

In the Vineyard, May 7, 2009

News from National

VOTF held its first platform teams meeting May 1-2 in Hartford CT. The gathering gave members of the platform teams a chance to meet face to face with both their own teams and members of other teams. Each team outlined its goals for the upcoming months and looked for places where they could work together with other teams as well. They also discussed the need to support affiliates and to make sure the work under each platform aligned with the Mission and three goals of VOTF. Over the next couple of issues of *In the Vineyard*, I will ask each of the platform teams to update the membership on the projects for each platform and how they plan to carry out those projects.

As a prelude to the meeting, Janet Hauter, VOTF Vice President, put together a presentation on “branding” and discussed how perceptions both of members and of the community as a whole affect the VOTF brand. Excerpts from her talk follow:

“We Need to Model the Church We Envision Ourselves Thriving In”

By Janet Hauter

Voice of the Faithful has come of age, and with maturity comes responsibility. We recognize through our member survey that we, VOTF, have a confused identity in the marketplace, and while our national goals were enthusiastically embraced by a majority of our members, they found it difficult to express who we are and what we are about.

We have matured enough to become a new creation by re-imagining our potential as faithful Catholics. This new platform plan was put together during the Easter season and we indeed are resurrection people. Change is constant and we are in a position to redefine ourselves.

As an organization, we need to be seen as an organization of hope that speaks in a respectful, collegial and collaborative manner. We know that a shrill, blame-seeking message often hits a saturation point that yields minimal to no results.

“We Need to Model the Church We Envision Ourselves Thriving In”

By Janet Hauter

continued

We have set up a cadre of aggressive goals through this year-long strategy planning process and it all points to a very exciting future. While these goals are critically important, the way we present, communicate, and implement them is equally important.

If we believe we are truly the Church, change must begin within ourselves, individually and communally. We must learn to channel and harness our anger at the institution constructively. In community-organizing terms, we need to move from “hot anger” to

“cold anger,” anger that transforms our hearts to forgive (but never forget). We must speak the truth grounded in fact with professional objectivity. Fundamentally, to change the Church, we must change ourselves first. We must also learn to forgive ourselves for remaining quiet, compliant, and passive in the face of recurrent abuse: sexual, financial, and power.

Integrating our centrist identity with respectful action packaged in a unique branded manner will distinguish VOTF among reform groups. We are the Church. We are the living, breathing, VOTF brand!

Help Wanted

We are looking for someone with experience who is willing to help us organize and edit a Program Book for the October Convention on Long Island. The Program Book is essentially a fund raiser and will include paid advertisements and messages from our affiliates, members, associates and well-wishers from around the country. It will also include a limited amount of material specifically relating to the conference, such as Conference Program, President's Welcoming Message, Special Award Winners, etc. If you are willing to lend a hand in this important endeavor, please contact Kevin Connors at fcon101596@optonline.net or 516-796-2231."

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. We will post additional info as it becomes available.

News from the Affiliates

The Long Road to Justice: Lobbying for Statute of Limitations Reform

By Francis Piderit

On Tuesday, April 21, 2009, member organizations of the New York Coalition to Protect Children descended on the Capitol Building in Albany to lobby for passage of the NY Child Victims Act, sponsored by Assemblywoman Marge Markey in the NY Assembly (Bill No. A02596) and by State Senator Tom Duane in the NY Senate (S02586).

Here is a scene-by-scene replay of the day, the players and personalities, the action, the issues, and the lessons learned for wanna-be lobbyists of all ages.

The Long Road to Justice: Lobbying for Statute of Limitations Reform

By *Francis Piderit*

continued

The Legislation

The Child Victims Act would extend the statute of limitations on child sexual abuse for an additional five years, so that victims will have until the age of 28 to bring claims. The act would suspend the statute for one year, so that those who have been unjustly denied access to the courts in the past will be able to come forward and make a claim in this one-year “window.” Marge Markey of Maspeth, Queens, has been leading the fight for this reform; she has spoken at several VOTF events. The “Markey” bill has been passed by the Assembly in each of the past three years; unfortunately, a Senate version of the same bill never made it out of committee, so the bill died each year. This year, Democrats control both houses of the State Legislature, so there is real hope that SOL reform will become a reality in New York State in 2009. Unfortunately, the Catholic Church through its lobbying arm, the Catholic Conference, is opposed to the reforms that VOTF supports.

The Press Conference

About 100 people crowded into a room in the office building across from the Capitol itself for an 11AM press conference that kicked off the event. Voice of the Faithful was represented by several well-known organizers present, led by Joe Byrnes of Brooklyn. Barbara Blaine of SNAP spoke, as did Prof Marci Hamilton. Survivors spoke, as did co-sponsoring legislators. Significant representatives of Orthodox Jewish organizations such as the Jewish Board of Advocates for Children, Inc. were also present.

The Competing Bill

Mention was made throughout the press conference and throughout the day itself of competing legislation sponsored by Assemblyman Vito Lopez of Brooklyn. This competing bill only extends the statute of limitations to age 25, and has no provision for a “look-back” window, which is the main provision offering justice to survivors of abuse who have been locked out of the courthouse in the past. Although there is no proof that this is the case, there is a suspicion that Assemblyman Lopez’s bill was put forward at the behest of the New York Catholic Conference, which is the lobbying arm of the Catholic bishops in the state, the thinking being that the conference lobbyists, sensing that reform might really happen this year, put forward a weaker bill without a window in order to limit the financial impact of the new legislation.

Head-to-Head with Legislators

For the next four hours, from 12 Noon until 4PM, supporters of our legislation banded into groups of four or five, and visited legislators and their staff for 20-30 minute sessions in which we made our case, asked for their support, and in cases where they were uncommitted or opposed to the Markey/Duane SOL reforms, attempted to get them to commit to reconsidering their position. Some legislators were supportive of our work. Others were flatly opposed. One legislator from the Nyack area argued that our proposed reform did not treat public institutions and private institutions equally. This argument, championed once again by the Catholic Conference, focuses on the New York state law which creates a special 90-day notice of claim for

victims of sexual abuse in public institutions such as public schools. The fact is that claims against public institutions brought under federal civil rights law are not subject to this special 90-day notice of claim. But the other side had already gotten to this particular legislator, and we had a hard time getting him to open his mind to the facts. The reality of this head-to-head lobbying is that you need to have a simple message that you can convey quickly and clearly, but you also have to know enough about the nuances of the legislation and its opponents to argue your case.

Prospects for Passage

We remain hopeful that when the Markey/Duane legislation comes to the floor of the Assembly and the Senate, it will prevail. An editorial from The New York Times strongly endorsed our legislation. Newsday, the leading newspaper on Long Island, came out against our bill. We recognize that Democrats have only a slim majority in the Senate, and the bill could go down to defeat in the upper house if only a few Democrats fail to support it. Generally speaking, more conservative Republicans from upstate areas support the Catholic Conference position. As for Governor Patterson, he has expressed reservations about the “window” and has already announced his determination to pass same-sex marriage legislation. Given his political position, he may not want to run counter to the Catholic Church on two major pieces of legislation in one year. So it will be a close-run thing, as they say.

Lessons Learned

SOL reform is at the moment a state-by-state battle. Since the statute of limitations is state law, reforming it means fighting for change one state at a time. Delaware and California have successfully passed reform legislation. Other states have failed. We hope New York will be next. If your VOTF affiliate is planning on supporting SOL reform legislation, here are some simple lessons learned for your own lobbying efforts:

1. Coalitions are smart strategy: When it was just us Catholics supporting this reform, it was easy for opponents to charge that the legislation discriminated against the Catholic Church. When you stand side by side with Orthodox Jewish rabbis and Protestant ministers, you disarm that argument completely.
2. Make your signs now: Lobbying is all about making an impression. There are a lot of different groups all trying to get the attention of legislators. Wear your VOTF buttons, carry signs, and make sure your voice is heard loud and clear. You cannot be bashful or too polite. This is the political arena, and the squeakiest wheels get the oil.
3. Support the Coalition, but Lobby as VOTF: One mistake we made as we lobbied each legislator was that each group walking into an office contained different representations... one survivor or SNAP member, one VOTF member, one representation from a Jewish group. We felt good, but the people we were visiting were just confused. We would have been much smarter to keep all VOTF participants together, and to move as a group from office to office.

At the end of the day, we were all invited to the Assembly Chamber in the Capitol itself and introduced to the legislators. It was a nice way to end the day before the long drive back to New York City. For more information about how the New York Coalition is working to pass this legislation, VOTF members can contact Bob Kristan, a VOTF member and coordinator for the coalition, at nyprotectchildren@gmail.com

END LINK

Site Seeing

VOTF's Bill Casey was interviewed on Seattle Public Radio (KUOW) about the upcoming lawsuit against the Seattle archdiocese..

To hear Bill's remarks



Bill Casey on Abuse
Scandal .mp3

To read an article about the case in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer

http://www.seattlepi.com/local/405867_church04.html

Mass celebrated to honor victims of clergy abuse

<http://www.naplesnews.com/news/2009/apr/30/st-john-evangelist-celebrates-mass-honor-victims-c/>

Father Richard McBrien talks about the "Grieving Church."

<http://ncronline.org/blogs/essays-theology/grieving-church>

More about Ruth Kolpack

<http://www.isthmus.com/isthmus/article.php?article=25694>

More on the investigation of women religious by the Vatican

<http://ncronline.org/news/women/women-religious-meet-vatican-accusers-rome>

Calendar

The Vineyard calendar is published twice monthly. If you have something to include about an event in your area, please send it to Vineyard@votf.org.

Elizabeth A. Dreyer, Fairfield University Professor of Religious Studies, will speak on Women's Spirituality for the 21st Century on Thursday, May 7 at 7:30 at the First Congregational Church on the Norwalk Green.

Dr. Dreyer, most recently author of *Making Sense of God: A Woman's Perspective*, is general editor of the Called to Holiness series. She lectures widely on the Christian tradition, especially medieval mysticism, grace, the Holy Spirit and contemporary lay spirituality.

[LINK here for more info](#)

Elizabeth A. Dreyer, Fairfield University Professor
continued

Her writings include *Holy Power, Holy Presence: Medieval Metaphors of the Holy Spirit; Passionate Spirituality: Hildegard of Bingen and Hadewijch of Brabant; Earth Crammed with Heaven: A Spirituality of Everyday Life* and *A Retreat with Catherine of Siena: Living the Truth in Love*. With Mark Burrows she edited *Minding the Spirit: The Study of*

Christian Spirituality. She lives in Hamden, Connecticut, with her husband, John Bennett.

For further information about VOTF in the Diocese of Bridgeport and directions to the First Congregational Church on the Green in Norwalk consult www.votfbpt.org.

Please also visit the VOTF Bridgeport blog CATHOLIC VOICES OF FAIRFIELD COUNTY <http://votfbpt.wordpress.com> for timely discussions of local and national issues and concerns.

Spiritual Thoughts

by Gaile Pohlhaus

Beliefs are faith put into words. Love is faith put into action.

We can be mistaken in both our words and actions. Dogmas seem to fossilize faith; at best they point to a truth but since words change in their meanings every day we can't be sure that we got the point. The Holy Spirit did not intend to act as some mystical editor. I don't think we should idolize words, the Church (meaning the whole of baptized folk), nor the Eucharist (Communion, the Lord's Supper*), nor Jesus, nor the risen Christ.

Actions can also be pointing in the wrong direction. I am sure there were many well-intentioned folk on the Crusades and well-intentioned missionaries who confused Western Culture with following Jesus. We learn from our mistakes and sometimes we learn without making mistakes.

In any case when it comes to a choice, I believe that Love trumps Beliefs. (I am aware of oxymoron in preceding phrase.)

*I do not mean to imply that Eucharist = Communion = Lord's Supper; these words seem to have similar roles albeit in different churches.

Suggested Reading

Boston College's Church in the 21st Century has added the following books to their suggested reading

Prophetic Witness: Catholic Women's Strategies for Reform, Colleen M. Griffith, Editor

While many share the vision of a more inclusive and just church for the 21st century, practical strategies of reform and renewal are still desperately needed. This strikingly direct and practical volume brings together the voices of leading Catholic women theologians from across the U.S., presenting their particular strategies for the church.

Boston College's Church in the 21st Century also recommends: **Two Centuries of Faith: The Influence of Catholicism on Boston: 1808–2008**; Thomas H. O'Connor, Editor

In recognition of the 200th anniversary of the Archdiocese, the president of Boston College authorized this series of scholarly essays focusing on the various ways in which Catholicism has influenced life and society in the Greater Boston area. *Two Centuries of Faith* covers such topics as Catholic Charities, parochial education, church-state relations, Catholic literary figures, the influence of women, the changing nature of parish life, as well as a contemporary history of the Archdiocese of Boston.

If you are interested in purchasing either of these books, please go to VOTF.org and follow the links to Amazon. VOTF will get a portion of the proceeds. What a great Mother's Day present!

Letter to the Editor

A young man (in his early forties) who is a deacon in my parish lost his wife to a terminal illness this past year. A requirement of becoming a permanent deacon is that one remain celibate for the rest of his life under such circumstances. This requirement, along with the requirement of celibacy as a condition of ordination to the priesthood in the Latin Rite, is one that is purely arbitrary and one that has no inherent connection with ordination to either the diaconate or the priesthood. It is well known, or it should be, that a good number of our current priests struggle mightily with this requirement, and that there are more breaches than we would like to believe. In the case of our good deacon, with three young children to boot, tell me how the church will be better served by requiring his lifelong fidelity to this requirement. The National Working Group for Priest Support of Voice of the Faithful (www.nwgps.org) has been advocating for a serious exploration of these and other areas relating to our priests and the priesthood. We invite your participation in these conversations.

By John Ryan on April 28, 2009 at 1:00 PM
(This letter was posted in *America Magazine*)