

HARTFORD REGIONAL VOICE OF THE FAITHFUL RESPONDS TO CONNECTICUT LEGISLATIVE BILL 1098

As Hartford Regional Voice of the Faithful (HRVOTF) was finalizing its position paper on Bill 1098, word arrived that the Bill had been pulled by the chairs of the Judiciary Committee of the Connecticut State Legislature.* It was our intention to have a written statement inserted into the record of the hearing that was scheduled to take place on March 11th at 11:00 a.m. The hearing was cancelled. Hartford VOTF did not support Bill 1098 and was not aware that the Bill was being drafted, or of the stipulations within the proposed amendment.

Even though the Statute that the Bill was designed to amend has been part of the Connecticut laws for many years, the attention it drew raised an issue of constitutionality as to the original Statute. Attorney General Richard Blumenthal has been requested to present an opinion regarding the constitutionality of the existing law that sets different rules for the Roman Catholic

Church (and four other religions). What that opinion will be and where the matter goes from there are unknown.

Constitutional issues aside, the central problem for VOTF members remains the same: lack of substantive lay involvement in the governance and guidance of the Church, particularly in the area of finances. Meaningful lay involvement would help bring about financial transparency and accountability and ensure proper stewardship of funds provided almost exclusively by the faithful. Many parishes lack effective finance councils and annual reports frequently provide less than sufficient accounting. History has shown that there has been gross mismanagement of donated Church funds in each of the dioceses in CT: Greenwich: \$500,000; Darien: \$1.4 million and Waterbury: \$125,000.

Hartford VOTF calls for the same level of transparency from the dioceses as it does from its parishes. The Archdiocese of Hartford has not issued an Annual Report to its people since the 1980's, despite the fact that much of its revenue comes from a tax imposed on parish contributions by the laity. The Archdiocesan Finance Council may provide some oversight and accountability, but the names of its members are not published on the Archdiocesan web site or elsewhere.

Since its inception in 2002, Voice of the Faithful has been working for reform within the Church. As an affiliate of that national organization, Hartford VOTF will continue to reach out to our Archbishop and pastors, whom we believe must always be an integral, voting part of the Church's administration, as we seek lay collaboration. However, we also strongly believe that by virtue of our baptism, Catholics have both the right and responsibility to participate in the guidance and governance of the Church.

(Voice of the Faithful is a Catholic reform organization that sprang out of the clergy sexual abuse crisis in 2002. Our Mission is 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).

