



**The Winchester-Area Voice of the Faithful Survey of Priests**  
Performed by WAVOTF Priests of Integrity Working Group  
Findings presented to the WAVOTF general assembly at our February 3, 2003 meeting

Inquires should be addressed as follows:

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## 1. KEY FINDINGS

### 1.1. Project Overview

In May 2002, the Winchester-Area Parish Voice Chapter of VOTF (WAVOTF) began meeting. The structure we followed from our initial sessions was to break into areas of interest, and have discussions about what we could do to address needs in these topic areas. One group that met from the outset was the “Supporting Priests of Integrity” Group.

We feel that we would be remiss if we did not stop and acknowledge the suffering of victims at this point. Without the victims, VOTF would not have formed, and without them, we would not be engaged in an open dialogue on how our church needs to evolve to be a better church. The priests interviewed all share the same concerns for victims as VOTF. Although the purpose of this particular document is to convey the findings of our group, we are dedicated to supporting the needs of the survivors of sexual abuse. Further, some comments within the documents may now seem less relevant than when first given. It is important to note that all surveys were conducted in August – October, 2002.

The working group initially invited some priest speakers to come and address the group, but soon thereafter our focus shifted. We started asking each other what it meant to support priests of integrity, and felt we really could not presume to know what support was needed without asking. That being the case, we then, in July developed a survey instrument for us to interview Archdiocesan priests. While we developed the survey as a group, we solicited input from others beyond the working group within the WAVOTF.

We conducted a pilot with the survey, with one member of the working group going out and interviewing several priests to determine if the survey needed any changes. Some small changes were made, and then we progressed to the next phase. We turned to the membership of the WAVOTF, and asked all to participate in surveying priests. We had many volunteers. One member of the group, and only one member, kept track of which priests were being interviewed. We felt that maintaining anonymity of the participating priests was essential to the priests feeling safe enough to express their viewpoints openly. To that end only one member of the group has the exhaustive list of who participated, and those who declined to participate.

We collected input from 30 priests from the Archdiocese of Boston. An additional three declined to be interviewed. We do acknowledge that by agreeing to participate, the population of priest from which we gather information was self-selected. It is clear that



the viewpoints expressed in this output are not 100% reflective of all priests in the Archdiocese.

This being the case, there are still some rather strong themes that did present themselves that we, the working group, felt should be presented in this format to draw attention to them.

Lastly, we feel that is important to note that the process of conducting the interviews was an extremely enlightening experience for all who participated. The priests, in general, were very happy to be asked their opinions, and the interviewers felt powerfully moved by both the comments and the process. The process itself was an indication of how we can support these men. Through the comments, it is clear that the priests share the same concerns as VOTF in addressing the needs of victims.

## 1.2. Survey Data Analysis

The following section is a brief analysis of the data gathered by the survey in the summer and early fall of 2002. There were three parts to the survey, each consisting of a number of questions. In the discussion below, each of the questions asked of the priests is repeated, followed by percentages of their various responses. In the analysis of Part III of the survey, representative comments by the priests are also given.

### 1.2.1. Part I: Background Information including Statistical Data

1. How long have you been ordained?

0-10 years	4%
11-20 years	13%
20-29 years	17%
30-39 years	33%
40+ years	33%
  
2. Are you a Pastor or a Parochial Vicar at this time?

Pastor	50%
Parochial Vicar	17%
Other	33%
  
3. How is the power dealt with in your parish?

Delegated by Pastor	52%
Closely held by Pastor	40%
Indeterminate	8%
  
4. Would it be helpful to you if you could turn the business matters of the parish over to someone else?

Currently delegate business matters to volunteer laity	65%
Have a staff member who is business manager	13%
Indeterminate	22%



5. Do you have a parish council?
 

Yes	60%
No	22%
Indeterminate	18%
  
6. What is your current image of the Church?
 

Negative	40%
Positive	27%
Indeterminate	33%

### 1.2.2. Part II: Current Parish Situation including Statistical Data

1. What has been your parish's reaction to the abuse crisis?
 

VOTF or victim support	21%
Various other actions/reactions	79%
  
2. Have laity requested listening sessions?
 

Priest initiated listening sessions	40%
Laity asked for listening sessions	23%
Indeterminate	37%
  
3. Have you complied with requests?
 

Yes	78%
No or indeterminate	22%
  
4. Have you been forbidden by Chancery to have dealings with VOTF?
 

No	87%
Yes	13%
  
5. Have church attendance and/or financial support fallen off as a result of the crisis?
 

Yes	60%
No	40%

### 1.2.3. Part III: Working for the Future including Statistical Data

1. In many ways for the Church, this is the best of times and the worst of times. What is best for you?  
 What is worst for you?

<u>Best</u>	
Opportunity to work with people	39%
Opportunity to effect change	35%
Support from parishioners	12%
Other	14%

Representative Comments

"People are speaking out and many are taking a more active role in the Church ministries";  
 "...the people's concern, empathy and understanding";  
 "There is a vindication of Vatican II";  
 "The crises have reawakened the desire to fulfill Vatican II";  
 "Organizations like VOTF bring vitality, enthusiasm and excitement";  
 "Prayers in parishes are a source of hope and support";  
 "The Church must change...must use the talents of all of the laity and clergy";  
 "...it depends on the strength of the laity to organize and become empowered";  
 "There is a reduction of clericalism";  
 "The Holy Spirit encouraged lay people to take their rightful place in the life of the Church."



**Worst**

People's distrust of priests	41%
Performance of leadership	28%
Guilt, despair, embarrassment, loneliness, betrayal	14%
Other	17%

**Representative Comments**

- "... a strong feeling that I cannot be trusted and am disposable";
- "Do they question my integrity?";
- "...embarrassed and feel guilty about the acts of brother priests";
- "...despair, disconnectedness, damage to the soul of the presbyterate";
- "I do not see any movement toward the healing of priests";
- "the most difficult task is reaching out to all of those who need me";
- "...a wounded clergy";
- "I can't help but worry that I may be falsely accused";
- "...that 50 years of my priesthood may be destroyed";
- "I have been betrayed";
- "I am doing the work of three priests";
- "...the ever increasing terrible lack of priests";
- "...the lack of honest leadership at the diocesan level";
- "The whole period is most difficult and painful in every way for all of us."

2. What are your current sources of support? *There were multiple responses to this question*

Laiety	79%
Other priests	66%
Families	40%
Prayer, other	20%

3. At this time in your priesthood, what do you need from us, the people of the Church?

Affirmation	67%
Laiety pressing for reform	30%
Other	3%

**Representative Comments**

- "You should persist in demanding greater participation in policy/decision making";
- "I need your care and concern and to be treated as a brother";
- "...as friends";
- "...a smile";
- "...ongoing prayer";
- "...prayers most of all";
- "...demand for due process for accused priests";
- "I should spend a majority of my time on ministry";
- "... an atmosphere of cooperation and commitment to our Faith";
- "...an awareness that I cannot do everything";
- "...awareness of the clerical pain and fear and the affirmation and recognition of the value of my role";
- "I need you to have faith and perseverance";
- "trust and confidence";
- "honest advice";
- "...an extra effort to affirm priests who are serving faithfully, in a public forum";
- "...willingness to share the ministries, wisdom, energy and talents."



4. What do you hope and pray will happen in/with and for the Church? What good might God bring from all the pain and struggle?

Representative Comments

We have edited the representative comments of priests in answer to this question in the form of Prayers of the Faithful.

**Prayers of Faithful Priests**

That the Church will more closely follow the Gospel in better ways.

That bishops listen to the experiences of parishes.

That a common ministry be shared by clergy and lay people.

That God might bring about a greater voice and guidance of the Church with laity joining with their priests and bishops.

That God might bring a vision of Church rooted in the mystery of death and life coming from death. This can be another opportunity to understand the Pascal Mystery again.

That the zero tolerance policy will be modified with an eye to repentance and forgiveness.

That both the priests and laity become holier with more openness and transparency.

That we be what we profess to be.

That communities will draw closer together.

That people treat a visit to the church for prayer as a natural part of their day.

That this period be one of understanding.

That through prayer and attention to the Holy Spirit we will continue to hand on our faith to the next generation.

That increased communications and open discussion will help us to face the future together.

That there will be an increase in holiness for all walks of life in the Church.

That we will not be afraid to share as we go forward in making appointments and in bringing the laity into the power structure of our Church.

That we recognize the dysfunctional structures and systems of power in our Church and be courageous enough to make the necessary changes.

That we develop humility and admit that alone we can do nothing.

That the Church throw itself on the God it professes to serve.

That the Church address deep, dark secrets truthfully and openly resulting in a stronger Church.

That people will realize why they stay and why they are Catholic.

That we have bishops of integrity, who are truthful and will deal honestly in a Christ-like way on all matters.

That there will be more involvement of lay men and women at higher levels of decision-making.

That there will be more lay deacons and perhaps deaconesses.

That there will be a re-forming of the Church.

That the laity will not be passive pay, pray and obey types.

That out of all of the pain and struggle we may have a stronger Church with a living faith.

That clergy and laity work together to bring about a more united Church through changes that will benefit all its members.

That there will come a renewed sense of our helplessness, a renewed sense of consciousness of a shared Church.

That we have an increase in the number of priests to allow the Church to reach out to the many that need help.

That there is a change in attitude so the priesthood is no longer viewed as having a functionary capacity.

That the laity have a better understanding of the underlying philosophy of the Church.

That the Church monitors the safety of children and provides workshops for parents.

That more gifts will come from the faithful and that there will be an environment in the Church to support these gifts.

That all people become more moral and priests' spiritual life is deepened so that we all become more Christ like.

That the hierarchy's style of leadership be adjusted and less dictatorial.

That people continue to support the clergy with their prayers and that they also support the financial support of parishes and the charities of the Archdiocese.

That secrecy and abuse of power in the Church be eliminated forever.



## 2. OUR INTERPRETATIONS

There were several themes that many priests either explicitly or implicitly presented during the interviews.

- The role of the laity
- The role of the priest
- The life of a priest
- Due process of priests accused of abuse
- Relationship between clergy and hierarchy

While many of these items are linked, each has their own subtleties. The role of the laity was a consistent theme in the conversations with priests. Many want a more open/collaborative relationship between priests and laity – a relationship where the priest is friend, rather than simply “father.” There were differing viewpoints in terms of deployment of a Parish Pastoral Council (PPC). In the survey responses, while all priests we spoke with did have a PPC, there was broad interpretation of the role of these councils, with 60% reporting a fully functioning council true to the mission of a PPC. The Archdiocese published guidelines for a PPC during the 8<sup>th</sup> Synod (1989), but much has changed in the Archdiocese since this time – the number of priests is greatly diminished, seminaries are graduating smaller classes, etc. With the general responsibility of parish life, the sacramental needs, and the operations of a parish, the ordained in the Archdiocese are under greater pressure than ever. With this in mind, we see a clear need for the laity to take on a more managerial role within the parish to enable the priest to be more available to meet the spiritual and liturgical needs of a parish community. Further, some priests commented on the need for diversity within the laity, that this time represents a call to inclusion for all.

Lumen Gentium beautifully articulates the role of the laity in all aspects of parish life. We would encourage Cardinal Law’s successor to take advantage of the God given talents of the people of God in Boston. Laity are called to participate in three munera of priest, prophet and king as part of their baptismal call.

The role of the priest is also something that was discussed broadly. While there is no question that the seminary prepares men to be liturgists, there is some question concerning the level of preparation given to the same to be strong managers. Given that 22% of the priests who were surveyed indicated that they did not have a business or operations manager, with the dwindling numbers of ordained, many have found themselves as a human resource manager, COO, CFO, and CEO of a small company. Basic training in financial management, delegation, conducting meetings, and hiring seems not to be present in the current seminary curriculum. We feel that there are two choices, continue on the same path of training at the seminary and allow the laity more latitude in areas where they are well trained, or to change the curriculum in the seminary to give the seminarians the skills they need to be successful managers as well as liturgists when they graduate and are ordained.

We were startled by the candor of priests in the discussions of their quality of life. Many alluded to the solitary life of priests (or “solitary nature of the priesthood”). In the survey 73% of the priests responded that the image of the Church (as institution) was not positive. The morale of these men has been greatly diminished through the current scandal. Gone are the days of rectories filled with 4-5 priests that provided needed friendship and support. Many of the priests today live alone in dwellings built for many more residents. It was also clear that many include their congregations as “family”. The Boston Priests’ Forum appears to be filling a need that was apparent. By bringing together ordained to speak openly, we hope that many, if not all, will find support through this organization. The Vicar General has expressed a desire to utilize the Presbyteral Council for priests to express their needs and share their candid thoughts. However, by admission, this Council, as well as the Diocesan Parish Council, are not fully functioning, as designed. This exposes the need for open communication without fear of reprisal. Clearly, organizations similar to VOTF and Priest Forum provide this outlet. Priests who are unable to reach out for social interaction are at risk. We must ensure that they are able to satisfy the basic human need for healthy relationships.

Further, and tied to the general well-being of priests, several indicated that the Church might want to revisit the issue of celibacy as a requirement for priests.



Many priests are concerned about the lack of due process for priests accused of abuse. While it is clear that there was gross mishandling of abuse allegations, it is not clear that the current handling is any better. Both processes denied swift and due process – allowing a “day in court”, for the truth to be known, guilty punished, and innocent exonerated. When the American Bishops met in Washington and changed the zero tolerance policy to one that the Vatican could support, no clear plan was made to address how this new policy would be rolled out, and how it would affect the priests currently on administrative leave. There has been no published process from the Archdiocese and no timeline given to resolve the current open accusations.

We do feel that it is important to state that being supportive of due process for the priests is not at the expense of victims’ rights, far from it. We feel that the best way to support the survivors of abuse is to have the truth known, and guilty punished. The only way to do this fairly is to have a due process in place.

Lastly, a consistent theme was that priests felt that Bishops did not know the priests serving under them. Many felt that the Bishops do not even know their names. Visitations are brief and not really done in depth with Bishops connecting to the priests and building camaraderie. This is inconsistent with the Vatican Council II documents “On Priestly Formation” and “The Role of Bishops.” Both of these documents express a necessity for a direct, consistent and personal relationship between the priests and his Bishop. It is a paternal relationship that should be encouraged.



### 3. CONCLUSION

From the responses to the survey, we have generated the following resolutions on which we believe there should be follow-up. As we progress further, other projects will emerge. These represent the first of many steps that need to be taken.

1. Provide opportunities for priests to enjoy socialization with laity in discussion groups, potluck suppers and other such events.
2. Communicate to the Structural Change working group the key survey findings related to that issue.
3. Bring together priests and survivors to develop a due process, which meets the needs of both contingents.
4. Develop a list of petitions from the priests' responses to the question of "what do you pray and hope for the Church."



## 4. APPENDIX

### 4.1. Original Priest Survey Questionnaire

#### 4.1.1. Part I: Background Information

- How long have you been ordained?
- Are you a Pastor or Parochial Vicar at this time?
- How is power managed in your parish at this time?
- Would it be helpful to you if you could turn the business matters of the parish over to someone else?
- Do you have a parish council? Is it helpful to you? How?
- What is your current image of the Church? How can the Church gain more vocations?

#### 4.1.2. Part II: Current Parish Situation

- What has your parish's reaction been to the abuse crisis?
- Have the laity of your parish requested listening or other types of sessions as a result of the crisis?
- Have you been willing to comply with their requests?
- Have you been discouraged by chancery to have any dealings with Voice of the Faithful?
- Have church attendance and/or financial support fallen off in your parish (as a result of the crisis)?

#### 4.1.3. Part III: Working for the Future

In many ways for the Church this is "the best of times and the worst of times".

- What is best for you now in your ministry?
- What is most difficult?
- What are your current sources of support now?
- At this time in your priesthood what do you feel you need from the people in the Church [us]?
- What do you hope and pray will happen in/with and for the Church?
- What good might God bring from all the pain and struggle?
- Is there anything else you want to talk about that I haven't asked you?

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_ Priest Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_



## 4.2. Revised Priest Survey Questionnaire

### 4.2.1. Part I: Background Information

- How long have you been ordained?
- During these years in what roles have you served the People of God?
- What is your image of our Church?
- As a result of Vatican II most parishes in this Diocese now have lay women and men functioning on Parish and Finance Councils working with Pastors and their staff. Many parishes have laity working on Committees such as Liturgical, Religious Ed., Adult Ed. and Youth Ministry as well as working in Parochial Schools. What have been your experiences of lay involvement in parishes or offices to which you have been assigned?

### 4.2.2. Part II: The Current Situation

- What has been the reaction of the Catholics and others with whom you interact in your parish or special ministry?
- How have you and your fellow priests responded to these reactions?
- Have church attendance and/or financial support fallen off as a result of the crisis?
- What has been most difficult for you during this most serious crisis in our Church?
- What are your current sources of support?
- Are you knowledgeable about The Voice of the Faithful? If not would you be interested in knowing more?

### 4.2.3. Part III: Working for the Future

- In many ways for the Church this can be described as the best of times and the worst of times. What is the best for you now in your ministry? What is the worst?
- What do you hope and pray in, with and for the Church? What good might God bring from all of the pain and struggle?
- We, members of The Voice of the Faithful, have as one of our three goals To Support Priests like yourself, who are faithful to their vows. At this time and in the future what do you need from the people?

### 4.2.4. Part IV: Open Dialogue

- Most important now seize this opportunity to talk about anything that was not covered in this interview.