan taught theology at the Catholic Institute of Sydney and Weston Jesuit School of Theology, which became part of BC in 2008. In addition to teaching, he currently directs STM's Sacred Theology Licensure program, serves on the editorial board of Theological Studies, and chairs the steering committee of the Karl Rahner Society. Together with two BC colleagues, Lennan wrote "To Serve the People

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of God: Renewing the Conversation on Priesthood & Ministry,” calling for reexamining diocesan priests’ formation and eradicating the priesthood’s embedded clerical culture. He is the author of two books, and he has edited five others.

As a virtual conference in 2020, VOTF has added something new. Once the registration fee is paid, registrants will receive a survey to complete their registration. The survey will be used to assign registrants to one of the short, small-group meetings to take place on Friday evening, Oct. 2, the evening before the big Conference, which starts on Saturday morning, Oct. 3. The pre-meetings will allow us to share how, together, we can help bring about a more just Church.

These pre-conference gatherings also will allow registrants to enjoy a key feature of our previous in-person meetings: the chance to say hello to old friends, meet new ones, and share stories about experiences in our Church. Because we won’t have the usual lunch-time and between-speech conversations virtually, we’re re-creating the experience for you this way, as well as offering an opportunity to practice signing into Zoom and making sure everything will work well on Saturday morning.

The cost for attending VOTF’s online Zoom 2020 Conference is just \$50. We look forward to seeing you “virtually” in October, in small groups, and in the big Conference.

## Church governance *Australian bishops’ draft suggests greater lay role*

*The Catholic Church in Australia had planned a plenary council for this October, but the COVID-19 pandemic delayed its assemblies until October and July 2021. In preparation, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference drafted a new Church governance document, “The Light from the Southern Cross.” At VOTF’s Oct. 3, 2020, Conference: Visions of a Just Church, native Australian Fr. Richard Lennan of Boston College will comment on this document, which he helped develop and which may lead toward a more lay-participatory Church. The following is excerpted from the document’s conclusions:*

Scripture and theology support the case for a synodal church where all the People of God have a role to play in co-responsible relationships between laypeople and those ordained or consecrated to religious life, all working together to bring alive the Spirit in the world today.

All those exercising leadership in the Church are urged to adopt the principles of good governance elucidated within the report, which in turn will ensure strong ethical and pastoral cultures. Priorities such as a more central role for women in church decision-making and leadership are ripe for implementation.

**Principles**—The principles contained in this report are no longer negotiable within the Church. Not only are they drawn from established civic principles, but they also derive from the Gospel principles upon which the Catholic Church has been built.



**Priorities**—The principles indicate certain priorities. A more central role for women in church leadership, and for lay Catholics generally, is a high priority.

**Application**—Each recommendation attempts to address principles in specific circumstances and for particular church institutions. As such, detailed application may vary according to circumstances, while the spirit of each recommendation remains clear.

**Local Churches**—Many of the recommendations are applicable directly for individual dioceses and parishes without waiting for any collective decision from a higher authority.

**Urgency and Timing**—The recommendations deserve immediate attention as a matter of urgency. The Church is at a tipping point according to many internal and external measures so far as improved governance is concerned.

**The Right Thing to Do**—External pressures exist, but these recommendations should not be considered just as a response to external circumstances but as inherently worthy at this time in the history of the Catholic Church in Australia. They are the right thing to do and the evidence suggests their implementation will be welcomed by the Catholic community.

**A Better Church**—The consequences of the governance reform indicated in this report will be a better Church, truer to its mission, fairer to all, and recognizing the gifts and contribution of all the People of God. That is the key test against which recommendations should be judged.

# Voice of the Faithful — a long commitment to child protection

## *Envisioning diocesan accountability reviews*

*Voice of the Faithful has always been committed to protecting children and soon will begin to assess how well dioceses are adhering to the Dallas Charter's child protection guidelines in a process of accountability and transparency similar to its online diocesan finance reviews. An original member of VOTF's Child Protection Working Group, trustee Patricia Gomez, will preview the initiative during VOTF's 2020 virtual conference, Oct. 3. In this earlier Voice Matters interview, she outlines VOTF's initial forays into child protection:*



“We wanted definitely to provide resources, assistance, and ideas at the local level to give some context for people in parishes, not only to make them aware of the need to take required education, but also the need for safety committees and resources at the parish level. Kathy Mullaney, Margaret Roylance, and Elia Marnik also were members of this initial group.

“The (Dallas) Charter was a big piece that we examined, but we tried to provide folks with things like warning signs of abuse you might see in an adult or child. We brought together a lot of resources. We held Safety Sundays to bring folks together after Mass to talk about what’s happening, what we can do, what resource are available. We published a series of announcements that could be put in bulletins just prior to National Child Abuse Prevention Month. We asked, “Do you know what program you’re using in your parish to protect children. We also developed ads promoting VOTF website resources.

“VOTF also was in partnership with other church groups and philanthropic agencies and was looking for input and trying to keep abreast of the latest child protection and development research, such as that which was coming out of the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at the time. This gave us access to resources like a film about survivors.

“The members of our working group were all trained in several child protection programs, and our motto was, ‘Be involved, be aware, be educated and take it to your community.’

“VOTF committees met many times when the (Dallas) Charter was being developed. The Charter mandated certain guidelines but did not specify how they were to be carried out and had no enforcement measures for fraternal correction. You can say on paper that something has to be done, but that doesn’t mean that it is. We asked parishes, for example, who collects the information to assess whether guidelines are being followed, but directors of religious education and others tasked with gathering documents already had too much to do. That’s why we suggested safety committees.

“Of course, child protection varied widely from parish to parish, according to how committed people were to child protection. The Archdiocese of Boston at the time used CAP (Child Abuse Prevention), a program of VIRTUS, which was created by the National Catholic Risk Retention Group to combat sexual abuse of children in the Church.

“We all agreed that self-audit of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishop’s National Review Board was not going to work. So, recognizing that we had to make people aware in the parishes was important, talking to parish councils and to pastors to make sure they knew what to do. Spot checks were being made of records each year, but only a third of all parishes were audited each year. Records would show, for example, a list of everyone who has been trained but not everyone who should be trained, and background checks didn’t take into account any pending court cases. Unless there is an on-site audit, no one knows for sure what’s being done.

“VOTF tried to work with the NRB, and we (working group members and VOTF leaders) met with Teresa Kettelkamp (then executive director for the USCCB’s Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection) about audits. We brought to her attention, for example, the deficiencies of self-audits and the fact that foreign priests didn’t know what to do.

“People turn to VOTF, so we need to continue providing resources and continue educating people, making them aware and empowering them.”

*This interview was done in 2013 and concerned VOTF’s child protection activities in its early years. Now in 2020, with VOTF’s child protection assessment initiative, we will apply independent monitoring of child protection in the dioceses, beyond the self-reporting that underlies the NRB audits.*



# Women's Roles in the Church

## Association of U.S. Catholic Priests' "Declaration on the Status of Women in the Church" Summary Statement

Former Voice of the Faithful trustee Svea Fraser helped develop this AUSCP document and will speak on women's roles in the Church at VOTF's virtual 2020 Conference: *Visions of a Just Church* on Oct. 3. Following is the Summary Statement:

The Declaration on the Status of Women began with "the joys and hopes of this age."

With hope for our future, the members of our group, a collaboration of four priests, two women religious and two lay women, were attentive to the "signs of the times" and the movement of the Holy Spirit. Each one reflected on the status of women in the world and in the Church. From multiple perspectives and disciplines a common theme emerged: the role of women has evolved with a growing demand for the justice of equal dignity and equality with men.

Knowing they are created in the image and likeness of God and are baptized into Christ, women are demanding the rights that have been denied them based on their gender only. Separate but equal status no longer meets the needs of the world today. The gifts that women can bring to the Church are thwarted when none are given the authority to minister or govern beyond limited possibilities. Granted, women always have the power to serve and to witness the Gospel of Jesus.

But new models of universal and parochial leadership are emerging.

The challenge for the future of the church is to institute pathways to shared governance and ministry that have been open to male, celibate clergy alone. To do so begins with conversation and dialogue among all the People of God.

How this is to be accomplished is the work of all the Church—inclusive of all the baptized. This can be done according to Pope Francis' vision for a church that is synodal at every level, in dioceses as well as in the universal church. We offer questions and concerns to raise awareness and bring people together to listen and to learn from one another, and ultimately to discern the will of God.

With joy we anticipate a vibrant community of inclusiveness that not only celebrates the power of men and women collaborating in spreading the Gospel, but also endorses that reality with visible signs of reform.



## Pope Francis on pandemic *Jesus calms the storm*

At the beginning of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic on March 27, Pope Francis delivered his *Urbi et Orbi* blessing to a deserted St. Peter's square. With all Italy under quarantine, he spoke about fear and darkness descending on the world. The Gospel for that day was about Jesus calming a storm. Six months into the pandemic, we would do well to recall Francis' refrain, "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" and his closing words: *Lord, may you bless the world, give health to our bodies and comfort our hearts. You ask us not to be afraid. Yet, our faith is weak, and we are fearful. But you, Lord, will not leave us at the mercy of the storm. Tell us again: 'Do not be afraid' (Matthew 28:5). And we, together with Peter, 'cast all our anxieties onto you, for you care about us.'* (cf. 1 Peter 5:7).



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Voice of the Faithful® is a worldwide organization 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.

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