

Letter proves Vatican put secrecy before children's safety

A letter remarkable for its implications for the Church's clergy sexual abuse scandal was made public early this year by Irish public television. The letter documents Vatican intervention in local church affairs to prevent mandatory reporting to civil authorities.

The letter was written in 1997 by the Archbishop Luciano Storero, then Vatican representative in Ireland, to respond to guidelines Ireland's bishops developed in 1996 for reporting clergy sexual abuse. Archbishop Storero said in the letter, "the situation of 'mandatory reporting' gives rise to serious reservations of both a moral and a canonical nature," and orders Irish bishops to see that the Code of Canon Law is "meticulously followed." The letter in effect directs the Irish bishops not to report clergy sexual abuse to civil authorities, but to dispose of sexual abuse cases in secret proceedings inside the Catholic Church.

In a statement VOTF national released in January, VOTF president Dan Bartley said, "The Vatican has always claimed that the church's response to the abuse crisis was not dictated from Rome. In the case of Ireland, this letter proves otherwise. In how many other local cases did the Vatican intervene to put secrecy before the safety of children?"

VOTF believes this letter prevented the appropriate action the Irish bishops wanted to take in response to the scandal within their church. VOTF calls on the Vatican to disclose fully all other instances of Vatican interference in local church affairs around the world.

In the documentary, "Unspeakable Crimes," reporter Mike Peelo said the letter "reveals how not only did the Vatican secretly block the bishop's efforts to improve child protection and bring abuser priests to justice, but were every bit as inept in their own handling of abuse." VOTF Ireland member and abuse survivor Bryan Maguire and other survivors were interviewed.

VOTF maintains the Church's credibility will remain questionable unless the Vatican fully reveals its past actions. The clergy sexual abuse scandal arose and was abetted not just by thousands of priests, religious and others working for the Church committing heinous crimes, but also by a Church hierarchy using Canon Law to enforce a policy of

secrecy to protect its public image.

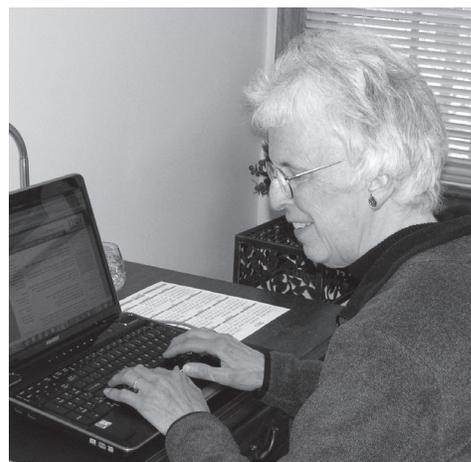
As recently as this past November, VOTF communicated with Cardinal William Levada, prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which is developing new guidelines for handling clergy sexual abuse cases. In its letter to the cardinal, VOTF called for:

- Timely lay involvement in developing these guidelines;
- Independent oversight of abuse cases; and
- Mandatory reporting of accused clergy in non-totalitarian states.

Cardinal Levada has not replied, and the Church will not recover from this scandal until every member of the hierarchy who mismanaged abusers is held accountable. 

Making volunteering a way of life

The tall, energetic woman breezing down the hall most weekdays at Voice of the Faithful's national office is part-time employee/volunteer Bev Spencer. She



makes her way between the back room where data processing is done, various offices and file room several times a day on errands concerned with the care and feeding of VOTF's database.

This is no small task. Each week, she is in the office a half day as an employee and a full day as a volunteer. VOTF data processing also benefits from a handful of diligent volunteers. Bev has a supervisor, Donna Salacuse, who oversees all the office's data processing. Bev, in turn,

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oversees several volunteers who process and do data entry for mailed-in donations. Her volunteer colleagues constantly input and update names, addresses, e-mail addresses, phone numbers, donations and myriad other information VOTF needs to keep track of more than 35,000 members worldwide.

Bev says she is drawn to volunteering because of its flexibility. "When I want to travel, for example, I can just say, I'm gone." And with a new grandchild in Maryland, this happens. But while on the job, she's intense. Bev also is a long-time volunteer at the Newton Free Library, not far from her home in Newton, Massachusetts. She is the library's volunteer coordinator, vice president of Friends of the Newton Free Library and heavily invested in the library's book sale fund raisers.

Bev first became aware of VOTF at the Boston Archdiocese's 2002 spring convocation. Later that summer, she volunteered doing registration data entry during VOTF's first convention. This led to her helping in the office with

donations.

"I'm big for jumping in and working on things as they are getting organized, and they clearly needed a lot of help," Bev says. "It's extremely impressive that they pulled that convention off, that they drew thousands of people from all over the country with no real formal way of doing so. To me, that spoke to the concern, the outrage of people because of clergy sexual abuse."

She says she was so focused on the tasks at hand she did not consider the big picture of Church reform much at the time, but "I think there is a great deal to reform in the Church, and there has to be an organization like VOTF holding the hierarchy's feet to the fire."

Bev is pragmatic about VOTF's success with Church reform, but appears even more committed now than when she started eight years ago.

"I don't expect to live to see the changes in the Church we're working for here," she says, "but if you sit still, nothing will ever happen. I know I'll be here for as long as VOTF is." **f**

VOTF's Emily & Rosemary Fund concludes second round grants

VOTF's Emily & Rosemary Fund for Women in the Church has concluded its second round of grants. Five women have shared \$35,500 in awards so far. The next round of grants will be awarded this spring.

Lynette Petruska, formerly a Roman Catholic nun and now a St. Louis attorney, started the fund to support women who lose employment in the Church as a result of injustice or discrimination and to help women who are working to bring about justice and equality in the Church.

"I was fortunate to have a profession to which I could return, but many women serving the Church find themselves and their families at great risk when targeted by discriminatory practices or when they stand up to injustice," she said during a ceremony initiating the fund.



Recipients include Carolyn Johnson, Ed.D., of New York, Karen DeFilippis and Paula Beaton of Texas, Cathy Roldan of California and Keisha Vyerser of Michigan.

Beaton (left) was forced to resign from her position as editor of the Corpus

Christi diocese's newspaper because of her plans to marry a former priest.

"I am humbled, thankful and happy to receive this grant," Beaton said. "I have felt rejected by a sector of the Catholic Church, so it is quite comforting to be supported by another part. I am grateful for all the work Voice of the Faithful does to help those who have been neglected and/or unjustly treated by the institutional Church."

Johnson was fired from her position as a Fordham University Graduate School of Religion assistant dean when she filed a complaint with Fordham's equal employment opportunity office after four months of sex discrimination and mistreatment.

"I am most grateful for the generous financial and moral support that Lynette Petruska and VOTF have extended to



me and other women faced with the dilemma of risking their livelihoods by speaking the truth," she said.

Roldan (left) lost her position as director of religious education when she reported unfair treatment of women and bullying from her boss, who was a priest.

"I'm so grateful to be given this grant," Roldan said. "It feels very lonely, as a woman, to fight injustice in the Catholic Church. This grant is giving me the opportunity

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and motivation to finish my degree and find ways to offer support to others facing similar circumstances.”

Veryser (left) was principal of a Catholic school when she was falsely accused of misappropriating school funds and lost her position.

“Receiving this grant has lifted my spirits,” Veryser said, “as I now know that there is a Catholic organization that understands my plight and is truly willing to help me recover my professional reputation. I am most grateful for the vote of confidence that this grant expresses.”

DeFilippis lost her pastoral associate position in the Ft. Worth diocese after 25 years primarily because her degree from a Jesuit university was considered too liberal for the current climate of the church.

“God is a God of liberation and has sent a holy chorus of angels in the form of VOTF to help get my feet on firm ground and move forward in service of God’s reign,” DeFilippis said. “My heart is filled with gratitude for your work and this new path of light you have shown me.”

“We are most appreciative that Lynette has made it possible to ease the effects of discrimination that women can experience within a Church we are striving to remake more in Christ’s image,” said Dan Bartley, VOTF president.

Emily & Rosemary Fund for Women grant information and applications are available at www.votf.org. 

Bishop Selection Initiative works to change the Church

Last spring VOTF President Dan Bartley wrote to Pope Benedict XVI requesting that formal participation of the laity in selecting local bishops be required. VOTF sent the letter and “Consulting the Laity on Candidates for the Episcopacy” to every U.S. bishop.

Early this January, VOTF Nashua, N.H., Area Voice of the Faithful Chair William McPherson sent the Vatican’s U.S. apostolic nuncio recommendations from a survey his affiliate conducted on selecting the next bishop of Manchester, N.H.

Late in January, VOTF Bishop Initiative Committee Chair John P. Doyle wrote to Archbishop Dolan about McPherson’s letter and bishop selection in general. Doyle pointed out that lay participation is encouraged, not required, so an opportunity exists for American Catholic bishops to lead the worldwide Church. He wrote they already had led the Church on three exceptional occasions:

First, in establishing the National Catholic Welfare Council during WWI, which evolved into the USCCB;

Second, in pioneering the Declaration on Religious Freedom during Vatican II; and

Third, in establishing guidelines to deal with clergy sexual abuse at the U.S. bishops’ conference in Dallas in 2002.

Now, Doyle said, a fourth instance of leadership could be added if the American bishops fostered formal lay participation in local bishop selection before the pope.

VOTF’s Bishop Selection Initiative awaits an answer, but will continue to keep the faith until the Church changes. 

Did you know?

...About Vatican II?

Vatican II was the only ecumenical council to use electricity and telephones. You perhaps have never fully appreciated how vastly separated from the modern world past councils of the Church were. After all, the council just before Vatican II was held 1869-1870—Vatican I, which declared papal infallibility. And the council before that was Trent, held 1545-1549 in reaction to the Protestant Reformation. No wonder Pope John XXIII saw a need to renew the Church when he called Vatican II. As the 50th anniversary of Vatican II’s first session approaches, we will bring you reminders of its significance. Check *In the Vineyard* for additional notes on Vatican II and for news about upcoming projects.

...About what it takes to make VOTF run?

We are blessed at VOTF to be supported by so many generous contributors. You are so generous we often feel reluctant to ask for money. We know you have many obligations, but your support is essential for everything from pencils to the work of our *Voices in Action* teams.

We report our financial statements annually on our website and post out tax returns, too. But sometimes these “accountant’s” numbers seem like gibberish.

We thought you might like to see a bit about what is behind those numbers. Here are just a few examples of individual expenses:

- Rent \$1,650.00/mo.
- VOTF staff person at ACC Conference \$1,120.00
- Website hosting and content \$4,500.00/mo.
- VOTF national office supplies \$100.00/mo.
- Computer for accountant/volunteers \$1,000.00

Your generosity and prayers are most appreciated.



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Keep the Faith, Change the Church

Voice of the Faithful is an organization of faithful Catholics who organized in 2002 to respond to the clergy sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church. We started in the basement of a church in Wellesley and now comprise more than 35,000 members worldwide.

Our mission is 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 achieve our mission, we pursue three goals:

- Support survivors of clergy sexual abuse;
- Support priests of integrity;
- Shape structural change within the Catholic Church.

Consider monthly donations

Simplify your charitable giving. Support Voice of the Faithful with regular monthly gifts. We both will benefit:

- Monthly donations may be friendlier to your budget, for example, and keep your paperwork simple. You will receive only one tax statement acknowledging your gift.
- We will send you fewer fund-raising appeals.
- Monthly donations provide us with reliable cash flow and help keep administrative costs low, freeing up resources for important projects.
- You will be reminded each month that we are working with you to Keep the Faith, Change the Church.

Become a monthly donor by visiting www.votf.org and clicking DONATE at the top—then choose Monthly on the selection page. To stop your monthly contributions, just call VOTF national at 781-559-3360.

Thank you for your generosity and God bless you.

Planned gifts secure our mission

Planned gifts provide financial and/or tax benefits for you and your family and guarantee long-term financial security for favorite causes, like Voice of the Faithful. Bequests also are among the most popular forms of charitable giving:

- Bequests, large and small, cost nothing when set up and may give you a great deal of satisfaction because you know your future gift will help sustain VOTF.
- Bequests can be a specific amount, a percentage of your estate or a particular piece of property.
- Bequests are simple and flexible. You can change your mind about the amount or revoke it any time.

Consider a gift to VOTF in your estate plans. You can create extraordinary opportunities and secure our mission.

For information, check the box on the return card with this newsletter or contact VOTF Development Coordinator Julie Dutcher, jdutcher@votf.org, 781-559-3360.