



## 2015 National Assembly

Connecticut Convention Center, Hartford, April 18


### Voice of the Faithful® returns to Hartford for 2015 National Assembly

Voice of the Faithful® members and friends from around the country will gather again this spring in Hartford, Connecticut, for the movement's **2015 National Assembly**. The Assembly takes place Saturday, April 18, at the Connecticut Convention Center.

Featured speaker will be **Marie Collins**. Collins is a member of the Vatican's Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, a clergy sexual abuse survivor from Ireland. She was among the first survivors there to take a prominent role in pursuing justice, having helped the Archdiocese of Dublin to set up its Child Protection Service in 2003.

The 2015 Assembly will include workshops on financial accountability, lay input options for the 2015 bishops' "family life" synod, the healing circle model of restorative

justice, survivor support discussion (with Tom Doyle), and clergy/lay dialogue. This also will be a great opportunity to catch up with old friends and make new ones. Bring those email friends to life!

You can register for the Assembly online. Go to [www.votf.org](http://www.votf.org) and click the Donate link at the top of the page. When the Donate page pops up, click in the box next to "VOTF 2015 National Assembly: April 18, Hartford CT." Then click Next and follow directions. The fee is \$90 per registrant and includes lunch. More information is on the website by clicking on "2015 National Assembly" in the menu on the left side of the homepage. There you will see links to online registration, a mail-in registration form, speaker bios, convention center and hotel information, and discount hotel room reservations. 

### A Healing Circle Model of Restorative Justice

*for those harmed by clergy sexual abuse of children and its coverup*

Voice of the Faithful® and its partners offer a Healing Circle model of Restorative Justice for anyone harmed by clergy sexual abuse of children or by the malfeasance of hierarchical leaders in response to it.

The Healing Circle enables those harmed to begin or continue a healing journey, but is not an end in itself, nor does it attempt to bring about complete healing. Those harmed include individuals, communities, and the Body of Christ itself—not only victims/survivors, but also family members and advocates of victims, people from the pews (still present or who have left), clergy, Church workers, and even abusers themselves.

Healing is a core teaching and practice of Jesus and a vital part of spiritual, psychological, and physical recovery from deep harm. Yet, healing opportunities have



(Continued on Page 2)

*(Healing Circle, continued from Page 1)*

been largely overlooked and absent in the life of the Church since the sexual abuse scandal gained wide public recognition starting in 2002.


Addressing that void, a Healing Circle is a process in which those harmed participate in a facilitated conversation that invites and empowers them to speak the truth about their harm and to listen to the truth of others.

***A Healing Circle is for those who have a personal story of harm that they are ready, willing and able to share without experiencing or causing further harm.***

#### **The Healing Circle:**

- Invites participants to share their own stories about suffering, broken trust, or the like, as well as the ripple effects on their lives and in their faith communities.
- Focuses on harms experienced in participants' own, unique circumstances and draws them into a shared search to address their healing needs.

- Does not seek to achieve closure, forget harm, or forgive those who caused the harm; although any of these outcomes might occur for some participants.
- Is not a substitute for other forums that pursue criminal or civil justice.
- Emerged from healing processes used by indigenous peoples around the globe. In this process, any individual harm was viewed as a harm to the entire community that needed to be repaired within the community. A facilitator guides the conversation in a way that promotes deep speaking and deep listening, safety and respect of all participants, and candor and trust within the conversation.
- Is not intended for those who simply have an opinion or judgment on the scandal but did not experience harm, or for those who do not take responsibility for any harm they have caused.

VOTF held an initial Healing Circle in Boston in November 2014. A second Healing Circle took place in Alexandria, Virginia, in January 2015. Future Healing Circles are planned in Naples, Florida (March 25, 2015), and elsewhere in the United States. 

## **Reflections during Child Abuse Prevention Month**

*Church blocks SOL reform: a singular avenue of justice for clergy sexual abuse victims*

**W**orth noting during April, National Child Abuse Prevention Month, is the Catholic Church's attitude toward states' statutes of limitation (SOL) reform. By fighting such reform, the Church has long sought to deny victims of clergy sexual abuse one of their only means of seeking justice: civil lawsuits.

An example of this attitude is Bishop William Murphy's comments in a letter to Long Island parishioners last fall, only the most recent of various salvos by the Church.

Even though SOL reform was not on the mid-term ballot, Murphy said the Child Victims Act, an SOL reform long sponsored by assemblywoman Margaret Markey, "seeks to penalize only the Catholic Church for past crimes of child sex abuse" and "should be opposed by those of us who know how effectively and permanently the Church has remedied that horrific scourge of the last decade."

But reform advocate Sister Maureen Turlish says the Church, "through its bishops and state Catholic conferences,

is the most powerful institution opposing better child protection legislation in the country, bar none."

SOL laws are deadlines beyond which victims cannot bring civil suits and prosecutors cannot bring charges. Sex abuse lawsuits, however, usually are not brought for many years. Studies show the memory of abuse can be suppressed even into adulthood, and because the crime is steeped in secrecy and shame, decades could pass before a victim seeks justice.

Yeshiva University law professor Marci Hamilton, calls SOL laws "the primary front for child sex abuse victims," adding that wherever "the statute of limitations has expired, there won't be any justice."

The Markey bill Murphy opposes, like other SOL reform laws, does not in fact single out the Catholic Church. The bill covers **all** private institutions and even includes families. But the Catholic Church has fought SOL reform

*(Continued on Page 4)*

**A**t last year's VOTF Assembly, those who attended a workshop on church finances got a first-hand look at parish financing gone awry. They studied a case of financial malfeasance in a northwestern U.S. parish. This year's workshop will take attendees south, to the southwestern Florida Diocese of Venice where financial statements, though posted online, don't tell the whole story.

To see how the workshop goes, attend the 2015 National Assembly (or wait for the reports). And to find out more about VOTF's recent activities involving, and long interest in, Church financial transparency and accountability, continue reading.



“We have something that we’ve been working on for three years, ever since I became a member of the board,” says VOTF’s Financial Transparency and Accountability Working Group leader Margaret Roylance, VOTF trustee and veteran working group leader, who started the Church Structural Change Working Group within a year of VOTF’s founding.

Other members of the working group are VOTF board chair and president Mark Mullaney; VOTF trustee and treasurer Anne Southwood; trustee Michael Ryan, who wrote *Nonfeasance: The Remarkable Failure of the Catholic Church to Protect Its Primary Source of Income*; David Castaldi, a former VOTF board chair and former diocesan chancellor and chief financial officer; and a VOTF founder and former diocesan finance council member Joseph Finn, all of Massachusetts; Edward Wilson, attorney and former trustee, New York; Sandra Guynn, former diocesan finance committee member, Montana; and Mary Pat Fox, VOTF trustee, Virginia. They are working on a three-part initiative.

**The first part** is a Web-accessed dioceses finances database that Catholics can use to learn where a diocese stands financially, to compare the transparency of reporting completed by other dioceses of similar size, and to get tips on what to look for in a diocesan financial statement.

**The second part** involves developing and disseminating information on how to protect the “parish purse”: Sunday collections are the single biggest source of Church income.

**The third part** is an emerging collaboration with the Canon Law Society of America. The CLSA is gathering information about what U.S. diocesan finance councils report about themselves concerning their membership and operation, then using that information to assess how well the councils follow the canons.

“We saw our efforts and the society’s as complementary, so we contacted them to see how we might cooperate in strengthening stewardship of diocesan resources,” Roylance says.

“We also have written a grant proposal,” she adds, “to help fund the initiative, particularly the establishment and maintenance of the Internet database, which must be continually updated as the diocesan data changes.”

These activities represent only the latest efforts by VOTF, which has always been concerned with enhancing financial transparency and accountability in the Church. VOTF believes that greater lay input in church finances is vitally important and that the clerical culture of secrecy underlying the clergy sexual abuse scandal also contributes to a general lack of financial transparency and even the cover-up of financial malfeasance.

An early example of VOTF’s concern for lay input occurred in 2004 when Castaldi counseled Boston archbishop Cardinal Sean O’Malley to allow more lay input into Church finances after O’Malley had appointed him to a committee assessing how the archdiocese should handle money raised from selling closed church property.

Without financial transparency, we faithful who provide for the Church’s good works usually have no idea how our donations are spent or see them spent in ways contrary to our wishes. For example, the *Orange County (California) Register* recently reported about a St. Edward the Confessor parishioner’s lawsuit regarding money raised beginning in 1999 for church renovations and a parish center: “The Parish Center to date has not been built. No accounting of the nearly \$8 million collected for the building of the parish center has ever been given to parishioners.” **f**



## From the VOTF Development Coordinator's Desk

### How can you help support Voice of the Faithful® in 2015?

Let me count the ways!

**1.) Monthly Partners:** Join the club! Together, we can achieve more Mission-and-Goals-oriented success because we spend less time soliciting gifts. **Bonus:** You never receive requests from us for money. We only send you the VOTF updates. "How do I join," you ask. It's easy. Simply visit [www.votf.org](http://www.votf.org), click DONATE, and then choose Monthly on the selection page. Voila! You're in.

**2.) Planned Giving:** Ensure that the good work of VOTF continues as part of your legacy. Your bequest will generate a financial or tax benefit and can be a specific dollar amount, property or percentage of your estate. To learn more, click on "Planned Giving" in the left column of our home page.

**3.) Provide an Item from VOTF's Wish List:** You may choose to donate an item that is needed in the VOTF headquarters to help keep the organization running smoothly. At the top of that list currently is a computer that we can dedicate to our Financial Transparency & Accountability Working Group. Cost: \$3,000.

**4.) Match Challenge:** Consider proposing a monetary gift that is contingent on being filled if members match the amount of your donation. This truly becomes a group effort.

**5.) Consider an Affiliate Gift:** Perhaps plan an event to raise money or earmark a portion of your affiliate's treasury to be donated to national VOTF.

**6.) Make Online Purchases through Amazon:** Shop in the comfort of your home, and VOTF can benefit. Simply click on Amazon in the right column of our home page and shop to your heart's content. You'll support VOTF's important projects with every purchase.

**7.) VOTF 2015 National Assembly:** Our upcoming April 18th assembly at the Connecticut Convention Center in Hartford has some overhead costs that you can help defray. Your contribution would be used to help pay for things like audiovisual needs and printed material, as well as transportation, lodging, meals and stipends for our speakers. For example, featured speaker **Marie Collins** is traveling from Ireland. Please consider becoming her sponsor.

**Most importantly,** hold us in prayer every day, so we'll all be filled with the spiritual strength for this amazing journey.

Thank you very much.

*Suzanne Donnell*  
Development Coordinator




*(SOL reform, continued from Page 2)*

in nearly every state where such laws have been proposed, even hiring lobbyists and PR firms in some states to bolster letters to parishioners and admonitions from the pulpit.

This opposition is especially scandalous considering the Church has shielded pedophile priests from prosecution and refused to discipline bishops involved in covering up crimes. Murphy, who was accused of shielding pedophile priests while vicar general of the Archdiocese of Boston, is still a bishop, even though the Massachusetts attorney general reported he "placed a higher priority on preventing scandal

and providing support to alleged abusers than on protecting children from sexual abuse."

The Church should be the first to want justice for clergy sexual abuse survivors. Justice, according to the Church's catechism is "the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor." Fr. James Connell, a Wisconsin canon lawyer and a founder of Catholic Whistleblowers, said "Only by living in the truth, the complete truth, can human action and speech generate justice and healing. Without truth there can be no justice and without justice, no healing." Connell first made these remarks during VOTF's 2012 national conference. 

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

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