

# Is It The Voice of The Faithful?

## Is Voice of the Faithful a moderate response to clerical scandals or a “Call to Action” Trojan Horse?

by Stephanie Block

At the 2002 National Call to Action (CTA) Conference, one speaker linked the dissenting movement of CTA with a new organization — the Voice of the Faithful:

CTA, simply by already being here, has been a crucial model for Voice of the Faithful. That VOTF is self-consciously "moderate" in comparison to CTA is good, for a main function of a more liberal movement for change is precisely to empower the moderate effort. Together we bring about change . . . In this way, the Roman Catholic Church must affirm that democracy itself is the latest gift from a God who operates in history, and the only way for the Church to affirm democracy is by embracing it. The old dispute between popes and kings over who appoints bishops was resolved in favor of the pope, but bishops now should be chosen by the people they serve. The clerical caste, a vestige of the medieval court, should be eliminated. The Catholic reform movement must establish equal rights for women in every sphere. A system of checks and balances, true due process, legislative norms designed to assure equality for all instead of superiority for some, freedom of expression, and above all freedom of conscience must be established within the Church — not because the time of liberalism has arrived, but because the long and sorry story of Church hatred of Jews, Church triumphalism in relation to other religions, Church rigidity in relation to dissent from within, and the fresh outrage of child rape all lay bare the structures of oppression that must be dismantled once and for all.[1]

Since the '70s, Call to Action has been recommending (in addition to changes in the moral law) the establishment of Diocesan and National Review Boards with strong lay representation, "shared responsibility in policy making" and an "open consultative process." [2] In the above address, the allegedly more "moderate" organization, Voice of the Faithful (VOTF), is described as having the same essential goal as the "liberal" Call to Action: a democratized — and therefore politicized — Church in which bishops and dogma serve by tyranny of the masses. So, what makes VOTF "moderate?"

### Boston

In 2002, Boston was rocked by clerical scandals, whose waves swept before the archdiocese's Bernard Cardinal Law. It appeared that the Boston Church hierarchy had been guilty of cover-up and abuse of power. Catholic protesters stood outside the cathedral, calling for the cardinal's immediate resignation. This is the climate that spawned Voice of the Faithful. Its founder James Muller, a cardiologist with sterling credentials in his field, claimed that within a year VOTF had enlisted 8,500 members through the internet with its motto of "Keep the Faith" but "Change the Church." The "Change the Church" part was explained as "just structural." VOTF insisted, and continues to insist, that it "does not seek any change in church doctrine." [3] What it does envision are elected parish councils, which would, in turn, elect diocesan and national lay councils, which would actively participate in the work of the bishops. [4] And it envisions "lay consultation in the process of pastoral selection." [5]

There are two problems with VOTF's argument. The first is that structural reorganization doesn't necessarily correct moral corruption. The proposed democratizing "solution" to clerical abuse and hierarchical cover-up has already been tried by various Protestant sects, and the lesson is that it doesn't prevent sexual or power abuse. Protestant clergy are implicated in abusive behaviors at higher percentages than Catholic priests. [6] Secondly, though VOTF claims to be positing no direct challenge to Church teaching, the organization is rife with Call to Action activists.

The first major gathering of VOTF in Boston drew a crowd of about 4,000 from around the country. [7] According to CTA, hundreds of those participants were CTA members. [8] The event's homilist called for married and women priests. [9] Speakers included well-known Catholic dissidents. [10] By November 2002, a number of Bostonian Catholics were deeply concerned about VOTF developments. [11] They protested that founding member Jim Muller was working on a "constitution" with Call to Action's Leonard Swindler (founder of the Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church — ARCC). It not only proposed election of priests and other members of the hierarchy, but also endorsed abortion, contraception, homosexual relations, married clergy and women priests, divorce and a host

of other Call to Action "reforms." [12] So much for not seeking doctrinal change. There have been enough red flags raised about this organization that some bishops have restricted their use of church property for meetings.

### On The National VOTF Web Site

There's a wealth of information about the organization's doctrinal positions on the VOTF website. Three documents are particularly striking:

1. Activities of the Structural Change Working Group: A committee of nine people has been meeting to define what VOTF means by its goal to "shape structural change within Church." It is examining, according to the VOTF document "Introduction: Activities of the Structural Change Working Group," Church structures as presently defined by canon law and local statutes, as they actually function, and "as they ought to be (to fulfill the vision of Vatican II)." [13] This "Structural Change Working Group" retained Fr. Ladislav Orsy, S.J., a visiting law professor at Georgetown University and professor emeritus of canon law at the Catholic University of America, as its consultant. (According to the *St. Anthony Messenger*, VOTF has retained the legal services of Orsy, as well. [14]) Avery Cardinal Dulles has written about Fr. Orsy: "On the papal teaching office, Father Orsy renews his plea (made in several other places) that Catholics should be free to dissent from definitive teaching." [15] To what is Cardinal Dulles referring? In his book *The Church: Learning and Teaching*, to give an example, Orsy writes the following disingenuous passage:

"It follows that if we abandoned the word 'dissent' altogether, we would lose little and gain much. If we could get into the habit of speaking of a researcher as holding another opinion or having come to a different conclusion or proposing a diverse hypothesis, we would only tell the truth positively. After all, hardly ever does a theologian dissent from a proposal and then settle down in a no-man's-land without an opinion; he dissents precisely because he has reached a positive conclusion, but a different one. If so, he might as well say it. Moreover, attitudinally, he may not be dissenting at all; rather, he may be consenting wholeheartedly to the search for a better understanding of the Christian mysteries."

Somewhat later in the chapter, Orsy explains the sort of dissenter he has in mind:

"At any rate, here and now we are seeking the permissible limits of a propositional dissent. That is, we assume that the dissenter has surrendered to God who reveals himself, and that he has accepted the Catholic belief concerning the role of the church in guarding and proclaiming the evangelical message. We are talking about a dissenter who is in full communion with the Catholic ecclesia."

On what issues, then, may the dissenter legitimately draw different conclusions from those of the Church? Orsy writes that ". . . to state simply that dissent from non-infallibly held doctrine is legitimate, is simplistic, and incorrect." However, when "the voice of a theologian who remains in communion but proposes an answer different from the one given by those in authority may not be an act of dissent at all; rather, it may be a needed contribution to the development of doctrine, coming from someone who is assenting to every part of the revealed truth but is in the process of searching for the whole truth." [16]

Orsy was among those who complained that the 1998 papal letter, *Ad Tuendam Fidem* (To Defend the Faith), sought to "discourage theological debate and to limit the teaching role of national bishops' conferences." Call to Action cited a number of theologians who disparaged the document on various grounds, among them Orsy, who (CTA wrote): ". . . told reporters the format shows this is not a CDF [Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith] official document, but only a letter from Ratzinger and the CDF secretary who co-signed it." [17] In a similar vein, Orsy's role in VOTF is to help the group express itself with a nuanced tone. "Orsy told *St. Anthony Messenger* that much of the rhetoric of the earliest days of VOTF should be taken with appreciation for the shock and pain its members were experiencing. They certainly have evolved since then . . ." [18]

2. "VOTF Policies and Positions:" Among the positions VOTF is prepared to state publicly is that "We do not advocate . . . the exclusion of homosexuals from the priesthood . . ."

3. "Theologian Petition:" This document simply states that VOTF has a right to exist and is signed by about 70 Catholic theologians and doctoral students. A startling number of signatories are people either directly associated with Call to Action or are known dissenters on a number of Church positions.

### Around the Country

Berkley, California: The January 12, 2004 guest speaker for a VOTF-Berkley meeting was Robert Blair Kaiser, a contributing editor for Newsweek magazine in Rome. Referring to *Humanae Vitae* dissent, Kaiser asserted that "teaching that has not been received is not a teaching," and "people can change the Church by ignoring it." Kaiser claimed that "women are blatantly being discriminated against, a great sin by the institutional Church," and "structural things VOTF can do: change canon law. We have to conspire. They're [priests are] just as much against the Pope as I am. Some of my best conspirators are priests." [19]

Chicago, Illinois: Forum for the Faithful is the name for the Chicago area VOTF chapter. [20] On March 30, 2003, it held a rally at Dominican University (formerly Rosary College) on Chicago's west-side, with VOTF co-founder James Muller among the speakers. According to April 13, 2003 minutes, Muller had suggested that the Chicago chapter host the next VOTF convention. However, the president of Call to Action, Dan Daley, advised the chapter that logistics for such a meeting would be a "headache." To give such advice, Daley was clearly involved in the chapter's organizational business. "I don't see a conflict at all," between VOTF and CTA, Daley is quoted as saying. [21] "We're very much in agreement with Voice of the Faithful on their concerns, issues around sex abuse and church reform, and the voice of laity in decision making, and we have been working cooperatively with Voice of the Faithful groups. We aren't tripping over each other's agendas, cooperate where we can." Daley denies that VOTF might drain reformist resources from CTA. He argues it is more likely that VOTF is expanding the potential base for "reform as it educates more mainstream Catholics about some of the major issues facing the church in America."

Elsewhere in Illinois: One VOTF chapter operates out of Holy Family parish, Inverness. The parish pastor is Fr. Pat Brennan, a frequent CTA speaker. [22] Another Illinois chapter, the Religious Education Community, headed by Eileen LeFort, is a CTA Church Organization for Renewal. LeFort's husband, Paul, is the regional coordinator for VOTF in the Diocese of Joliet.

Wisconsin: The 2003 annual Call to Action conference launched a Corpus Christi Campaign for Optional Celibacy, building on the work of three Milwaukee-area women who earlier this year started a grass-roots campaign with a post office box and the name People in Support of Optional Celibacy. One of these women is Terry Ryan of New Berlin, a leader in both her local CTA chapter and a founder of the Milwaukee VOTF chapter and VOTF regional coordinator. [23]

The Southeast Wisconsin Alliance of VOTF hosted ex-priest Dr. Daniel Maguire at a January 2003 meeting. Maguire and his wife have been strong supporters of and collaborators with the abortion rights group, Catholics for a Free Choice. [24] Catholics for a Free Choice is a CTA "Catholic Organization for Renewal" group.

Faithful St. Louis: Many members of the sixteen-member steering committee of the St. Louis VOTF chapter hold a range of dissenting positions. In particular are Call to Action associated Sister Louise Lears and Robert Schutzius. Lears, coordinator of the steering committee of Faithful St. Louis and its inaugural 2003 conference, is a Sister of Charity of Cincinnati who teaches health-care ethics at St. Louis University. Besides being coordinator of the recently combined Center for Theology and Social Analysis and Catholic Action Network for Social Justice, whose address is the same as Faithful St. Louis, she is also the contact for the Call to Action church renewal group, Catholic Men and Women for Justice. Sister Louise was among CTA "women's ordination" protesters during the papal visit to St. Louis in 1999. [25] Robert Schutzius, an ex-priest and one of the founders of the Call to Action group, Association for Rights of Catholics in the Church (ARCC), which promotes married and women clergy and homosexual advocacy, serves as Chair of Faithful St. Louis' Advocacy Committee. [26]

Connecticut: One co-leader of VOTF of Greater West Hartford, Conn., is Joanne Moran, a spiritual director for the Spiritual Life Center in Bloomfield, Conn., a community of sisters and laity who in 2000 were asked to cease offering spiritual direction by Archbishop Daniel Cronin. The Spiritual Life Center disassociated itself from the archdiocese, became a non-profit ecumenical entity and in 2002 awarded the Call to Action speaker and radical feminist Miriam Therese Winter its first annual Living Spirit Award. [27]

Thomas Groome, a married ex-priest who argues for women in the priesthood and inclusive language and dissents from *Humanae Vitae*, gave a January 2003 presentation for VOTF of Eastern Connecticut. [28]

Massachusetts: As part of the on-going adult education of VOTF Northshore Affiliate, Fr. Roger Haight, SJ addressed the group in January 2003. [29] A CTA speaker, Haight is under Vatican investigation for his book, *Jesus, Symbol of God*.

Michigan: The Grand Rapids, Mich., VOTF co-hosted an evening with Fr. Richard McBrien in February 2003. McBrien is a CTA speaker and dissents from the Church on a number of issues.[30] He is author of *Catholicism*, which is anything but a treatise on the Faith (see "Fr. McBrien's *Catholicism* — A Review" by Frank Morriss, Forum Focus, published by the Wanderer Forum Foundation).

New Jersey: On November 20, 2003 Anthony Padovano, a CTA speaker and president of the CTA "Catholic Organization for Renewal" CORPUS, which advocates married clergy, addressed a meeting of VOTF New Jersey.[31]

New York: The Long Island VOTF held its first forum in February 2003 at the Pax Christi in Port Jefferson.[32] Pax Christi is among Call to Action's church organization renewal groups. At their Faith Convention in September 2003, the keynote speaker was dissenter Fr. Richard McBrien, mentioned above.[33] Around the same time, the Long Island VOTF was calling for resignation of Rockville Centre's Bishop William Murphy. While, on one hand, defending a VOTF priest who had been caught with child pornography on his computer, they decried Murphy, who has not permitted VOTF to meet on church property, for permitting another priest to say a few Masses while charges against him are being reviewed.[34] Bishop Murphy, ironically, is one of the few bishops with an excellent record for handling clerical abuse cases.[35]

Also in 2003, regional VOTF groups held a "day of dialogue" at Fordham University.[36] Among the speakers were various VOTF officials and a host of CTA related individuals. They included Sidney Callahan, a CTA speaker and a board member of ARCC;[37] David Gibson, a speaker for CTA and CORPUS events;[38] Robert Blair Kaiser, a speaker for CTA events;[39] Eugene Kennedy, an ex-priest and a speaker for CTA and CORPUS events;[40] Tom Roberts, editor for the very pro-CTA National Catholic Reporter; and A.W. Richard Sipe, another ex-priest and CTA speaker.[41]

### **More Call to Action Support**

This is in no way an exhaustive listing of CTA activity within VOTF. CTA's longtime supporter, Bishop Thomas Gumbleton has published a letter of praise, saying: "We can only hope that Voice of the Faithful and other lay groups will have the stamina to persist in their efforts to hold bishops accountable and to bring structural reform to the Church?"[42] CTA speaker Dr. William V. D'Antonio received a \$34,950.00 grant from the Lilly Foundation to do a sociological study of VOTF.[43] Another CTA speaker, ex-priest Terry Dosh, is the Twin Cities VOTF literature resource person — and the recommended bibliography of VOTF-TC mostly features fellow Call to Action and VOTF supporters.[44] Dosh is active in ARCC and publishes Bread Rising. Still another, Fr. James Coriden gave a talk at Washington DC's Holy Trinity Church on VOTF's goal 3.[45] The list goes on. The dissenting positions of CTA, whether formally embraced by VOTF or not, are a significant part of the "adult education" that is informing the VOTF membership and that's a serious problem.

### **By Their Fruits You Will Know Them**

What's the bottom line? Is Voice of the Faithful nothing more than a Call to Action clone? Is everyone involved with the group lobbying to make Catholicism a version of the United Universalist Church? That's not a simple question. There are numerous interviews of VOTF members who don't want women priests, married clergy, an imprimatur on condoms, or a new rite of marriage for same-sex partners. They say they are quite simply looking for some accountability on the part of the bishops. But then there's Fr. Richard McBrien who writes: "To be sure, there are certain types of Catholics (calling them 'conservatives' debases a good and dignified term) who condemn any and every attempt to link the scandal with the need for structural change." [46] Yet, Fr. McBrien is himself a CTA speaker and a dissenter on a host of Church positions and dogmas.[47]

The words "structural change" have a terrible meaning in his mouth, beyond any mere ecclesiastic accountability. "Certain types of Catholics" might be excused, under the circumstances, of wondering about a certain type of disingenuousness — maybe even opportunism — at play. It's not the "moderate" Catholic who's in key leadership positions or giving the lectures at VOTF meetings. Among VOTF's leaders and shapers, Call to Action activists and other dissenters, both on the national and local level, appear to be using VOTF's successes and shaping its policies. Which means that VOTF, as an organization, isn't just another benign reform effort. Whether or not CTA is riding the VOTF wave towards its own shore, both the naive and the cunning among VOTF's membership are seeking changes that strike at the heart of Catholicism and that ultimately desire to challenge every dogmatic

position, every liturgical movement, every moral principle. CTA speaker and dissenter Sr. Joan Chittister expressed it well:

"Do they [VOTF] not realize that by concentrating on lay participation rather than on specific theological issues, they are really striking at the core of church development and power? They are targeting the biggest issue of them all, authority. Clearly, whether they know it or not, Voice of the Faithful is definitely not issue-free. And, whether they realize it or not, their audacity is shaking the foundations of an imperial church that, until this time, has seldom felt the need to explain anything, let alone ask questions of anyone other than those in their own inner circles. Sensus fidelium or no sensus fidelium. Before this is over, thanks to Voice of the Faithful, issues like a married priesthood, the ordination of women, the use of inclusive pronouns in scripture and the choice of postures during the canon of the Mass will seem to be exactly what they are — very, very minor. That's why I admire them: They are into the biggest issue of them all.[48]

"Whether they know it or not," whether a pawn of CTA or an autonomous grassroots uprising, VOTF is an attractive place for Call to Action types. And an extremely uncomfortable place for the rest of us.

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#### Endnotes

1. James Carroll, "*Enhancing Democracy: the Key to Religious Reform*," Plenary address at 2002 CTA. National Conference, Milwaukee. Reprinted in CTA's Spirituality Justice Reprint.
2. A Call to Action, "*Justice in the Church*," Origins, 1976.
3. VOTF, "*Introduction: Activities of the Structural Change Working Group*," [www.votf.org](http://www.votf.org)
4. Miriam Hill, "*Catholic Group in Boston Sows Seeds of Revolution*," Philadelphia Inquirer, May 15, 2002.
5. "Introduction: Activities of the Structural Change Working Group..."
6. Special Report by the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, "*Clerical Abuse in Social Context: Catholic Clergy and Other Professionals*," Special Report by the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, The Catalyst, March 2004.
7. July 20, 2002.
8. "CTA Backs Voice of the Faithful as 4,200 Gather in Boston," Call to Action News, September 2002.
9. MassNews Staff, "*Is Voice of the Faithful Unfaithful to Catholic Principles?*" MassNews, July 22, 2002.
10. Deal Hudson, "*When Wolves Dress Like Sheep: A Close Look at Voice of the Faithful*," Crisis Magazine e-letter, August 8, 2002.
11. Two concerned lay Catholic groups have sprung up in Massachusetts. Your Catholic Voice: Co-founded by Raymond Flynn (former mayor of Boston, currently talk show host) and Michael Galloway; and Faithful Voice: [www.faithfulvoice.com](http://www.faithfulvoice.com)
12. Marianne Keating, Letter to the Editor, *Lawrence Eagle Tribune*, Nov. 9, 2002; Meg Murphy, "*Walkout Ends Church Healing Session*," *Lawrence Eagle Tribune*, Oct. 31, 2002.
13. The document was obtained at the VOTF website: [www.votf.org](http://www.votf.org)
14. John Bookser Feister, "*Voice of the Faithful: 'Keep the Faith, Change the Church'*," *St. Anthony Messenger*, June 2003.
15. "Avery Dulles & Ladislav Orsy in Dialogue," *America*, November 25, 2000.
16. Ladislav Orsy, SJ, *The Church: Learning and Teaching*, Michael Glazier, 1987. Excerpt from chapter 3: "Assent and Dissent."

17. *Call to Action News*, September 1998 <http://www.cta-usa.org/news9-98/scholars.html>
18. John Bookser Feister, "Voice of the Faithful: 'Keep the Faith, Change the Church,'" *St. Anthony Messenger*, June 2003.
19. Phil Sevilla, Field Report on the VOTF meeting at Holy Spirit/Newman Center in Berkley, CA, January 12, 2004.
20. Forum for the Faithful has a website: [www.forumforthefaithful.org](http://www.forumforthefaithful.org)
21. "Can Call to Action and Voice of the Faithful Get Along?" *Salt of the Earth: Social Justice News*, Claretian publication, April 2003.
22. VOTF website, Parish Voice — Central, [www.votf.org](http://www.votf.org). Brennan is on the CTA Speakers and Artists Referral Service listing.
23. Tom Heinen, "A Push for Priestly Changes," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, November 7, 2003; Tom Heinen, "Vatican Draft Document Creates Stir," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, September 24, 2003; Juliet Williams, "Top Cleric Backs Celibacy Policy," Associated Press, 9/5/2003 (published in the Boston Globe)
24. Voice of the Faithful, *In the Vineyard*, reports from VOTF chapters, February 2003.
25. Helen Hull Hitchcock, "Faithful St. Louis?" Women for Faith and Family Statements, 2003. See also, CTA *Church Renewal Directory*: Catholic Men and Women for Justice listing.
26. Hitchcock. See also Voice of the faithful St. Louis website, <http://134.124.1.107/~votfsl/officers.html>, Committees and Officers page.
27. Joanne Moran, "Voice of the Faithful Affirmed," *The American Catholic*, December 2002; Janet O'Brien, "Spiritual Life Center Celebrates," *The American Catholic*, November 2002; Praxis, News from Hartford Seminary, December 2002.
28. Voice of the Faithful, *In the Vineyard*, reports from VOTF chapters, February 2003.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid. (McBrien spoke at the 2001 national CTA conferences. He has publicly dissented against *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, *Humanae Vitae*, and the Church on the issue of women and married priests.)
31. Northern California VOTF website: VOTF articles listing. CORPUS is listed on the CTA "Catholic Organizations for Renewal" list.
32. Voice of the Faithful, *In the Vineyard*, reports from VOTF chapters, February 2003.
33. Voice of the Faithful of Long Island, September 27, 2003 Faith Convention flier and registration form.
34. Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, "Catholic Malcontents Attack Bishop Murphy," *Catalyst*, January/February 2004.
35. Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, "Catholics Rally to Support Bishop Murphy," *Catalyst*, September 2003. Article references a report by the Massachusetts Attorney General Thomas Reilly showing that Murphy had no culpability for the Boston scandals; also the Pulitzer Prize winning investigative report by reporters from the *Boston Globe*, *Betrayal: The Crisis in the Catholic Church*, which demonstrates the same thing.
36. Voice of the Faithful conference materials, "Stand and Be Counted," Fordham University, Bronx, NY, October 25, 2003.
37. Callahan spoke at the 2003 national CTA conference; ARCC — Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church. ARCC is a Call to Action COR group (Catholic Organizations for Renewal). It advocates for all the key issues of CTA, including married and women priests, freedom to dissent from Church teaching, freedom to remarry in the Church after divorce, lay selection of priests and bishops, homosexual acceptance, radical political activism, etc. (See ARCC promotional brochure.)

38. Gibson is a scheduled speaker at the 2004 national CTA conference and the June 24-27, 2004 CORPUS conference. CORPUS is a Call to Action COR group (Catholic Organizations for Renewal). It specifically advocates for a married priesthood, while supporting other CTA issues.
39. Kaiser was a panelist at the 2000 national CTA conference and addressed two regional CTA conferences in 2002 — CTA San Diego October 19, 2002 and CTA Michigan State Conference October 5, 2002.
40. Kennedy spoke at the 2002 national CTA conference and is scheduled for the June 25-27, 2004 CORPUS conference.
41. Sipe spoke at the national 2003 CTA conference and the regional CTA-San Diego conference, March 6, 2004.
42. Bishop Thomas J. Gumbleton, letter, *Commonweal*, October 10, 2003.
43. The Louisville Institute (a Lilly Endowment Program for the Study of American Religion at the Louisville Seminary), *Intersections*, winter 2003. D'Antonio is listed in CTA's Speakers Referral Bureau.
44. Terry Dosh, "A Select Bibliography for VOTF Folks," Twin Cities VOTF webpage.
45. *Voice of the Faithful, In the Vineyard*, reports from VOTF chapters, February 2004.
46. Richard McBrien, "The Costs of Failure," *The Tidings*, December 26, 2003.
47. McBrien spoke at the 2001 national CTA conferences. He has publicly dissented against *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, *Humanae Vitae*, and the Church on the issue of women and married priests.
48. Sr. Joan Chittister, untitled column about VOTF in *National Catholic Reporter*, January 31, 2003

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#### What is Call to Action?

Today's Call to Action is a loose coalition of several hundred Small Faith Communities and "Church Organizations for Renewal." Together, they support and work for the same goals that were recommended by the original 1976 CTA Conference in Detroit:

- The ordination of women to the ministerial priesthood.
- A lifting of the priestly discipline of celibacy.
- "Democratic" or "popular" selection of bishops and priests.
- Admission that active, homosexual behavior is not necessarily or intrinsically sinful.
- Change of the moral law against artificial birth control and intentional abortions.
- A new understanding that the Kingdom of God is a temporal achievement humanly accomplished.
- "Freedom of speech" for Catholic educators and theologians.

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#### Dissenters Speaking at the First National VOTF Gathering

July 20, 2002

Boston

- Dr. Debra Haffner: Counseling, Education, and Public Affairs for Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington and a former president of SIECUS.
- Leonard Swindler: founder of the Call to Action group ARCC (Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church). ARCC is Call to Action Church Organization for Renewal and works within the Church for the right to divorce and remarry, use birth control, and dissent from Church teaching, among other things.
- James Carroll: an ex-priest and columnist for the Boston Globe whose positions include support for contraception, abortion, and women's ordination.

- Tom Groome: a professor at Boston College with widely publicized views supporting women in the priesthood and inclusive language and dissenting from *Humanae Vitae*.
- Michelle Dillon: a professor and writer who promotes abortion, women's ordination, and homosexual rights.
- Recipient of the first VOTF "Priest of Integrity" award went to Fr. Thomas Doyle, OP. Fr. Doyle spoke at the 2002 national CTA conference and is scheduled for regional CTA conferences.

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Some of the Bishops condemning VOTF and/or forbidding VOTF chapters to meet on Church property:

- Bishop William Lori, Bridgeport, Connecticut
- Bishop William Murphy, Rockville Center, New York
- Archbishop John Myers, Newark, New Jersey. Myers wrote, "While certain members of the organization insist that [VOTF] goals and objectives are not determined, other literature and other factors clearly indicate that it is aligned or being aligned with groups in the Church that are clearly in dissent with Church teaching." Myers banned VOTF from meeting on Church property.
- Bishop George Coleman, Diocese of Fall River, Massachusetts
- Archbishop Sean O'Malley, Boston, Massachusetts, maintaining a VOTF ban instituted by Cardinal Law.
- Bishop Joseph Gerry, Portland, Maine (ban later rescinded)
- Bishop Daly, Brooklyn, New York (ban later rescinded)
- Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio, Camden, New Jersey
- Bishop Robert Vasa, Baker, Oregon
- Auxiliary Bishop Emilio Allue, Boston Archdiocese
- Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk, Cincinnati, Ohio
- Archbishop John Donoghue, Atlanta, Georgia
- Archbishop Michael Sheehan, Santa Fe, New Mexico
- Bishop Allen Vigneron, Oakland, California

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A large number of signatories on a VOTF "*Theologian Petition*," stating that VOTF has a right to exist, include a host of people associated with Call to Action. (Others, not included on this list, are known dissenters from a variety of Church positions):

- Dr. Eugene C. Bianchi: Bianchi was a CTA national conference speaker on 2003, and has prepared a foundation paper for the CTA Church Organization for Renewal, CORPUS, which advocates married and women priests.
- Nancy A. Dallavalle: Dallavalle advocates CTA, telling religious study faculty at Fairfield University on May 21, 2002 that one way for Catholic laity to "become involved" is to join Call to Action or Voice of the Faithful.
- Sr. Margaret Farley, RSM, will speak at the 2004 National Call to Action Conference. Farley lectured at the New Ways Ministry Fourth National Symposium in 1997 on "Same-Sex Relations: An Ethical Perspective," saying that as long as the Christian sexual ethic was focused on "procreation" and the "control of sexual desire," there was no room for a positive evaluation of homosexuality. But in recent decades, under the pressure of new discoveries in the social sciences and scientific fields, traditional Catholic sexual morality is crumbling. Now, the "procreative norm is gone, the rigid stereotype of male / female complementarity is gone, and the time is ripe for a positive evaluation of homosexuality and same-sex relations."
- Thomas Groome: Groome is an ex-priest from Boston College who dissents from *Humanae Vitae*, advocates inclusive language and ordaining women.
- David Hollenbach, SJ: Hollenbach, an outspoken critic of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* was barred by the Vatican from serving as an administrator or member of pontifical faculties at the nation's two Jesuit theology schools.



- Mark Jordan: Jordan, an openly homosexual professor who has written *The Silence of Sodom*, has offered the course "Blessing Same-Sex Unions" at Emory University.
- James Keenan: Keenan was one of three priests who, on June 2, 2003, testified to the General Court of Massachusetts regarding the definition of marriage, and to the "dismay" of the Massachusetts Catholic Conference misrepresented the Catholic position on same sex marriages.
- Paul Lakeland: At the June 7, 2003 VOTF one-day meeting in the Boston area, the keynote speaker was Paul Lakeland, a professor of religious studies at Fairfield University in Connecticut. Lakeland advocated the abolition of the College of Cardinals, the ordination of women to the diaconate, and lay participation in the election of bishops. Lakeland teaches liberation theology, having written *The Liberation of the Laity: In Search of the Accountable Church* in which he "advocates that the laity be liberated from the shackles of clerical oppression."
- Dr. Walter Ludwig, former CTA board member and listed on the 2004 Call to Action Speakers Referral Service, has been a speaker at national and regional CTA conferences (1995, 1997, and 1998; CTA/AZ regional), and is the author of *Reconstructing Catholicism for a New Generation*.
- Gary Macy: Macy addressed the San Diego County CTA on April 3, 2004, according to the national CTA calendar. A flier for the event identifies Macy as "a popular and frequent speaker at Call to Action Days of Sharing." He challenges the Church's position against women's ordination. Macy spoke at the annual West Coast CTA Conference in 1998, 1999, and 2003.
- Anthony Massimini: He writes: "I submit that such groups as Call to Action, CORPUS, and the Women's Ordination Conference are being called by the Spirit to act in a new, prophetic way."
- Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza: She was the keynote speaker at the 1998 national CTA conference and will be speaking again at the 2004 conference, is a member of the Women's Ordination Conference, the pro-abortion group Catholic Committee on Pluralism, and is on the recruiting committee of Catholics For a Free Choice.
- Leonard Swindler, founder of the Association for the Rights of Catholic in the Church (ARCC). ARCC is Call to Action Church Organization for Renewal and works within the Church for the right to divorce and remarry, use birth control, and dissent from Church teaching, among other things.

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### Backgrounds of VOTF Leadership

- James (Jim) Muller, VOTF co-founder and a professor at Harvard is quoted by Notre Dame Magazine [profile, winter 2002-2003] as seeking a "governance partnership" that would call for substantial consultation with the laity by the bishops, including issues of human sexuality, women's rights, and democratic processes.
- One VOTF steering committee member is Andrea Johnson, from the Call to Action related Women's Ordination Conference.
- One member of the VOTF founding leadership council is Janice Leary, coordinator of CTA in Massachusetts, which she founded in 1990. Another VOTF founding member, Fr. Walter Cuenin is a Newton, Massachusetts, parish priest who helped to found the Boston Priests' Forum. The forum is a place to discuss "whether mandatory celibacy should remain" and Church teachings like the birth-control ban.
- The national Call to Action co-director, Dan Daley, and "other CTA board and staff have met with VOTF about future collaboration."
- Sr. Betsy Conway, VOTF Secretary, was reported by the Boston Globe as saying that the empowerment one feels in a collaborative community of religious women can't help but estrange one from the closed hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church.

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