



**VOICES IN  
ACTION**  
Transforming Our Church Together

VOICE

**VOICE OF THE FAITHFUL**

*Strategic Plan: Executive Summary*





With a leadership transition, the new Voice of the Faithful officers (elected in March 2008) committed to a member outreach to co-develop priorities for the future. The outreach selected was to conduct a member survey that considered two overall concerns: how to define critical issues about VOTF and how to strategically target meaningful actions to meet the needs of our members. The survey conducted was a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) of the organization, designed to refocus our lens on the future.

## Planning Assumptions

In planning the survey, we assumed that the outcome would define for us a way to:

- ❖ Capitalize on our strengths
- ❖ Mitigate our weaknesses
- ❖ Embrace opportunities
- ❖ Develop realistic solutions to future threats

## Survey Results

### Strengths

- We have a talented membership whose skill sets and gifts have yet to be tapped fully.
- All members have an extended network of outside relationships.
- We are generally viewed as a centrist organization working within the Church for change.

### Weaknesses

- Our governance structure causes response delays and lag time in media coverage.
- There is a lack of clarity about who we are/what we stand for (i.e., our brand is ambiguous).
- There is a lack of clearly defined priorities.
- We lack sufficient funding.
- Growth may have hit a plateau.

### Opportunities

- Ongoing, long-term initiatives like a 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

### Strategic Priorities

Local Action

Safety & Reform

#### Strategic Goal A

**VOTF will more clearly define who we are (our brand at work in action) and what our focus is through a Strategic Plan (*Voices in Action*) that includes multiple initiatives for member participation. Each initiative shall be aimed at building a critical mass for change within the Church.**

Through the survey we heard many times that it was difficult for members to define who VOTF was to those unaware of our presence. This was a major impediment for many members seeking to build affiliates, gain donors and invite new members. We believe that this plan has the potential to engage more supporters in “field work” to actively participate in the organization.

VOTF will serve as an active, aggressive advocate for several new initiatives born from the survey feedback. We believe this outreach to our membership will have a positive influence in short and long-term success.

#### Strategic Goal B

**We will involve our members in local/diocesan actions to achieve best practices.**

Using a practical, grassroots approach to Church reform, we will work to increase active participation of the lay faithful in the mission and ministries of each parish and diocese. Such activities include the implementation of highly functional Best Practices for pastoral councils, finance councils, and safety committees, and the development of tools that will help affiliates refocus their efforts and gain new momentum.



### **Strategic Goal C**

**We will work diligently for reform to protect children and support survivors.**

VOTF will communicate our support of survivors to increase victim awareness; develop guidelines for those seeking to reform laws governing redress for victims of childhood sex abuse and mandatory reporting of child abuse; educate ourselves and others about child sex abuse in our society; and collaborate with others who seek to expand child abuse prevention education and awareness programs in both the Catholic environment and the broader communities.

### **Strategic Goal D**

**We will aggressively work toward universal church reform.**

VOTF will engage the global Catholic community to bring a lay voice into issues affecting the broader Church and the entire People of God. We believe that we are the Church, and to gain reform in the Church Universal, we as individual Catholics must change first.

### **Strategic Goal E**

**We will do the due diligence needed to network and partner with other Catholic organizations so as to facilitate mutually beneficial actions and create critical mass for change.**

While maintaining our allegiance to the mission, goals, and identity statement of VOTF, we propose to develop collaborative actions with other Catholic groups in order to effectively nurture meaningful reform. We will develop a database of information on all organizations we connect with and make it internally available to all working on the strategic plan.

### **Strategic Goal F**

**We are loyal and dedicated to our faith and toward that end we believe that our spiritual growth and our ability to build community within and outside VOTF is vital towards “becoming Church.”**

We will facilitate spiritual development and foster community within Voice of the Faithful through resources, programs and activities that encourage members to maintain a prayerful voice attentive to the Spirit. We will emphasize private and communal prayer and spirituality. We will work with others to develop or promote special events centered on prayer and community.



## Principles for Action

Organizationally, many of the specific action steps envisioned for the Strategic Plan are already under way. As we continue these efforts, and as we mount new actions, our choices will be based on principles developed through our experiences these past seven years:

- ❖ **Shift in Direction:** While our efforts to date have attempted to establish dialogue with the hierarchy, our efforts have only occasionally been successful. Where successful, we will continue to work toward progress. But where there is no evidence of potential success, we will turn inward to minister to the needs of our membership and to engage Catholics at large in an ongoing dialogue about the need for lay participation to transform our Church.
- ❖ **Multi-Pronged Actions:** To be true to our Mission, Core Values and Goals, we believe that simultaneous actions locally, regionally and nationally can and will be effective with the support and dedication of our gifted members.
- ❖ **Both a “Business” and a “Ministry”:** We believe that we must be more effective in our message and actions in the future in order to measure our successes nationwide and report both the successes and challenges to our membership. Committed to our mission, we will never lose sight of the fact that the Spirit is guiding us one step at a time, one action at a time.
- ❖ **Justice as a Theme:** With a more just Church, we believe that many of the critical issues affecting the institution today can be compassionately confronted. Toward this end, we anticipate a greater recruitment effort asking young adults, whose passion naturally lies in justice arenas, to join in our work. We believe this is essential to growing our constituency, offering energy to our campaigns, and welcoming young adults to our midst.

## Voices in Action: The Strategic Plan

- ❖ Spiritual and Communal Growth
- ❖ Local Actions
- ❖ Child Protection and Survivor Support
- ❖ Universal Church Reform
- ❖ Networking and Partnerships

For details on each initiative, see *Voices in Action: Strategic Plan* and the *Information Sheet*.