

In the Vineyard March 12

National News

Update on VOTF's Strategic Plan

The five platform leadership teams have been meeting regularly to design action-based initiatives that will move VOTF decisively forward. Initial reports will be submitted to the officers by March 31, 2009. A face-to-face meeting of all the platform leadership teams will take place in Hartford CT on May 1st and 2nd. Formal roll out of the initiatives is scheduled to occur in June.

Each leadership team remains open and highly receptive to new volunteers. To join, please send an email to Donna Doucette at dbdoucette@votf.org, indicating which platform leadership team you are interested in joining.

To read about the specific initiatives for each platform link [here](#)

Update on VOTF's Strategic Plan

Currently the Platform leadership teams are exploring the following topics/issues. As each team finalizes its plans, they will establish the priorities and specific steps for the projects selected to move forward:

Local Action Platform

- Best Practices for Parishes
- Financial Transparency in the Parish
- Pastoral Selection
- Safe Environments in the Parish
- Building Strong Affiliates
- Affiliate Communications Toolkit
- National Parish Database
- Closing & Merging Parishes

Reform Actions to Protect Children and Support Survivors

- Statute of limitation reform
- Local Survivor support and Victim Awareness
- Collaboration with advocates for survivors and children as well as liaison with the survivor community
- Community efforts to protect children

Universal Church Reform

- Promulgating a Catholics bill of rights
- The selection process for bishops
- Engaging youth
- Improving VOTF external and internal communications

Networking and Partnerships

- Focusing on reaching out to other Catholic organizations to better understand them and their priorities and have them understand us and ours.
- Identifying principles of engagement with other organizations.
- Where our respective (and collective) goals share common ground, engage with them in a defined action on that one issue (not subscribing completely in their mission), to create an action with critical mass.
- Developing a contact and history database on our findings as a resource tool for other platform teams.

Spiritual and Communal Growth

- Establish a Resource devoted to prayer and prayer experiences that is grounded in Christian tradition.
- Promote Development of an Interactive Prayer Community; using a blog with links to and from VOTF's website.
- Project VOTF's presence within the Catholic Community by promoting and scheduling face-to-face community events, such as VOTF Solidarity Sunday, and celebration of a VOTF patron, such as John XXIII.
- Combine these 3 goals into an interactive Resource Capability that fosters spiritual and communal growth among the entire faith community.

Each team has been attentive to the guiding principles set forth in the Strategic Plan, namely, that all proposed initiatives and activities must be:

- Consistent with our mission, goals and identity statement,
- Responsive to the findings of our SWOT analysis, and
- Have a reasonable expectation that what is proposed can actually be accomplished.

Additionally, each initiative must engage and energize our membership, tapping into our collective gifts and talents to result in maximum participation.

International News

Controversy in Ireland

Bishop John Magee, who found himself in the center of controversy over his handling of clergy sex abuse allegations in the Diocese of Cloyne, has stepped aside. Pope Benedict has appointed Archbishop Dermot Clifford to assume the powers and duties of the Archdiocese. Voice of the Faithful in Ireland and the United States hope these events will mark the beginning of a new era of accountability.

To read more about what is happening in Ireland go to VOTF.org and see the latest news.

New from the Affiliates

Why I am Still Catholic

Submitted by

Richard Taylor, Greater Philadelphia Voice of the Faithful

I find it very hard, even heart-wrenching, to be Catholic these days. Everywhere we turn are painful realities that undercut our commitment to the Church. Sex abuse scandals. Bishop cover-ups. Lack of Church financial accountability. Rome's harsh attacks on homosexuality. Efforts to turn back the clock on Vatican II. The fading hope that women's leadership gifts and call to ministry can ever be expressed in ordination. The lowly status of the laity, whose talents, intelligence, spirituality and experience are largely disdained by the hierarchy. A governing structure that puts the laity on the bottom rung and gives them no decision-making power. Often the Church, it seems to me, treats us like children.

So I ask myself: Why do I stay? Why am I still Catholic?

The basic answer to "Why am I still Catholic" is that the good, the true and the beautiful in the Catholic Church still far outweigh the bad, the false and the ugly. Sometimes the bad seems so strong – and it can have such a negative emotional and spiritual impact on me – that I can almost lose sight of the good. But the good is there, and it's strong, beautiful, nourishing and true.

Here is my own inventory of the good:

Why I am Still Catholic

I love the Catholic people – especially in my own parish, but also beyond. What a glorious mix of human beings! I can identify with theologian Rosemary Haughton who wrote that she likes "being part of something that has thrown up so many eccentric and remarkable people." As Andrew Greeley says, "It's fun to be Catholic."

"In its best moments," Greeley says, "Catholicism is the happiest of the major world religions. It is permeated by the reverent joy of Christmas night, the exultant joy of Easter

morn, the gentle joy of First Communion, the satisfied joy of grammar school graduation, the hopeful joy of a funeral mass.”

Maybe that joy is due to Catholics’ sense of sacramentality – seeing the world through different lenses, God present, not only in the sacraments, but everywhere – God so close, so loving, so forgiving. As Julian of Norwich assures us, we are “enfolded in love.” How could anyone be sad or unlovable, surrounded by such divine and besieging kindness?

Along the same lines, I love the small “c” (universality) of Catholicism, how it embraces people of all cultures, races, ages, classes, nationalities throughout the world. I know that some parishes are mostly one race, but rarely are they one class. “Why, there’s the butler going to the same Mass that Madame attends.”

I’m blessed to see this goodness in my own inner-city parish. When we gather for worship, I watch young and old, whites, blacks, Latinos, Asians, people with Native American backgrounds coming together reverently. The homeless are welcomed, along with people who are well-off. Persons with mental or physical disabilities sit among the “abled.” Released prison inmates are made to feel at home. People of all sexual orientations praise God together. I know that this wonderful universality will happen again and again, “24/7,” as the Mass is celebrated around the world. It is, as Vatican II states, both a sign and instrument of our unity, as well as a promise and signpost of human unity across every barrier that divides. No other Church has such wonderful, beautiful, hopeful and world-wide diversity.

For me, a deeply-lodged anchor of my Catholicism is the absolutely central place it gives to Jesus Christ, the tangibility of God. Many years before becoming Catholic, I “accepted Christ as my Lord and Savior,” as our evangelical friends would say. I delight to be part of a worshiping and serving community whose members are trying to be disciples of the living Christ. Every time we meet, we not only reaffirm together our faith in Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, but are nourished and challenged, by Word and Eucharist, to live out our Christian faith in daily life. Better than any other Christian group I know, the Catholic Church has kept for 2,000 years the unity and integrity of faith in Jesus Christ. I feel blessed to have come to believe in the basic teachings of the Church, expressed in the creeds and in the central doctrines of the faith. I need frequently to be reminded of them and shown their implications.

When I’m not reacting negatively to some pronouncement that seems absurd, I appreciate the existence of the teaching Magisterium of the Church. For all its human faults, heavy-handedness, sometimes arrogance and lack of due process for accused theologians, I believe it is largely responsible (along with the Holy Spirit) for upholding the truth which is in Christ. It helps keep us on track. It is a major force holding us together, helping us contain our tensions, rather than splitting apart, as has happened so often in Christian history. It helps us honor Jesus’ prayer “that they may all be one” (John 17:21).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church is a remarkable achievement of the Magisterium and a magnificent compendium of Catholic faith. I have read my own dog-eared and

much underlined copy from cover to cover and use it often as a reference. Many sections not only express the faith clearly, but are beautifully and movingly written. My main criticism is its stridently sexist male language. Reading it, one unfamiliar with the pervasiveness of such language in other official Catholic texts might conclude that it was written with the explicit intention of alienating women. (See, for example, the very first paragraph. Its six brief sentences use words like “he,” “him,” “himself,” “his,” and “man” an astounding twenty-one times, nearly one in every five words.)

At times the Church has expressed its faith in horrendous ways, e.g., burning heretics at the stake, forcing belief on unwilling cultures. At times it has taught untenable things, like supporting slavery, demeaning Jews, condemning democracy, opposing religious freedom. On occasion, it still supports the untenable (e.g., its teaching against contraception). I suppose it will do so in the future. But, at its best, it has never wavered in upholding its core belief in Jesus Christ. At its best, it has held Jesus before humanity in a humanizing, transforming way, not only theologically, but embodied in Christ-filled human beings who take up their cross and follow him. Catholicism is a marvelously, unambiguously Christ-centered faith. I find that very good, true and beautiful.

I find tremendous goodness in the venerable tradition of Catholic social teaching. I love the way it transcends the political dichotomies of Left and Right, its affirmation of human dignity, social justice and the common good, its preference for the poor, its linkage of faith with works, the wisdom it gives about how to transform the world to be more like the Reign of God. I love Cardinal Bernardin’s contribution to this tradition, the idea of a seamless garment of respect for life, from conception through death. I know of no other religious body that has the depth of Catholic social teaching.

Capitalists, look out! The Church is clear that the market should not be made into an idol, that the state has a right and an obligation to regulate economic affairs toward greater justice and fairness, that selfish individual wealth-seeking often conflicts with the “common good.” But socialists look out as well! No other entity in the world has been as critical of socialism’s excesses (especially in its communist form) as has the Church. The Church upholds the right to private property, mistrusts inordinate power in political hands, to give only two examples of its critique of several varieties of socialism.

And it’s not just talk. For years I went to a peace and justice conference organized by a department of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops. Social Action directors and community activists – 500 or more priests, vowed religious and lay people – come together with bishops and other Catholic leaders to share and learn about each other’s work for peace, justice and the integrity of creation. They represent tens of thousands of other Catholics from their home dioceses who have the same commitment. Jim Wallis, a Protestant leader and editor of *Sojourners* magazine, says that such organized Catholic efforts represent the most powerful lobby for justice and peace in this whole country. Catholic Charities recently received national recognition as the largest and most effective social service organization in the nation.

Another wonderful expression of social teaching is the independent Catholic groups, like Pax Christi and the Catholic Worker, who do so much to embody their faith through peacemaking and justice-seeking.

My own urban parish, St. Vincent de Paul, is flush with people who live out Catholic social teaching through their ministries to the poor and their actions for peace and justice. I'm thrilled that people from 145 Philadelphia and suburban zip codes are attracted to our parish, not only because of its liturgy and lay involvement, but also because of our outreach to the marginalized and our efforts to make this world more like the Reign of God. I know of many other parishes around the country with similar orientations.

The preferential love for the poor, so central to Catholic social teaching, also finds expression in hundreds of Catholic hospitals and thousands of Catholic social service agencies throughout the country, along with millions of Catholic volunteers and ordinary parishioners. Day by day, and mostly unheralded – they go about the work of healing the sick, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the lonely, protecting the unborn and doing the other works of mercy. Again, these Catholic efforts provide the most widespread and comprehensive services to the poor and the marginalized of any non-governmental group in the United States. Their goodness is a sure sign of God's Spirit at work.

I love the Sacraments, "even" Reconciliation, which, at least for many individuals, seems to have fallen out of favor in today's skeptical world. Of course I can pray directly to God for forgiveness, but there is something wonderfully concrete about going to another human being, confessing my sins, being assured of forgiveness and getting help not to sin again. At times, Confession brings me an almost unbelievable sense of peace and tranquility. It gives me the inspiration, over and over, to believe that I can begin again.

I love the Mass and can't imagine my life without the ability, on any day, to join my brothers and sisters – along with the angels and saints and choirs of heaven – praising and thanking God. I can't imagine not being nurtured by the Body and Blood of Christ so as to go out into the world to try to be that body broken and that blood poured-out. I'm blessed to be part of a parish where the worship is anything but cold, dull or routine. Not always, but very often, we experience worship as deeply joyful, renewing, life-giving and participatory. We sense Christ forging a Body like his own from the unfinished materials of our lives.

The Mass is wonderful and central, but only part of the immense spiritual richness of Catholicism which I treasure. In addition to the liturgy are the lives of the saints and mystics, the great prayer traditions, the devotion to Mary, spiritual direction, the multiplicity of retreat centers, the wonderful books on spirituality – all have helped me enormously in my spiritual journey. Where would I be without them? Where else could I find such spiritual treasures?

In addition, I value the call to the priesthood and vowed religious life. That is a big step for a person raised as an eastern seaboard Quaker, a denomination with no ordained

clergy, whose leadership is entirely lay. But some of the finest most dedicated and, yes, holy people I have ever met are priests and nuns. Of course there are nefarious, corrupt, pompous and power-hungry examples, as the sex abuse scandals have revealed. But these, I truly believe, form a minority of clergy and religious. Crucial in my journey to Catholicism was the kindness, intelligence and endless patience in answering my questions of a Medical Mission Sister and a Jesuit priest with whom I met. I've had the privilege in my parish of working with a Vincentian Brother and a Daughter of Charity who can only be called saints. As much as I may object to clericalism, it is clerics and sisters who, again and again, have shown me the face of Christ.

Another good thing that many of my friends find hard to believe is that the Catholic Church is amazingly open to positive change. It may be hard to see amidst today's scandals and rigid directives from Rome, but who would have thought in the 1950's, before Vatican II, that we would see such immense changes. The Mass is in the vernacular, not Latin, as it was for over a thousand years. The hierarchy now accepts Biblical scholarship. The Church has given up the idea of being the one and only path to salvation. For so many centuries, the hierarchy opposed political democracy and religious freedom, but it now affirms them. The Church has now confessed its mistake in holding the Jewish people responsible for Christ's death. All these positive, humanizing changes were brought about, not only by the Holy Spirit, but by the hard work and even suffering of dedicated people.

These profound reforms make me believe strongly that the injustices and misconceptions in which the Church is involved today can and will be changed. As Martin Luther King affirmed, "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." As laity, we may be oppressed, as Paul Lakeland contends in his challenging book, *The Liberation of the Laity*. But, as the Psalmist says, God "secures justice for the oppressed,...sets captives free,...raises up those that were bowed down" (Ps. 146:7-8). Already, out of the sexual abuse scandals has come not only creative groups like Voice of the Faithful and the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), but books, conferences, university courses and prophetic voices calling for a profound transformation so that the Church can more nearly be like the community of Jesus' vision. I think a Church like that is worth struggling and sacrificing to help bring about.

St. Augustine said:

Hope has two lovely daughters:

Anger and Courage.

Anger that things are not what they ought to be;

Courage to make them what they might be.

If we stop with anger, we'll be frustrated and tempted to withdraw. We need courage, I think, to make the Church what it might be. And prayer. And love. Maybe we can take a leaf from Martin Luther King's book and learn how to struggle courageously, but also lovingly and nonviolently, to help make the Church what it might be.

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.

Site Seeing

[Archbishop gets new digs](#)

Cincinnati.com - Cincinnati, OH, USA

"I can't imagine this sitting well with people in the pews," said Kris Ward, the Dayton chairwoman of **Voice of the Faithful**, a group that advocates for more ...

The following articles reference the controversial bill being debated in Connecticut advocating lay financial control of Catholic churches.

Tom Gallagher, presents a thoughtful account of to the steps that could impact financial accountability.

<http://ncronline.org/news/accountability/proposal-look-civil-law-reform-parishes>

http://www.stamfordadvocate.com/ci_11874477

http://newhavenregister.com/articles/2009/03/10/news/a2-copy_of_ct--parishfinances.txt

<http://www.courant.com/news/local/hc-catholicshowdown.artmar10,0,7744055.story>

<http://www.courant.com/news/local/hc-religion0310.artmar10,0,890045.story>

http://www.connpost.com/ci_11873170

Calendar

Hosting the Stranger: Songs of Celtic Christianity
Nóirin Ni Riain, singer composer

Friday, March 13, 2009

8:00 p.m.

St. Mary's Chapel, Boston College

FREE

This event is sponsored by the Institute for Liberal Arts of Boston College.

For further information, please contact Richard Kearney at 617-552-6004 or

Richard.kearney@bc.edu. For directions, please visit <http://www.bc.edu/about/maps.html>

To read more about Nóirin Ni Riain

Nóirin Ni Riain Sings at St Mary's Chapel

Noirin Ni Riain is one of Ireland's best known musicians. Born in County Limerick on the west coast of Ireland, Nóirín began to take singing lessons at the tender age of seven and studied music at University College, Cork. Noirin is known primarily for her spiritual

songs, which have been an inspiration for many. She also sings Celtic music, Sean-nós and Indian songs. She plays an Indian harmonium (Surpeti), Shruti box and Feadóg (whistle).

Noirin has performed in the Royal Festival Hall with Sinéad O'Connor; with the American composer John Cage; with the sons of Karlheinz Stockhausen, Markus and Simon; with Paul Winter at the summer and winter solstice concerts in the Cathedral of St John the Divine, New York; with the Scola Gregoriana of Notre Dame University, Indiana, where she performed the leading role in *Anima*, by Hildegard von Bingen. She has sung several times in India as a delegate of the Irish government, performed in war-torn Sarajevo, and performed at other notable events worldwide.

The Scituate Affiliate of Voice of the Faithful invites you to a talk by Ronald DuBois, Ph.D., entitled “The Eucharist: Origins in Jewish and Early Christian Practice” on Thursday, April 2nd from 7pm to 9pm at Saint Mary of the Nativity Parish Hall in Scituate.

Starting with early stories of the Eucharist, Ron will trace some of the history that has led to the Eucharistic services we have today. He will also look at some of the ancient Jewish practices of Shabbat and Synagogue worship that were a part of Jesus' history. The conclusions Ron draws may lead to a deeper, more reverent celebration of the Eucharist by contemporary Christians. Ron holds a Master's degree in Theology from Maryknoll Seminary in New York and a Ph.D. in Philosophy from St. Louis University. He is an elected member of the National Representative Council and the Board of Trustees of Voice of the Faithful and a member of The Paulist Center in Boston. For more information, please contact Kathy Cerruti at dkcerruti@comcast.net.

Boston College's The Church in the 21st Century has the following offerings for the month of March.

Boston College's The Church in the 21st Century

Tuesday, March 17

Garden of Grace: Spiritual Practices for Family Life

Presented by Kathy Hendricks, author, retreat leader, spiritual director

Location: 129 Lake Street, Brighton Campus, STM, Room 024, 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

\$15.00 fee for lunch

Tuesday, March 24

The Jesus Prayer: A Pathway to Contemplation in the Eastern Christian Tradition

Presented by Khaled Anatolios, faculty, Boston College STM

Location: Gasson Hall 100, Main Campus, 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Thursday, March 26

Discernment and Life Choices

Presented by Ronald A. Mercier, S.J., director, Jesuit Collaborative
Location: 129 Lake Street, Brighton Campus, Room 024, STM, 12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Ups, Downs, and Reinventions: American Catholics and the Practice of Sacraments
Presented by James O' Toole, faculty, Boston College History Department
Location: Gasson Hall 305, Main Campus, 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Monday, March 30
Spiritual Practices & Psychological Health
Presented by John McDargh, faculty, Boston College Theology Department
Location: The Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, Lower Campus, 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

e-mail us at: church21@bc.edu or call us at: 617-552-0470. Familiarize yourself with the entire C21 Spring 2009 series on Catholic Spirituality in Practice @ http://bc.edu/church21/Current_Events.html

Book Review

Submitted by Anne Southwood

Finding Happiness
Abbot Christopher Jamison
Liturgical Press 2008
Collegeville, MN

Abbot Christopher recently began his American book tour speaking in Boston. He is a well known television personality in Great Britain; more than three million people watched the show "Monastery" filmed at his Worth Abbey in 2005.

Required by funding mandates to provide religious broadcasting, the BBC sought interesting proposals. BBC accepted the Worth Abbey concept of "adopting" a small group of very secular men for 40 days and nights, with continual filming to show any affect on their spirituality. The chosen men had indicated "sanctuary" as a motivating goal when they volunteered. After working with these men, a tough group, including a porn producer and a Northern Ireland terrorist, the Abbot wrote the book, "*Sanctuary*." In case you're wondering, the porn producer had a significant spiritual experience just before leaving.

To read the rest of this review

Review of *Finding Happiness*

Why the second book, *Finding Happiness*? The Abbot realized that English library sections devoted to "self improvement" were growing fast. And yet, people in his very secular culture, "at a deeper level," did not seem happy. He removed all books with "happy" in their title from a library shelf. He was not impressed. He wrote another kind

of "happy" book to counteract the "spiritual longing that is part of modern life." This Benedictine Abbot thought he knew the real answer. Abbot Christopher probably would pick the 6th Century if he could go back in time. He would wag his finger at Gregory the Great for removing Acedia (spiritual apathy) from the list of 8 "thoughts" which became the 7 deadly sins.

Born in Australia and educated in England, Abbott Christopher covers a lot of intellectual ground with skill and wit when he speaks. His real strength is as a teacher who involves his audience with imagination. He also has the ability to deliver information about desert fathers and Greek philosophical background to monasticism in an easy way. Example: if you're bored don't just sit there trying to contemplate beauty and goodness...say the short form of the John Cassian prayer which influenced Benedict, Lord come to my assistance. God will figure it out for you.

The book is a good read for the Lenten season. His thesis is that you must discipline externals and train thoughts to seek the freedom of interior happiness. Pleasure should be an enjoyable bonus, not an activating life principle. He offers this book not only for those who share gospel faith, but for all who could benefit by a more accurate vision. He describes happiness as the living activity of a soul expressing virtue. He believes that even before Christianity man knew the necessity of interior awareness.

The Abbot insists that the wisdom in monastic stepping stones is an important help to recapturing virtue in society. He cites a relationship to the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. He seems happy to tell the story of overwhelmed Catholic priests offering a confessional ear to those of any faith during the 2007 Edinburgh festival. Listening is a virtue. A roomful of people taking 5 minutes to reflect on one phrase of the beatitudes from the Sermon On The Mount would make him very happy.

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.