

JULY 2 IN THE VINEYARD

NATIONAL NEWS

VOTF is accepting 2009 Priest of Integrity Award Nominations

The National Priest Support Working Group is now accepting nominations for the 2009 Priest of Integrity award that will be presented at the Long Island National Conference October 30-31st. Deadline for submission is August 1st. [Click here](#) for nomination information and requirements.

SAVE THE DATE!!

October 30-31, 2009: VOTF National Conference

MAKING OUR VOICES HEARD

Featuring SR. JOAN CHITTISTER, O.S.B., and FR. THOMAS REESE, S.J.

Join in lively discussions as we come together to reflect on the state of our church and how we can be part of the changes that will renew our faith. Sign up now! Also remember to use the reference code VOTF for the hotel reservation.

Catherine of Siena Distinguished Lay Person Award

The '09 National Conference Committee is seeking nominations for this year's Catherine of Siena Distinguished Lay Person Award. This award was established by the 2005 VOTF Convocation Steering Committee and approved by the Board of Trustees at that time.

VOTF established this award because Catherine of Siena encountered corruption and crisis in the Church and took noble and effective action to end it. Grieved by scandal and undeterred by rank, she was spurred on to reform the Catholic Church. Catherine of Siena went directly to Pope Gregory XI and through determined and courageous efforts became the catalyst for ending the crisis precipitated by the Avignon papacy.

Catherine of Siena Distinguished Lay Person Award

continued

Catherine of Siena's deep faith propelled her to care for those labeled as "least" in her society. Neither hardship nor schism, war or persecution detained her from carrying out the Lord's work. She was an innovator led by the spirit and an agent of change in a tumultuous time. The Church ultimately recognized her contribution by proclaiming her both a saint and a Doctor of the Church.

Judge Ann Burke, the head of the National Review Board at that time, was the first recipient of this award. Carolyn Disco, recognized as a champion of survivors who worked tirelessly to right what is wrong, received this award at VOTF's 2007 Convention.

Models of exemplary lay leadership are needed as torchbearers of light in our Church. Many lay people use their gifts willingly for the church's service. VOTF seeks to light

the lamps of recognition for those lay leaders and to call forth the talents of all members of the Body of Christ.

All members of VOTF are encouraged to submit the name of a lay person who has exhibited the faith, courage, aptitude for unprecedented action, and the outspokenness of Catherine in his/her own arena in the past few years.

When submitting a name, please include the following:

- Name of nominee
- Name of nominator (or affiliate)
- Role of nominee (theologian, lay minister, parishioner)
- Reason for nomination (main reasons why this person exemplifies the virtues of Catherine of Siena)
- Supporting evidence (Testimonies, newspaper articles)
- Likelihood of nominee to attend conference (High, medium, low)
- Contact for follow-up

Please send nominations to sheila_peiffer@yahoo.com

NEWS FROM THE PLATFORM COMMITTEES

Local Action Platform:

Global Change Starts With Local Action

The mission of the Local Action Platform Group is to increase the active participation of the lay faithful in the mission and ministries of each parish and diocese. Our approach will be to discover and describe models or “best practices” in such areas as parish governance, financial administration, child safety and community life. We will then provide the resources needed by the laity to implement these best practices in their own parishes and dioceses. Since effective implementation will be dependent on the existence of strong, effective VOTF affiliates, our platform team also aims to provide the tools needed to strengthen VOTF affiliate operations and communications, so that each affiliate has the resources needed to help the laity achieve the best practices defined.

[LINK HERE](#)

Local Action Platform:

Global Change Starts With Local Action

Our focus is on practical, pragmatic tools, including:

- Parish-based transformation programs for renewal of parish and finance councils
- Establishing parish-based safe environment committees
- Structured programs for VOTF affiliate renewal and for starting new affiliates

- Communications toolkits for VOTF affiliate promotion and outreach

We are looking for members of VOTF who are interested to help with the significant work that lies ahead. Over the next year, we will be developing practical tools that local parishes and affiliates can use to transform their activities. We need volunteers who can help us research best practices, and work with parishes and affiliates on pilot programs. We are also looking for volunteers to help with initiatives on parish closings and mergers, and with carrying forward survey work on parish and diocesan practices nationwide. If you are interested in volunteering, contact Francis Piderit at PideritVOTF@piderit.com or Brad Pritts at bpritts@pritts.com for more information.

NEWS FROM IRELAND

Irish Report Sheds Light on Widespread Abuse Cover-Up

The shocking report released in late May by the government-appointed Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse details the depth of child abuse at the hands of the clergy and religious of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland. Roughly 2,000 men and women were abused in more than 100 schools and institutions run by religious orders dating back to the 1950s. This latest report is another example of the worldwide issue of clergy abuse—an issue that cannot be resolved without an end to the culture of secrecy and a call for accountability. Click here to read the [VOTF national press release](#) or visit the VOTF Ireland website to view their [press release](#).

You also may be interested in reading an article sent to the *Irish Times* by VOTF's Sean O'Conaill.

[LINK HERE](#)

Isn't Child Safeguarding Also the Work of God?

By Sean O'Conaill

No one can be in any doubt that the morale of Catholic clergy in the anglophone world is at its lowest ebb in living memory. With a mean age approaching 70 in Ireland, priests know that the status of the priesthood as a career choice among younger generations is in critical decline.

Meanwhile an unbelievable torrent of clerical child abuse revelations – dammed up by generations of secrecy – continues to overwhelm the media.

Disappearance and disgrace seem to be an entirely possible future for a cadre whose oldest living members joined it when no career could compare in prestige.

Against this backdrop one can see the logic of the Pope inaugurating a 'Year for Priests' on June 18th. Those of us who have experienced none of the worst of the abuse of clerical power, and who may even feel a sense of personal debt to individual priests, could not complain about this in principle. The best of our clergy never abused power.

Exemplifying the spirit of kindness and service they too need reassurance that this example will not be forgotten and will continue to bear fruit.

However, to read the Pope's letter inaugurating this 'Year for Priests' on June 20th is to be filled with misgiving. Quoting at length from the nineteenth century saint Jean-Marie Vianney, the patron of parish priests, Pope Benedict extols the role of the priest in the eternal scheme of things:

"O, how great is the priest! ... If he realized what he is, he would die... God obeys him: he utters a few words and the Lord descends from heaven at his voice, to be contained within a small host...".

Listing then the role of the priest at every transitional stage of our lives from birth to death, and at major crises in between, the pope quotes the saint again, without a hint of hesitation: "After God, the priest is everything!"

It was at this point that I wondered if the Pope has yet been briefed on the Catholic mother in the diocese of Ferns who was so convinced that "After God, the priest is everything!" that she could not believe that anything untoward could have happened when a priest shared a bed with her daughter.

To head off the criticism that I am taking this statement of the Pope's not only too literally but outrageously out of context, I need to remind everyone that no greater outrage can be committed than sexual abuse by a person entrusted with a highly privileged spiritual role. To this day the Church has not measured the spiritual harm done by such behaviour – or even acknowledged bluntly that it completely disables the capacity of the Catholic priesthood to heal those who have been most completely robbed of their ability to receive the Eucharist.

Continuing on the theme of the spiritual importance of the priest's role the Pope quotes yet again from the Curé d'Ars:

"All good works, taken together, do not equal the sacrifice of the Mass since they are human works, while the Holy Mass is the work of God".

What then of the human work of protecting children from abuse? If even that is less important than the celebration of the Eucharist, and if "After God, the priest is everything!", is the pope explaining to us here, in the clearest possible terms, why the only two Irish dioceses yet subject to independent inquiry were found to have put the interests of clergy before those of children?

And does this also explain why, when reminded of the criminality of child sexual abuse by the state in 1987, Irish Bishops prioritised not child protection but the insurance of the clerical institution against financial liability?

Again I will be criticised for taking out of context, and too literally, a pep talk aimed simply at restoring the morale of a severely challenged cadre of ageing men. I do so to

remind everyone of the call made by the CEO of the NBSCCC earlier this year to everyone in the church – to build a culture of accountability within it. We cannot do that by arguing that no human work – not even the safeguarding of children – can be God’s work also.

My understanding of the Eucharist is that it most perfectly expresses God’s preference for the human body and soul as His own dwelling place, and especially the desire of Jesus to dwell within the soul and body, and heart, of a child. Empowered as we all are to prevent children being robbed of that gift, doesn’t this work have exactly the same importance as the celebration of the Eucharist?

And couldn’t the morale of the priesthood, and the church, be better restored if all priests were empowered by the Pope to say so?
Sean O’Conaill, President VOTF Ireland

NEWS FROM THE AFFILIATES

After reading about newly installed Gallup Bishop Wall's initiative to investigate all past and present priest personnel files, the Twin Cities affiliate thought to try and promote this policy. Who better to start with than Twin Cities native Robert Carlson, recently appointed as Archbishop of St Louis? Below are our letters to these 2 bishops. We plan to continue this practice with all newly appointed bishops, including Saginaw, MI.

Suzanne Severson
Twin Cities VOTF Steering Council
[LINK HERE](#)

May 21,2009

Dear Bishop Carlson,

The Steering Council of Twin Cities Voice of the Faithful congratulates you on your new appointment as Archbishop of St Louis! Many of us knew you during your years of serving this archdiocese as priest and bishop and have followed your appointments with interest and prayerful support. We will continue to support you in prayer as you undertake the challenging task of shepherding the Archdiocese of St Louis.

The focus of our organization's efforts is on healing and support for victims of all sexual abuse and to support priests of integrity. You may have heard of our recent Priest of Integrity Award bestowed to Fr. Michael O'Connell for his work early on in the abuse crisis when he was serving as Vicar General of this archdiocese. Another priest we feel is deserving of praise and support is Bishop James Wall, the newly installed bishop of Gallup, Arizona. Bishop Wall has ordered an exhaustive review of Gallup's priest personnel files. In addition, the diocese has pledged to post the names of priests who have been removed from ministry on their website. We recognize that this is a difficult thing to do for a diocese, and we applaud the courage and transparency that goes with this pledge.

Enclosed are background articles on Bishop Wall's recent announcement regarding the personnel file investigation for your review. We pray that that you find a way to follow his courageous example and conduct a similar personnel file review when installed as shepherd of St Louis.

We send our good wishes to you for a long and fruitful ministry of God's people in Missouri, and our prayers that many hearts and souls will find healing, solace, and protection under your care.

In Prayerful Support,

The Twin Cities Voice of the Faithful Steering Council

May 21,2009

Dear Bishop Wall,

The Steering Council of Twin Cities Voice of the Faithful congratulates you on your recent installation as Archbishop of Gallup, Arizona. We write today to thank you specifically for your decision to conduct an exhaustive review of Gallup's priest personnel files and your pledge to post the names of priests who have been removed from ministry on the diocese's website. We recognize that this is a difficult exercise to undertake, and we applaud the courage and transparency that goes with this effort.

The focus of our organization's efforts is on healing and support for victims of all sexual abuse and to support priests of integrity. Last year we presented Fr. Michael O'Connell, retired rector of the Basilica of St. Mary in Minneapolis, with our VOTF affiliate's Priest of Integrity Award for his work early on in the abuse crisis when

was serving as Vicar General of this archdiocese. We send our good wishes to you for a long and fruitful ministry of God's people in Arizona and our prayers that many hearts and souls will find healing, solace, and protection under your care.

In Prayerful Support,
The Twin Cities Voice of the Faithful Steering Council

We would love to hear about other affiliates across the country! Please send your updates to vineyard@votf.org

SITE SEEING

A very interesting article by Dr. Robert Moynihan about the new movie “Angels and Demons” and the reaction from the Vatican. What is truth, what is fiction? And does the Vatican care?

<http://www.insidethevatican.com/newsflash/2009/newsflash-jun-28-09.htm>

John Allen interviews Archbishop Gregory Aymond, the new Archbishop of New Orleans, and get his thoughts on the sex abuse crises and how he will handle it going forward.

<http://ncronline.org/news/politics/digging-our-heels-against-obama-wont-work>

David O’Brien has some advice for the Bishops.

<http://ncronline.org/news/politics/call-bishops-build-hope-not-fear>

SUGGESTED READING

A Pulitzer Prize Mother - 2009

By Ruth Bertels (from her website Taking Five)

When religion becomes more complicated than it seems Jesus ever meant it to be, these words from Alice Walker’s book, “Color Purple,” come to mind.

“Tell the truth. Have you ever found God in church? I never did. I just found a bunch of folks hoping for God to show. Any God I ever found in church I brought in with me and I think all the other folks did, too. They come to church to share God, not find God.”

Margaret Marie Bragg, mother of Pulitzer Prize journalist, Rick Bragg, read her Bible, but she didn’t go to church to share God, for she didn’t own a dress fit for the Lord’s house, nor shoes without holes.

[LINK HERE](#)

A Pulitzer Prize Mother – 2009 (cont’d)

By Ruth Bertels (from her website Taking Five)

And she had holes in her heart, holes bored deep with beatings from her husband, holes bored deep when she stepped between the drunken father and the three little boys, taking the blows meant for them, as they stood paralyzed with fear.

After her husband left her a number of times, he finally failed to return, except toward the end by phone, when he was dying of TB at the age of 40.

Then, he would talk about the children, but mostly he just wanted to talk about the Lord. Margaret listened,

and was church for him, who had never been church for her.

One day, he asked to see Rick, now a freshman in high school, who found his father a shriveled old man, no longer the tall, fearsome giant he had remembered.

There were two presents for the boy, a shotgun and a box of books. As Rick traveled from one newspaper job to the next, the books went with him, an unbroken link with the man who was unable to be a father to him or his brothers.

While working for the “New York Times,” Rick wrote about little people like Gangaram Mahes, the Serial Diner, saying of him:

He is a thief who never runs, a criminal who picks his his teeth as the police close in. To be arrested, to go home to Riker’s Island, is his plan as he picks up the menu. He prefers to be arrested in mid-town, because –in a place where a chicken salad sandwich can cost \$15 – he figures he is just one more thief.

Rick described walking the streets of New York the morning he heard of his Pulitzer Prize in 1966

I thought of a woman in Alabama, who was probably soaking beans and flipping through the King James Bible, a woman who didn’t even know what a Pulitzer was.

When he called to tell her of winning the great award, she was thrilled for him, but didn’t want to go to New York for the banquet celebration. She said she didn’t have the proper clothes. She had no teeth. She wouldn’t know how to talk to those important, educated people.

Rick sent the money for new clothes, for a date with the hairdresser, for new teeth, which didn’t fit any better than the old ones, and for a plane ticket.

The courageous woman flew to New York and won the hearts of everyone, from the publisher to the newest cub reporter.

Later, Rick was able to give his mother a home, debt-free, with a porch in front and a garden in the back.

In her son’s book, “All Over but the Shoutin,” now in paperback, with words that sing from page to page, Margaret Marie Bragg’s life proclaims the Gospel, this mother who picked cotton until she was bent over, ironed other people’s clothes, and made excuses to leave the supper table early, so there would be more food for the children. Her story is like a cool breeze off a Wisconsin lake on a spring evening.

This book is for everyone, including young men who will meet a Pulitzer Prize writer, who turned out to be a Pulitzer Prize son.

To all mothers this Sunday, may the peace and personal love of Christ be with each of you and heal any wounds that may be too deep but for Divine Intervention. Amen.

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END LINK

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear VOTF

My eyes are wide open to the mistakes the hierarchy has made and continues to make, but I see them as men who are equally as imperfect as me. I assume that the laity is equal to the hierarchy -- that the hierarchy can't exist without us, and we without them. And that's because I've been lucky enough to witness that from the inside. The Archdiocese of Boston has made it pretty clear that in the foreseeable future, our parishes will be sharing priests, and the daily pastoral care will be administered by the laity. So why the fight for a seat at the table, when the table's already set? We have an obligation as Catholic Christians to participate fully. It's a model my parish has already begun. Our pastoral associates (two nuns who shared the position) left this winter. Lay Catholics, including me, have been tapped to fill many of their duties while we look for a replacement. But even when we hire someone, we will continue many/most of those duties. Bottom line -- assume that VOTF has helped forge a way for the laity and encourage people to take an active role in their faith communities, to be leaders, to let their voices be heard. Frame it like the battle is won, because there is, in fact, no other option. And take credit for making the laity important to the future of the Church. Above all, get to the point -- our faith defines us as Catholic Christians. Our goal is to move ever closer to Christ. VOTF may likely share that belief, but they're not saying it. It seems the mission is rooted in animosity. I know many people have suffered and are righteously indignant, but to move forward, VOTF needs to start from a place of unity, a place of common love, a place of Christianity. Hope springs eternal. Not blind faith, but hope. That may be too simplistic a view, but I don't see any other way for VOTF to expand.

Linda Phelan

Dear VOTF,

Thanks so much for your criticism of the bishops' conference. It was well deserved. I have always wondered about the other priests in the rectory while all this abuse was going on. Most of this happened when there were several priests living together. Did no one speak up, were they squelched, or what was the role of the pastor?

Mary Z.

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.