

# STRATEGIC PLAN



# VOICE OF THE FAITHFUL STRATEGIC INITIATIVES: 2008-2010

*An action-oriented strategy supporting our Mission and Goals*

**Theme:** *Attentive to the Spirit we move forward together, inspiring meaningful change and celebrating our successes.*

**Overall Strategic Objective (2008-2010):** *Make significant measurable progress in achieving our mission and goals through action and initiatives targeted at Church reform.*

**Origination:** *As Voice of the Faithful, we have a commitment to listen to our constituents, our members, to help us define an action-focused future.*

## **Results of SWOT Analysis**

### **Strengths**

- Talented membership
- Name recognition
- Extended network of outside relationships
- Generally viewed as a centrist organization

### **Weaknesses**

- Governance structure
- Lack of clarity about who we are/what we stand for, i.e., brand
- Lack of clearly defined priorities
- Lack of sufficient funding
- Plateau in growth

### **Opportunities**

- Ongoing, long-term initiatives like the Synod
- Potential for maximizing our efforts through affiliation with other reform organizations
- Ability to define ourselves through our actions
- Ability to motivate Catholics, members and non members alike, including those who have left the church

### **Threats**

- Lack of sufficient funds to perform the needed work
- Internal conflicts
- Discouragement and apathy among members and non members alike with our limited ability to initiate meaningful change in the institutional church

## **Review of SWOT Analysis and Root Causes**

Despite a large, very talented membership, our unclear brand thwarts our ability to create sufficient motivation and momentum to facilitate meaningful change. This results in general apathy and discontent among leadership, which continues to hinder our fundraising ability.

**Root cause:** Disorganized/inefficient and ineffective organizational structure hinders our ability to develop *and execute* a clear, focused plan.

### **Proposed Solutions**

- ❖ Become a more focused, action-based organization whose actions clearly define who we are.
- ❖ Revise our organizational model to facilitate execution of an action-based strategic plan driven by proper planning, execution, shared responsibility, collaboration, accountability, transparency, evaluation and continuous improvement on local and national levels. Transition to the new execution-based model must be orderly, with minimal disruption to existing programs.
- ❖ Acknowledge and engage member knowledge, skills and abilities through direct involvement in the strategic plan.
- ❖ Plan, monitor and execute the metrically driven strategic plan so that results are reported to members in a highly organized, informative manner that increases momentum, commitment, enthusiastic involvement, and donations.
- ❖ Remodel VOTF using a platform approach (defined below) that maximizes our effectiveness by grouping activities into five action-driven categories, each of which requires specific skill sets for successful execution. Activities supporting a particular platform should be naturally interdependent with activities under other platforms, so that VOTF can leverage support of all platforms into greater impacts for change.

### **Strategic Plan Guiding Principles**

#### ***Primary***

- Must be consistent with our mission, goals and identity statement.
- Must be consistent with the findings of the SWOT analysis.
- Must be executable—there must be a reasonable expectation that what we propose can actually be achieved given our current organizational resources and SWOT findings.
- Must be consistent with our core values.

#### ***Secondary***

- Must be in line with constituent expectations—which should significantly increase our fundraising ability.
- Must engage and energize membership, tapping into their gifts so that more are mobilized and contribute talents and treasure.
- Must be easy to understand and articulate (KISS – keep it simple, silly).

## ***The Plan***

The Strategic Plan was developed from the perspective that our strategic objectives must:

- Capitalize on our strengths,
- Mitigate our weaknesses,
- Embrace opportunities, and
- Develop realistic solutions to future threats.

This analysis resulted in a plan with **five strategic platforms**.

- **Local/Diocese Actions**
- **Reform Actions to Protect Children and Support Survivors**
- **Universal Church Reform**
- **Partnerships and Networking**
- **Spiritual and Communal Growth**

*The entire organization will be invited to support and participate in one or more of our five platforms. The response in terms of volunteers and contributions will strongly influence our priorities, which we will make well known up front.*

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## **Platform: Local/Diocese Actions to Achieve Best Practices**

*VOTF in action at the parish and diocesan levels*

This platform uses a practical, grassroots approach to Church reform and emphasizes results achieved at the parish and diocesan level. Such activities include the implementation of highly functional **Best Practices** for pastoral councils, finance councils, safety committees, etc

### ***Knowledge, Skills and Abilities Needed for Parish/Diocese Platform***

**Knowledge:** Strong understanding of Best Practices models and the methods needed in each discipline.

**Skills:** Strong organizational skills, an eye for detail, respectful confrontation and conflict-resolution skills, and an understanding of how to manage and implement change.

**Abilities:** A consultative approach, ability to respect differing opinions and bring groups to consensus, strong understanding of change-management theory and practice.

### ***Recommended Actions Within This Initiative:***

1. Initiate larger scale diocesan accountability program—a well-developed diocesan scorecard (*already under way*).
  - Create a team (*partially in place*) to coordinate this with affiliates and collect data on all dioceses.
  - Make scorecards available on our website.
  - Produce annual or semiannual scorecard updates.
  - Send commentary to USCCB Office for the Protection of Children & Young People, with copies to every bishop.
  - Widely publicize results.
2. Become a centralized parish/diocesan resource (open to all) on the following topics:
  - How to form a parish council
  - Best practices – finances parish and diocesan
  - Parish closings
3. Become a centralized news information source available to all “bloggers”. Aim is to provide Catholics with a one-stop resource similar to *U.S.A. Today* presentation model: captivating headlines, links to follow trends, etc. – such as release of legal discoveries. Some start up office staff/volunteer time needed; already partially under way.
4. Create local media teams (“VOTF in the public square”) and invite and train a media team in as many dioceses as possible, starting with our largest affiliates and the largest six dioceses.

- Create local media contact list.
- Develop media relationships.
- Set up national communication exchanges with local media teams.
- Coordinate rollout of “VOTF as Reform Agent” initiatives on the local level
- Seek to engage college-aged young adults by presenting VOTF as a justice-focused organization through presentations at Newman Clubs and colleges.
- Pursue a dedicated outreach to the disenfranchised Catholics who have lost their spiritual home through parish closings, loss of faith in the institutional Church, etc. Coordinate this project with other groups.
- Create staff development programs & materials to develop “thinking Catholics” across the country. Use the examples of prophets in our Church to stimulate & engage thinking, problem solving and action on change.
- Develop a National Speakers Bureau of skilled professionals who can speak on topics relevant to the functioning of the local church (parish and diocese). Members of the Bureau could travel or establish web-based instructional programs (with minimal tuition--\$5-\$10) for leadership and member viewing.

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## **Platform: Reform Actions to Protect Children and Support Survivors**

*VOTF action aimed at increasing protection of children against abusers and securing justice for survivors of clergy sexual abuse*

This initiative focuses on quick responses and targeted reform-driven actions at the national and local level, so that VOTF can adopt *proactive approaches* to reform systems that currently put children at risk and deny justice to survivors.

### ***Knowledge, Skills and Abilities Needed for Platform***

**Knowledge:** A responsible understanding of victim issues and root causes of the abuse of children.

**Skills:** “Intelligent compassion” that conveys a message of support for survivors while maintaining a clear sense of appropriate boundaries. Advocacy for strategies that keep children safe in Church environments. Change-management skills. Ability to communicate in tense climates requiring respectful confrontation and conflict resolution skills.

**Abilities:** Sensitivity and compassion in supporting victims along their journeys to recovery; ability to recognize system failures and potential solutions and articulate this in a way to bring about change. Demonstrated experience in implementing, monitoring and measuring effective child-protection programs within parishes or dioceses.

### ***Recommended Actions Within This Initiative:***

1. Actively support bills in state legislatures that reform statutes of limitations. Create & circulate a generic booklet on “how to pass legislation” using the Delaware model.
2. Reach out to affiliate leaders to notify them when this booklet is available and encourage their actions to implement it locally.
3. Initiate an internal drive to send Marci Hamilton’s book on achieving legislative reform to state reps with a letter emphasizing the need for a change in every affiliate/diocese.
4. Engage in community efforts to protect children in concert with other child-protection advocacy organizations and initiatives. Sponsor a national Walkathon in concert with other abuse-focused groups to emphasize the mission of protecting our children. Hold the Walkathon on the same weekend in spring 2009 with key cities participating. (Major media event and fundraiser)
5. Support survivors and their advocates in local events, such as vigils, leafleting, letters-to-the-editor, etc., whenever possible. Initiate local pilot projects that connect survivors to sources of pro bono professional services and/or financial emergency support.

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## **Platform: Universal Church Reform**

*VOTF engaging the global Catholic community to bring a lay voice into issues affecting the broader Church and the entire People of God*

VOTF action under this platform aims at transforming the clerical culture of the Catholic Church into one that is responsive to the whole faith community. VOTF will initiate dialogue on issues that call forward all gifts of the Catholic community, such as mandatory celibacy, the role of women in the Church, and the process by which bishops and pastors are selected. National dialogue must occur to develop well-executed, often innovative, solutions.

### ***Knowledge, Skills and Abilities Needed for Platform***

**Knowledge:** Candidates must understand the early Church and the way it functioned. Knowledge of our Baptismal roles and responsibilities and of Vatican II and the principles that emanated from it are essential, as well as a firm understanding of Church teaching on conscience.

**Skills:** Strong mastery in articulating the above messages in language that calls Catholics to act out of conscience. Respectful confrontation and conflict-management skills are essential.

**Abilities:** Proven abilities in group process and facilitation skills to increase awareness, develop group motivation to act and successfully, and execute initiatives developed by same.

### ***Recommended Actions Within This Initiative***

Under this platform, roll out popular, mission-related initiatives in a highly coordinated, well-timed, highly professional manner that engages the entire organization and sparks a high level of interest among non-member Catholics. Each national initiative must include the following components:

- Formation of a leadership team (including at least one officer) that takes ultimate responsibility for the action
- Drafting of a white paper as to why the issue is important and offering a definitive proposed solution
- Circulation of the proposed initiative, including the white paper, to our members; the plan to roll out the initiative must include any requests for money needed to publicize and support the project.
- Creation of high-quality video on targeted reform issues so that VOTF is identified and defined by the effort
- Creation of an ad (size and placement based on funds received)
- Coordinate the roll out with other organizations
- Letter to Pope/Bishops explaining the initiative
- Announcement with press release/press conference

- Follow up activities to keep the initiative alive through letter-writing campaigns, petition drives, etc.

Existing/proposed initiatives and their anticipated rollout order:

- ❖ Review of mandatory celibacy proposal (Q3 2008 startup)
- ❖ Women's proposal (Q2 2009)
- ❖ The "Selection Solution" – seek local involvement in the selection of a bishop as a seat becomes available (based on known, required retirement dates) –(Q3 2009)
- ❖ Synod announcement and early stage development (Q4 2009)
- ❖ Evaluation and follow up plan for 2010 (Q4 2009)
- ❖ The future of our Church – Catholic youth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Q1 2010)
- ❖ Select/elect our Pastors (Q2 2010)

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## **Platform: Partnerships and Networking**

*VOTF as facilitator of inter-organization dialogue and activities*

VOTF works with other organizations on issues where we share common ground, resources and insights and, when appropriate, combines efforts to develop critical mass to raise a broader national voice. Examples of this Platform include executing a national process of education and dialogue, national Town Hall meetings, a large gathering in 2011 (National Synod) and developed, well-prepared action teams that nationally and locally effect change.

### ***Knowledge, Skills and Abilities Needed for Platform***

**Knowledge:** Clear understanding of the Vatican II invitation to empowerment; knowledge about early Church practices; knowledge of our Baptismal roles and responsibilities; knowledge of culturally specific Catholic Churches that remain connected to Rome but function as culturally specific entities, etc.

**Skills:** Ability to communicate the above in language all can understand coupled with an ability to deal with reform groups outside VOTF who may have different agendas but where we find ourselves on common ground on a particular issue. Ability to develop a commonly agreed upon scope for any defined actions and to avoid “scope creep” where one group’s agenda is furthered at the expense of others. Ability to engage in small group dialogue where every opinion is respected. Ability to engage participants in innovative thinking.

**Abilities:** Comfortable with an often ambiguous group process, with the ability to mold efforts into results. Strong history of leadership abilities demonstrated in tasks and with groups. Effective public speaking, negotiation skills and ability to clearly convey ideas in written form.

### ***Actions Under This Platform.***

- Host annual conference; first one is already scheduled for Oct 2009 on Long Island with Joan Chittister as the keynote speaker.
- A major initiative is already under way: The American Catholic Council.
- Invite local youth to participate – one or two national coordinators; local coordinators already in place.
- Become the “go to” organization for other reform organizations including coordinating educational initiatives etc.
- Actively share information with other organizations, including membership lists, for designated events/actions – one or two active coordinators needed

- Develop active relationships with Religious Orders, USCCB, NRB, OCYB, National Association of Lay Ministers, National Federation of Priest Councils, Catholic Theological Society, Academia, Catholic Publications as well as other reform minded organizations.

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## **Platform: Spiritual and Community Building**

*VOTF as community builder, spiritual support and educator*

Directed by our Mission, we must remain “attentive to the Spirit” as we engage in a long and difficult struggle. We acknowledge the need of God’s wisdom and guidance to find ways to support one another on the journey we have been called to follow. Modeled by Jesus’ example to build relationships, form community and live the Gospel, this initiative will build teams to facilitate centering retreats and social gatherings that can bond us together spiritually.

### ***Knowledge, Skills and Abilities Needed for Platform***

**Knowledge:** Strong understanding of Scripture and the teachings of the Church (early and modern) and how to make the Gospel message understandable and a lived model for us in modern times. Ability to integrate a group to form a community that helps members attain a new level of personal and communal spiritual awareness and growth.

**Skills:** Ability to write meaningful prayers and rituals that provide a deeper, more enriched spiritually to sustain, stimulate and develop us into a greater relationship with God; provides ways to foster community.

**Abilities:** Proven ability to execute successful events that could contribute to the aforementioned goals.

### ***Actions Under This Platform***

- Develop events for personal and communal spiritual growth that can meet the needs of attendees, promote the organization, etc.
- Sponsor retreats for members who are interested in reform
- Host dinners with speakers (especially new authors with currently released materials); host other social events that can build community (dances, golf outings, etc.)

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## ***Organization-Wide implications***

Fortunately, many of the activities contained in the strategic plan are already underway. In addition to supplementing and expanding these activities, the strategic plan aims to organize them in a way that they can be managed efficiently and effectively and targeted to yield progress toward each of our national goals.

We will need five to seven (5-7) skilled volunteers to step up and take on leadership roles in each of these platforms.

These core teams will be responsible for recruiting, organizing, fine-tuning and prioritizing the activities within each platform. Additionally, they will be responsible for developing reporting mechanisms that keep the rest of the organization informed, as well as defining anticipated internal resource requirements.

The office staff in conjunction with the officers will be responsible, among other things, for coordinating and supporting the platform leadership teams and their needs and activities.

Each of the current National Working Groups will be encouraged to coordinate its efforts with the appropriate Platform initiative. For example, the Structural Change Working Group has a natural connection with the Best Practice activities in the Local/Diocese Platform, Survivor Support is a natural match with the Reform Agent Platform, Prayerful Voice with the Spiritual Community Platform, and so on.

Proposals developed in VOTF will now have an established, functional platform to support their implementation and ensure that all proposals are integrated to complement the national Mission. Each officer will be responsible for managing an initiative to demonstrate shared responsibility, collaboration, and a working role in achieving the mission and goals.

## ***Development***

VOTF's development activities have suffered because of our inability to define ourselves and execute responses and actions in a timely, targeted manner. The Strategic Plan will substantially improve our ability to do both, because it fosters a team approach and shared responsibility.

The Strategic Plan will encourage donors, for whom a particular aspect of church reform has appeal, to support us. Although all donations typically go into the general fund (unless the donor specifies otherwise), memberships surveys related to fundraising will show us where our donors' priorities lie and where to build additional projects in the future.

The Strategic Plan gives us the opportunity to look at our organization in a new way that embraces the many overlooked talents and abilities of our membership and offers them the chance to be a vital ingredient of our future growth and success.

## ***Development Implications***

1. We are considering initiating a voluntary membership dues program. (Anticipated startup: Q1 2009.)
2. We will announce the initiatives with professionally designed, clear explanations and ask for volunteers and donations over a three-month period. Make it clear that priorities will be set based on number of volunteers and donors. **NOTE:** We will inform membership that, although donations will go into the general fund, responses about general areas of interest during fundraising and the number of volunteers for each initiative will influence our resource allocation (both time and money). In this way we make it clear that our members influence priorities by the choices they make and by demonstrating responsibility and accountability for designated platforms and projects.
3. We will develop a method for learning which platforms each major donor prefers to support, so that we can more effectively assess priorities.
4. VOTF's primary fundraising method (after membership dues) will be quarterly email and snail mail reports on each platform. The reports will include:
  - Progress to date
  - Initiatives/activities in progress
  - Number of members participating in the particular initiative (need to track)
  - Money raised—current quarter and year-to-date actual versus budget by category
5. Other interim email fundraising will be sent based on special updates or specific fundraising request (like an ad in support of a specific activity i.e., the Papal ad).

## ***Measurement***

- Each initiative's leadership team will design its own measurement matrix for determining success.

## ***Benefits***

This plan has great potential for success for three reasons:

1. It directly addresses the current needs of our constituents, as garnered through the SWOT analysis administered at all levels and groups throughout the organization. By responding to perceived weaknesses and preparing for future opportunities and threats, we will have the ability to manage our respective success.
2. The plan directly addresses the plateau effect on our member size and donations. We believe that inviting members to join us in tasks that further the mission is key to recognizing the treasures we have in our membership. In many ways, we have functioned

as a top-down organization with a passive membership watching what we will do next. In this plan, we engage as many as possible in working in the Vineyard by forwarding our mission and goals in decisive ways.

3. The officers will help manage the process. Direct involvement by the officer team will help all members experience a grassroots organization that can reach out and build relationships, build community, and build the Kingdom together.