

February 26 In the Vineyard

National News

Ideas for Lenten Reflections

As you prepare for Lent, VOTF's National office has put together some options for your Lenten reflections. Most are suitable either for individual action or for an organized discussion group at your parish or your affiliate.

- Organize reflections and discussions about conscience [insert link] and what that means to us when we are instructed to develop a well-formed conscience but expected to follow the dictates of the Church in many ethical and theological issues.
- Host a review and discussion about Church structure, using the Organizational Structures Primer [insert link] prepared by VOTF's Structural Change Working Group.
- Open conversations about celibacy [insert link] in your parish or affiliate, using the resources suggested by the Priest Support Working Group.
- View and discuss the five-DVD series on Vatican II and the Laity [insert link], which were produced by Fr. Robert Pelton, peritus on Cardinal Suenens' team at Vatican II and Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame (and long-time VOTF champion).
- Select one of the other study guides available from the Voice of Renewal/Lay Education National Working Group, or choose one of the Recommended Books [insert link] for a "parish book read" during Lent.

Another Option—Visit the Boston College C21 Online [insert link] pages and participate in one of the free online studies you can find there.

Voice of the Faithful Has a New Look!

VOTF recently launched a new website. If you haven't seen it yet, click to our new Home Page and take a moment to check out some of our new features:

- Scroll past the main stories and peek at the News box on the left. All day, every day, you can see the latest postings of news about the Catholic Church here – direct from the media sources posting the news. Click one of the story titles to read the story itself.
- For affiliates, there is a new Calendar section that allows you to post information on conferences.

- You can also keep up to date on happenings in Voice of the Faithful with the VOTF Actions feature — in the box adjacent to the News. You'll also find links to the latest In the Vineyard and Focus publications there.

We hope you find these changes useful as we work together to Keep the Faith and Change the Church.

Why Are You Catholic? (This can go somewhere else)

As members of Voice of the Faithful, we are “Keeping the Faith and Changing the Church.” Collectively, we are changing the Church, but how are you “keeping the faith?” Please send in any thoughts of inspiration, support and encouragement to vineyard@votf.org. Why do you love being Catholic? Why do you love your Church? Together, we can help each other keep the faith.

Affiliate News

News from Palm Beach

John McGovern sent in the following dispatch from his seat in the Palm Beach County courthouse as he watched the trial of Father Francis Guinan.

Priest on Trial: The Anatomy of Triumphalism and Clericalism in the Roman Catholic Church

By John E McGovern, VOTF Palm Beach president

On Wednesday, February 18 at 3:25 pm the State rested its case in State of Florida v Francis Guinan. The defense case will proceed tomorrow at 9 am. Following the conclusion of the State’s case, the defense attorney moved for an acquittal for his client on the grounds that “no persons from St. Vincent Ferrer Parish were subpoenaed by the State to claim that “their money was stolen from them by Fr. Guinan.” A point well taken, I thought to myself. Fortunately, the judge denied the motion to acquit.

Throughout his testimony on Wednesday, February 18th, the Chief Fiscal Officer of the Diocese, Denis Hamel, testified that: (1) Tens of thousands of dollars of expenditures on Father Guinan's personal American Express card were not ordinary expenses of his parish.

Priest on Trial: The Anatomy of Triumphalism and Clericalism in the Roman Catholic Church (continued)

By John E. McGovern, VOTF Palm Beach president

On average, \$6,000 per month for a period of 19 months of expenses on Fr. Guinan’s personal credit card were paid from cash that was supposed to be part of the operating expenses of the church over Fr. Guinan’s “sole” signature. They were paid from cash in a

"slush fund" created from cash that was weekly "taken off the top" from the offertory envelopes. These expenses included, but were not limited to:

- Hotel stays in many Las Vegas gambling hotels;
- Airline flights to Ireland, Las Vegas, The Bahamas—tickets for himself and Carol Hagen (a friend of Guinan's) and, on occasion, Skehan, his predecessor as Pastor of St. Vincent Ferrer Parish;
- Expensive furniture from Baers;
- Patio furniture for his condo;
- Dinners at expensive restaurants;
- Expensive cigars (usually \$250 - \$350 per occasion); and,
- the "piece de resistance," in January '04 expenses totaling \$2,172.95 on the credit card of one Carol Hagen his "good friend."

(2) Under diocesan policy, "the priest (pastor) has discretionary authority" to spend up to \$50,000 (no mention of per year, per month etc.) without permission of the diocese; a privilege at the center of the defense case.

When the leadership of VOTF Palm Beach met with Bishop Barbarito last year the Bishop stated that the canonical requirement of a Finance Council is in place within every parish of the diocese. If this were the case, how would a character like Guinan get away with this type of fiscal irresponsibility?

Sitting in the courtroom, I was impressed by a few of the members of St. Vincent's parish who finally "got it" that they had been robbed. I believe that the majority of St. Vincent people have been in denial for quite some time now and have remained purposefully ignorant about the realities of their own situation. Four years ago, when the Diocese announced to the congregation of St. Vincent's that an investigation has been launched and that Fr. Guinan had been removed, the majority of people believed that the matter had been exaggerated by the press and that this was "one more attempt by the press to paint the church in a bad light." This was stated by the pastor also when he finished reading the "official" letter from the Bishop - in a kind of "semi defense" of his fellow priest. That same man is now the pastor of the church and many parishioners have left the church and have moved to a neighboring church in Boynton Beach.

Thinking back to VOTF's annual conference on fiscal responsibility a few years ago, there was testimony collected by the diocese over the sad state of affairs years ago at St. Patrick Parish when parishioners tried to "set things right" over Guinan's dealings there. Denis Hamel has known for years that Guinan was a problem. During the trial, Hamel made no mention of the fact that he had been alerted years earlier regarding problems when questioned by the defense as to why he was pressing the issue of the audit at St. Vincent's parish when Skehan was leaving and Guinan was taking over in September 2003 until his removal in March 2005—a period of 19 months. He testified that it was a matter of "transition of the two pastors" and made no mention of the fact that parishioners had been concerned for years about Skehan's use/misuse of money.

The Forensic Accountant, William Michaelson, testifying for the State, spoke of the comparison between the cash position of the parish during Guinan 's 19 month tenure compared to the 15 month "post Guinan" period in order to estimate the amount of cash that "disappeared" under Guinan. Comparing the two periods, Michaelson stated that, on average, there was a \$19,596 PER MONTH difference in the cash position of the parish between the two periods. In other words, on average, Guinan was siphoning off that amount of "cash" per month to a "slush fund" in order to conceal from the diocese the true cash position of the parish.

The same situation persisted under Skehan with one exception: Skehan was hiding cash and placing it in accounts which he was using either for himself (on a very minimal scale compared to Guinan) or for "charitable" purposes. One "slush fund" under Skehan—referred to as "Slush Fund #3"—was used by him to pay a retired church employee, who was already collecting a pension from the diocese, another "cash pension" exceeding \$100,000 over a period of several years.

Guinan, on the other hand, was putting the money into his own pockets. He put an end to paying "cash bonuses" three times per year to rectory employees. The parish bookkeepers who testified stated clearly that there was a "difference" between the way Skehan was treating cash and the way Guinan did.

While their intentions were different, the effects of their actions were the same. Cash was never reported to the diocese. "Week after week after week" cash in collections was "taken off the top" and not reported to the diocese and – as reported in the paper today - "the female spokesperson for the diocese winced" when she heard this evidence. Of special mention, Skehan continued to live in the rectory following his retirement and "continued to sign checks" in some instances. If the diocese was conducting oversight I do not understand how this could have been happening.

The State rested its case after playing for the jury the taped conversation between Florida FDLE (the Florida version of the FBI) and Guinan (who was in Australia at the time) urging him to return as soon as possible to the United States and face arrest. He returned several weeks later.

VOTF's insistence on parish finance councils having "real authority" could not be timelier. I think the Diocese of Palm Beach is not going to look very good when this is all over. The entire defense case will rest on discrediting the way the diocese conducts oversight of parish fiscal management.

News from the New York Affiliate

The New York VOTF affiliate put out a statement about the news that Bishop Dolan from Milwaukee will be the next Archbishop of New York. To read the statement VOTF plans to send him a letter after his installation and is interested to see what changes that he will bring to the New York diocese.

Site Seeing

Numerous theologians and Christians in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland have begun a petition for the full recognition of the decrees of the Second Vatican Council, and you have an opportunity to be a part of this initiative.

If you support the declaration, your name, town, and function—not your email address—will be [displayed on this website](#) immediately after your confirmation. After completion, the lists of signatures will be handed over to the Vatican, and the German Bishops' Conference, the Official Catholic Lay Organization ("ZdK") and the press will be informed about the outcome.

To read this [petition](http://www.petition-vaticanum2.org/pageID_7327623.html), follow the link http://www.petition-vaticanum2.org/pageID_7327623.html

Read John Allen's examination of Archbishop Dolan, the new Archbishop of NY at <http://ncronline3.org/drupal/?q=node/3357>

US News and World Report's religion writer, Cathy Lynn Grossman reports on NY's new Archbishop.
<http://content.usatoday.com/communities/religion/post/2009/02/63223847/1>

Delia Smith, famous chef and author of several cookbooks, talks about her own personal Catholicism <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/4732837/Saint-Delia-Delia-Smiths-Christian-commitment.html>

Bail was set at \$1 million Tuesday for a Roman Catholic priest accused of stealing more than \$400,000 from the collection plates of his Roselle parish.

The complete article can be viewed at:

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/chi-priest-theft-11feb11,0,6153614.story>

Doing any shopping lately? If so, please shop at Amazon.com! Anything you purchase from Amazon.com by following a link to their site from VOTF means a small donation to VOTF! And we get that donation on books, DVDs, CDs, electronic equipment, apparel, toys and more, even gift certificates.

Book Review

Submitted by John Ryan

Doors of Hope: Paths for Renewal in the Catholic Church

By John J. Dietzen, TempleGate Publishers, 153 pages, \$18.95

For those of us who grew up in the pre-Vatican II church, one which we thought of as being unchangeable and rooted forever in the Council of Trent which took place centuries ago, this is a book that offers what I view as the most refreshing and coherent account of how we came to where we are and why we should have hope for the future. For those of us who have grown up since Vatican II this is a book that will help us understand why

there is so much divisiveness among Catholics, lay and ordained, in these troubling times for the church.

Even those among us who may believe themselves to have a firm grasp of their faith and what is going on in the church will benefit from reading what is more than just a refresher course on change in the church. This book is an incisive re-assessment of certain fundamentals of our faith, a re-assessment which does in fact open many “doors of hope”. To read the rest of John’s review

Book Review (continued)

Doors of Hope: Paths for Renewal in the Catholic Church

Well documented in this book is the fact that popes and bishops have sometimes missed the mark on fundamental aspects of the church, accounting for what the author describes as an “...intellectual quasi-schizophrenia---a spirit of openness and exploration versus silencing and condemnation—which characterized much of the church’s attitude toward scholarship during most of the twentieth century.” This schizophrenia is typified by two quotes the author uses to introduce one of his chapters:

“The church is in essence an unequal society, a society comprising two categories of persons, the shepherd and the flock. The right and authority necessary for promoting and guiding all members toward the goal of society reside only in the pastoral body. As to the multitude, its sole duty is that of allowing itself to be led, and of following its pastors as a docile flock.” *Pope Pius X (1906)*

“All share a true equality regarding the dignity and the activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the body of Christ. From their charisms, there arise for each believer the right and duty to use them in the Church and in the world for the good of mankind and for the upbuilding of the Church.”

Vatican Council II

John Dietzen, with more than 54 years in the priesthood, 51 of them with a syndicated column in the Catholic press, has a unique insight into the problems and frustrations affecting Catholics today. Along with this real world sense of what Catholics are experiencing, he brings decades of pastoral experience and research into church history, especially the recent past, in addressing such issues as:

- The challenge of Sunday worship without a priest
- Married priests/Women priests
- Can we make the Sacrament of Penance work?
- Baptized Community, a neglected force in the church
- The “on again/off again” relationship between clergy and laity
- Human rights in the church (a notion condemned by early popes)
- The primacy of conscience as “...transcendent, beyond the claim of external social groups, even of the official church”. (Cardinal Josef Ratzinger)
- Clergy sex abuse
- Rights of priests and victims

- Uniting believers: sixty years after the decree on ecumenism
- Healing families: Divorce, Remarriage, and Communion

One could be tempted to think that covering such a vast array of subjects in any substantive manner cannot be done in a 153-page book. To the contrary, these and other issues are addressed clearly and convincingly. Each chapter contains abundant annotations (200 in total) citing encyclicals, canon law, and many other sources.

To give just one of many examples of the author's style, and mindset, I quote from his chapter on the Sacrament of Penance, where he discusses the notion of first confession for children:

“If we insist, for example, that a child can commit a mortal sin at the age of 12 or 14, with all that age's mental, spiritual, and emotional gropings, then it seems we are making mortal sin something considerably less than the catechism and good theology tell us it is. We threaten to produce an unwholesome, superficial religious personality that sees love and friendship with God and with other people as something one can pop in and out of several times a month. This trivializes grace, sin, and forgiveness, and ends up trivializing even God.”

His chapter on Healing Families focuses attention on the 6- to 7-million Catholics “...deprived of Eucharistic Communion because their divorce and remarriage renders them juridically unworthy to receive the sacrament. Within the framework of the Church's teaching about marriage and the Eucharist, are there avenues to address this problem with both fidelity to Catholic tradition and Christ-like compassion for these hurting members of our faith?”

Such “hurting members of our faith”, and all others struggling to keep or better understand their faith in these troubling times for our Church, will find this book not only good reading but also, a door of hope.

Calendar

VOTF Bridgeport is sponsoring *The Presence of Christ in the Gathered Assembly*, a talk by Sr. Judith Kubicki, PhD, Associate Professor of Theology at Fordham University on Thursday, March 5th, at 7:30 PM at the First Congregational Church on the Green in Norwalk.

President of the North American Academy of Liturgy and Associate Chair of the Theology Department, Sr. Judith has degrees in English, Music and Liturgy and received her doctorate from The Catholic University of America.

In addition to her book mentioned above, and her doctoral dissertation on Liturgical Music as Ritual Symbol, she has written extensively on liturgical themes. She is especially interested in the meaning and implications of the Church's belief that, when the community assembles for worship, Christ is in their midst.

For more information go to www.votfbpt.org.

VOTF Palm Beach 2009 Conference

Adult and Catholic: How the Laity Can Save the Church

March 28, 2009 - 9:30 am - 3:00pm including lunch

Registration: Advance - \$25; at the door on day of conference: \$30.00

Conference Site: Knights of Columbus Hall - West Palm Beach (1155 S. Congress Ave)

Speaker / Facilitator: Paul Lakeland, PhD - Fairfield University Distinguished Professor of Catholic Studies. For more information

<http://www.geocities.com/votfpalmbeach/VOTFPalmBeach.html>

The Paulist Reconciliation Ministries and the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry present *The Road to Reconciliation: Theological, Pastoral, and*

Psychological Dimensions

Presenter: Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S. (Thursday and Friday lectures), Catherine Dooley, O.P. (Friday lecture), and Pastoral Workshops by P. Denio, P. Fink, S.J., R. Helmick, S.J., D. Leckey, J. Loftus, S.J., R. Petersen, T. Ryan, C.S.P., T. Stegman, S.J., C. Williams, C.P.P.S.

Thursday, April 16, 2009, 7:00 pm and Friday April 17, 2009, 9:00 am – 4:00 pm
Symposium

Co-sponsored by Paulist Reconciliation Ministries and Boston College School of Theology and Ministry

Location: 129 Lake St., Boston College Brighton Campus

Fee: Thursday is free; \$25 for Friday includes lunch. Mail-in-Registration by April 1

For More Information, http://www.bc.edu/schools/stm/meta-elements/pdf/reg_form.pdf

Letters to the Editor

I have been with VOTF since the July 2002 conference in Boston, and my admiration and respect for the wonderful participants and attendees has not lessened. I was fortunate to be able to attend both the 2005 and 2007 conferences in Indianapolis and Providence - but am almost 83 now and probably will not be attending the next one.

The three goals of VOTF were certainly prayerfully chosen. It is sad to see the survivors still struggling for support from the laity and accountability from the bishop; the priests enduring the hardships of their lessening numbers; and the continued stonewalling of the hierarchy against any changes in a system that corrupts its clergy (the awareness that healthy change will not take place seems to be reality). .

In spite of all of the concern about and criticism of VOTF that takes place, I still have faith that there are many persons working hard for us and that we should hang in there doing whatever we can for as long as it takes. It is refreshing to recently read the two articles from *In the Vineyard* highlighting the activities and successes of groups like

Bridgeport Ct and Louisville KY. They keep on keepin' on no matter what. I am looking forward to other affiliates publishing their VOTF stories.

The Bishop's ban has hurt VOTF in the Fall River Diocese, but we still have one enthusiastic and very successful group left that is continuing to exist. I will continue to support VOTF prayerfully, financially and personally, as long as I can, and encourage you to do all you feel able to do - for as long as it takes.

Estelle Roach
Fall River Diocese

It was August of 2003 or 2004. While driving, I listened to WCBS radio in the New York-New Jersey area. They reported that Archbishop John Myers of Newark had shuffled around at least 7 pedophile priests in Peoria, Illinois, before coming to Newark, NJ.

I checked *The Record* every day for a week and never saw this reported in print. The next July, there was a general article about the National Conference of American Bishops and it mentioned that Bishop John Myers had resigned his position on the committee of bishops who were to oversee the recommendations for protecting children, but no reason was given.

Name withheld upon request

It is easy to lose heart when faced with continuing headlines of priests that steal from their flocks and bishops that place the protection of their own authority over the safety of our children. The embracing of holocaust deniers and the excommunication of people endorsing women's ordination could not have done more to disillusion the faithful than if they were part of a strategy to do so.

We cannot lose heart. This is our Church. We must look beyond the actions of the few. My father, an acknowledged sinner, put it more bluntly: "Don't let those "so and so's" drive you away from YOUR Church."

Name withheld upon request

Questions, Comments?

Please send them to Siobhan Carroll, Vineyard Editor at Vineyard@votf.org. Unless otherwise indicated, I will assume comments can be published as Letters to the Editor.