

Calling All Catholics to Transform Our Church

VOICE
OF THE FAITHFUL

On behalf of all Catholics who share our desire to help our Church, Voice of the Faithful presents this message on the occasion of Pope Benedict XVI's visit to the U.S.

Mindful of the many serious challenges facing our Church today, yet hopeful of a better tomorrow, VOTF's 35,000 members seek the transformation of our beloved Church.

- We envision a Church that is open, transparent, and accountable.
- We imagine a Church that embraces the gifts and talents of the laity.
- We dream of a Church governed by compassion, informed by justice, empowered by equality, and animated to act collegially.

But we cannot attain this transformation until we heal the wounds still open.

The Moral Crisis We Face Today
Many Catholics know too well the human suffering and financial costs associated with the the global clergy

sexual abuse crisis. By 2004, in the U.S. alone, more than 4,300 priests were alleged to have abused almost 11,000 young people between the years 1950 and 2002.¹ Legal settlements by American dioceses amounted to \$615 million in 2007, and now exceed \$2.3 billion overall. Catholic dioceses have filed for bankruptcy in Alaska, Arizona, California, Iowa, Oregon, and Washington. Equally troubling is the fact that our leaders contributed to this terrible toll.

How can our Church be a moral beacon when so many bishops who repeatedly transferred known predators remain in office?

Without justice for the abused and accountability from the bishops, this crisis will continue to plague our Church.

Our Church Faces Many Other Serious Challenges As Well

The declining number of clergy jeopardizes the availability of Eucharist. The laity continue to be excluded from meaningful participation in decision-making. Catholics -- particularly the youth -- are leaving our Church to join other religions, or no religion at all. The hopeful vision of Vatican II remains largely unfulfilled, and deep polarization exists in our Church about how best to fulfill our sacred mission.

We seek a lasting, transformed Body of Christ that serves all people with compassion, collegiality and cooperation. We believe in collaboration among all members of our Church in order to achieve this transformation.

The Answer Is Transformation

We seek a transformed Body of Christ -- a Church that both calls upon and serves all members, lay and ordained alike, with compassion and integrity.

Our Transformed Church Would:

Treat survivors with justice and compassion. Pope Benedict and all our bishops should meet with survivors, listen to their stories, and treat them with respect and compassion. Show them and the world that we recognize the grave harm our Church has done and strive to become a source of healing.

Make bishops be accountable to the people they serve. Pope Benedict should call for the resignations of those bishops who repeatedly reassigned predator priests. Bishops of integrity would stop blocking settlements, initiate truly independent annual audits, and support revising the laws that govern the statute of limitations. Protecting our children would become a top priority, beginning with creation of a national database of credibly accused priests. Fair investigation and prompt resolution of allegations is another priority.

Embrace Full Lay Participation. Catholic laity would embrace our responsibility to assume our proper place among the people of God. Laity would be fully involved in the decisions that impact the life of our parish and our diocese, including parish closings. Our parishes would grow, and our children and grandchildren would become proud, active members of our Catholic Church.

Have Full Financial Transparency & Accountability. Every parish would publish annual

financial statements. Every parish and diocese would have fully engaged finance committees providing independent perspectives to pastors or bishops. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops would change financial reporting guidelines into mandatory requirements. Theft of parish and diocesan funds would stop, and we would no longer see surveys reporting that 85% of dioceses responding suffered embezzlements within the past five years.²

Release the Gifts of the Spirit: Fresh spiritual and theological insights would be embraced and encouraged. We would facilitate meaningful, positive change by creating forums and opportunities for Catholics to express and develop their faith, and to put that faith into action.

To all Catholics, Voice of the Faithful sends this call: By virtue of your baptism, you are a priestly people. The time has come to stand and to speak out. Out of love for our church, act today -- do your part in taking responsibility for the growth and well being of our Church.

With your help, we can make it happen! Please go to www.votf.org and sign up to receive regular updates on what you can do as a Catholic layperson to transform our Church.

About Voice of the Faithful

Voice of the Faithful (VOTF) is a worldwide movement of concerned mainstream Catholics formed in 2002 in response to the clergy sexual abuse crisis. Our Mission is to provide a prayerful voice, attentive to the Spirit, through which the Faithful can actively participate in the governance and guidance of the Catholic Church. Our goals are to support survivors of clergy sexual abuse, support priests of integrity, and shape structural change within the Catholic Church.

¹ *The Nature and Scope of the Problem of Sexual Abuse by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States*, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2004.

² *2007 Survey of Allegations and Costs*, Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Georgetown University, 2008.

³ "Internal Financial Controls in the Catholic Church," Robert West, Ph.D. and Charles Zech, Ph.D., Villanova University, 2007.

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