

VOTF meets Pope Francis in U.S.



Funding of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors—Although Pope Francis took a big step in responding to the abuse scandal by establishing the commission and appointing lay people, it still lacks funding necessary to carry out its mandate.

Healing for those affected by the clergy sexual abuse scandal—The Church's response to the scandal has lacked healing initiatives. VOTF is using the Healing Circle model of Restorative Justice to help anyone who feels harmed begin or continue a path toward healing. VOTF invited Pope Francis to a Healing Circle as a way for him to experience its potential personally.

Bringing transparency and accountability to diocesan financing—Although Pope Francis is cleaning up the Vatican Bank, has removed a couple of bishops for outlandish spending, and has spoken on the injustice of economic inequality, dioceses still contend with financial malfeasance. VOTF has developed a web portal to help Catholics see where their donated dollars go. This can help thwart malfeasance like theft, fraud, paying for sex abuse victims' silence, and spending donations for purposes other than intended by contributors.

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Crowds of the faithful wait for Pope Francis to say Mass outside the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, D.C., (top) and Philadelphia's Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul (left).

Pope Francis visited the United States this past September, and VOTF members were on hand in Washington, New York, and Philadelphia to present him with several important messages.

"Spotlight" movie stirs up faithful convictions

The "Spotlight" movie released worldwide in January dramatizes *The Boston Globe* investigation that led to its January 2002 story about clergy sexual abuse of minors in the Archdiocese of Boston. The rest, including Voice of the Faithful's nearly 15-year struggle to help heal the Church, is history still being lived.

Catholics reacted in various ways to the original revelations, with VOTF being one such response. Frank McConville, who was there at VOTF's founding said, "We dialogued. We listened to each other. (Although) we were a 'big tent,'



The "Spotlight" movie's star-studded ensemble cast.

a diverse group, we found we were not alone in our thinking, and we could learn from each other. We were Church. We were the Voice of the Faithful."

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Pope's council of cardinal advisers discusses local bishop selection



Pope Francis' nine-member Council of Cardinals took up the issue of bishop selection at their meeting this past September. Indications are that they plan to discuss the issue further this year.

The Sept. 16, 2015, Vatican Information Service Bulletin summarized the cardinals' intentions:

"... on the procedures for the appointment of new bishops, or more specifically on the qualities and requisites for candidates in view of the needs of today's world and on the related issue of information gathering ... this theme will need to be explored further and developed ..."

Having long been a proponent of greater lay input into local bishop selection, VOTF took the opportunity to remind the cardinals of our proposals regarding bishop selection.

John P. Doyle, chair of VOTF's Bishop Selection Committee, sent a letter to the council's leader Cardinal Sean O'Malley, archbishop of Boston, and VOTF sent a follow-up letter to each of the other eight advisers.

Our letters reminded the cardinals that we had asked Pope Francis in August 2013 "to restore to all the laity and clergy of a diocese a formal role in the process of recommending candidates for their bishop to you prior to your appointment of him." And we enclosed with the letter our paper "Furthering the New Evangelization: Consulting the Laity on Candidates for the Episcopacy," which had been distributed at that time.

"Spotlight" (Continued from Page 1)

Fourteen years later, "Spotlight" dramatizes the environment in which VOTF started. Characterizing VOTF's beginnings in her story for *The New Yorker* magazine, cultural correspondent Sarah Larson said:

"In the movie, the revelations of the Spotlight investigation make (*Globe* Spotlight team member Sasha) Pfeiffer too

In our letter to the cardinals, we said our proposal requests that the Pope institute a canonical process for selecting bishop candidates that includes **formal consultation with all the priests and laity of a local church**. This broad involvement is just what Pope Francis wants for our Church.

In addressing bishops on three different occasions, Pope Francis has asked them to search more broadly within our Church for bishop candidates, to "dialogue fearlessly" on Church issues, and to "foster in all the faithful a sense of personal responsibility for the Church's mission," while enabling them to fulfill that responsibility.

We suggested that the best way to study how to engage priests and laity in this process is through trial demonstra-

Our letters reminded the cardinals we had asked Pope Francis to restore to all the laity and clergy a formal role in selecting bishop candidates.

tions to be set up by local bishops' conferences, which we had asked Pope Francis to do in our 2013 proposal.

Additionally, we suggested the demonstration projects could include using VOTF's bishop selection portal at votf.org/bishop. The portal allows Catholics in a diocese to email the papal nuncio recommendations concerning outstanding needs and opportunities within the diocese, qualities and qualifications a bishop should possess, and names of priests who would make excellent candidates for bishop.

The cardinals could discuss bishop selection as early as their February meeting. They will meet in February, April, September, and December of this year. **f**

uneasy to keep going to Mass with her grandmother. 'She (Pfeiffer's grandmother) was shocked and saddened, but she stuck with the Church till the day she died,' Pfeiffer said. 'Some people left the Church; others tried to change it from within, like the group Voice of the Faithful ...'"

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“Spotlight” (Continued from Page 2)

Changing the Church from within has proven to be an enormous task, partly because not every Catholic sees it as their responsibility. In “Big Dig,” Maurice Timothy Reidy’s rave review for “Spotlight” in *America* magazine, he called for Catholics to take responsibility for their Church. VOTF former trustee professor David O’Brien responded with some perspective on this in a letter to the editor:

A few Catholics tried hard to take responsibility for their Church, notably through the group Voice of the Faithful.


“‘Spotlight’ deserves the high praise of reviewer Maurice Timothy Reidy. He thoughtfully reflects that the film ‘in its own way calls on all Catholics to take responsibility for the church.’ A few Catholics tried hard to do just that, notably through the group Voice of the Faithful. Not only did bishops refuse offers to help but very few American Catholic priests, religious or laity moved from anguish to action ...”

In spite of this nearly insurmountable challenge, VOTF continues trying to pierce the veil of secrecy overhanging many Church functions, hold it accountable to all the People of God, broaden lay input into governance, and support those harmed by scandal. Responding to O’Brien’s letter to the editor, former VOTF board chair William Casey said:

“I fully agree all Catholics need to take responsibility for the Church in response to the clergy sexual abuse scandal that rocked its foundation and public credibility. Voice of the Faithful, which O’Brien cites for its unrequited effort to do just that starting in 2002, is now offering all Catholics an

opportunity to move the Church toward healing its wounds by participating in Healing Circles based on Restorative Justice principles and practices. Will Catholics who held back from taking responsibility when the scandal broke into public consciousness now take advantage of an opportunity to heal our wounded Church?”

“Spotlight” is reminding people how power has corrupted parts of our Church. The movie is helping VOTF to enlighten a broader audience about problems deep in the Church’s culture that tend toward scandal—even as we work toward healing and renewing the Church.

“Spotlight” has been nominated for six Academy Awards: Best Picture, Best Director, Best Supporting Actor (Mark Ruffalo), Best Supporting Actress (Rachel McAdams), Best Original Screenplay, and Best Film Editing. 

VOTF has ...

- Held at least a half dozen Restorative Justice Healing Circles and plans several more in 2016
- Completed its Diocesan Finances Database and continually updates the web portal
- Developed a working relationship with the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests and plans to attend its assemblies
- Promoted funding for the Vatican Commission for the Protection of Minors that is appropriate to its mission
- Promulgated policies and procedures to help make parish collections secure from theft

“Pope Francis in U.S.” (Continued from Page 1)

Ongoing wide availability of the sacraments by ordaining married Catholic men—VOTF has long promoted a married clergy as a way to address the priest shortage, a worldwide problem that leads to parish mergers and closures and reduced pastoral care. VOTF has petitioned U. S. bishops to apply the pastoral provision currently used to ordain married Orthodox and Protestant clergy as priests to ordain married Catholic men, as well.

Including a wide variety of lay voices in selecting local bishops—VOTF has made available an Internet link that any Catholic lay person in a diocese can use to provide input on local bishop selection by email directly to the apostolic

nuncio. Catholics can enumerate outstanding needs and opportunities in a diocese, list candidates’ ideal qualities and qualifications, and name priests as candidates.

Improving equality of women in the Church—Women serve the Church in many leadership roles, but women cannot serve in certain leading ministry positions. As a practice that would promote women’s equality, VOTF advocates ordaining women to the permanent diaconate, as practiced in the Church for hundreds of years.

VOTF will continue to raise lay voices loudly enough for Pope Francis to hear. 


VOTF presents “Storytelling for Healing”

“Storytelling for Healing” was presented at Boston College’s Church in the 21st Century on Dec. 3, 2015, by VOTF’s William Casey. Casey is a former VOTF board chair and director of the Northern Virginia Mediation Service Restorative Justice Program.



VOTF’s William Casey presents “Storytelling for Healing” at Boston College’s Church in the 21st Century Center.

In his lecture, Casey talked about Voice of the Faithful Restorative Justice Healing Circles (see votf.org) and how they can be a step toward healing for those who have been harmed by the Catholic clergy sexual abuse scandal.

Healing Circles, he said, employ the power of deep listening and ensure a safe place for those telling their stories. 

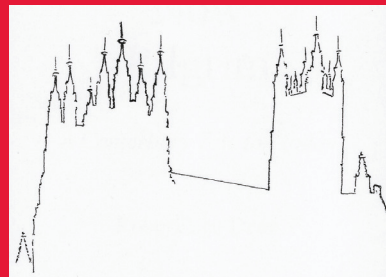
It’s a matter of *Will Power!*

Martin Luther King said, “Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability but comes through continuous struggle.” For 14 years, we—the VOTF family—have struggled for change in the church and healing for the faithful. Much remains to be done. Here’s how you can make a difference:

Talk about VOTF to your fellow parishioners, or to “un-churched” friends who don’t understand the work VOTF does, nor why we do it. Talk about it loudly and proudly.

Visit the website (votf.org) regularly for news, inspiration, and updates on people and issues. Share what VOTF is doing. Information is power, as the “Spotlight” movie has demonstrated. These issues will NOT go away simply by ignoring them.

Make a donation; receive a free book



Canterbury Cathedral, stylized on cover of “Now Pilgrim,” has been a popular destination for pilgrim travelers for centuries.

Through the generosity of Robert L. Dean, who recently published his re-imagining of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* as a modern-day pilgrimage, we have a limited number of copies of *Now Pilgrim* to share.

Anyone who donates \$100 or more to VOTF during our spring appeal will receive a FREE copy of the book.

Dean says about pilgrimages in his prologue, “The vitality of Christianity is nowhere more evident than in the continued popularity of pilgrimage ... A pilgrimage remains what it has always been: a journey of spiritual enlightenment ...”

Donate now to receive your book, and thank you for your continued support of VOTF.

Support VOTF with your donations—either in response to appeals or in monthly online donations. This is the fuel that propels our initiatives off the drawing board and into the community. Your donation makes a difference.

Exercise your *Will Power!* As you make financial plans, ensure that your voice is heard well into the future by including a bequest to VOTF (contact pdeck@votf.org for information).

Thank you for being part of our family.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Priscilla Deck".

Priscilla Deck
Director of Development



VOICE
OF THE FAITHFUL
Keep the Faith, Change the Church

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Voice of the Faithful® is a worldwide movement of Roman Catholics working to provide a prayerful voice, attentive to the Spirit, through which the faithful can participate actively in the governance and guidance of the Catholic Church. We support survivors of clergy sexual abuse, support priests of integrity, and work to help shape structural change in the Church.

KEEP UP-TO-DATE — Sign up to receive our free *In the Vineyard* e-newsletter at www.votf.org.