

An Interview with Jim Post, President of VOTF

by Miriam Devine

"It was a quiet Sunday morning," Jim Post, president of Voice of the



Faithful, said. "I came downstairs, poured a cup of coffee, and opened the newspaper. And here's this story in the *Boston Globe*

on the Geoghan case and how Cardinal Law knew of the problem and kept moving him around." He paused. "I mean it was so shocking - so chilling to realize that for years the leadership in the archdiocese just took a walk on dealing with this guy and kept reassigning him to different parishes."

At 11 o'clock Mass at St. John the Evangelist Church in Wellesley, a wealthy Boston suburb, many of Post's neighbors and friends expressed the same embarrassment, disgust, anger and shame that he was feeling. There was a sense even then that this was not just bad news, it was "horrific." As more disclosures surfaced daily, people felt the need to talk about it.

"To our eternal gratitude, our pastor, Father Tom Powers, let us use the church hall to meet; he even suggested that people speak from the altar after every Mass. I think it's important to remember that while the

parishioners felt betrayed, the clergy were absolutely devastated. It was such a rejection of everything that these good people stand for. They'd been betrayed by brother priests. The concept of shepherd - what nonsense when you look at the behavior!"

A group headed by Nobel Peace prize recipient Dr. Jim Muller began holding weekly meetings. More and more people came - 200, 300, 500. There were teachers, parents of young children, physicians, bankers, businessmen and women; people ranging in age from the 30's to the 70's. They discussed whether they could really make a difference; whether they could deal with bishops and a cardinal, and perhaps the Vatican.

Dr. Muller, a cardiologist, had been involved on an international level with United Nations agencies, and Jim, a professor of management at Boston University, had done work with the World Health Organization on international standards and codes of conduct for businesses relative to global health issues. Both had dealt with high-ranking ministers of other countries. "So we both had fragments of experience we could draw on," Post said.

They developed three goals: to respond to survivors; to support

priests of integrity; and to shape structural changes in the Church so that this would never happen again.

"It will be a marathon, not a sprint," Jim said. "You need the muscles and the training to run a marathon. It's going to take a lot of vigilance, and a lot of laity involvement."

"I think that's what the great story of Voice of the Faithful will be. We're going to be the vehicle for more laity involvement. Our goal of shaping structural changes can be seen narrowly in terms of getting the aftermath of Dallas right. But the truth is that there are more systemic problems here which have to do with openness and transparency and the laity's involvement in decision-making processes. In a very real sense it's about reclaiming some of the opportunities and the responsibilities that Vatican II talked about.

"We're reaping a very bitter harvest for not living out the Vatican II statements on the laity," he added. "There's been a lot of backsliding since then and I think people are now awakened to it. We have to develop different mechanisms for engaging the laity in a much more substantial and meaningful way. Many members of the clergy and some bishops believe this too."

Post also sees Voice of the Faithful as a forum in which differing viewpoints can be aired. He emphasized that VOTF has no wish to change anything affecting the faith and doctrines of the Church. "Think of your left hand and your right hand. In your left hand is the faith and doctrine of the Church and in the right hand is the human institution. All the problems we're working on are in the right hand - the human institution. That's what's broken; that's what went off the rails. And we're committed to having dialogues with bishops. We're all going to live together in this family - but it won't happen overnight."

Turning serious, he said, "I think of the wildfires in Colorado and Arizona. They sweep away everything in their path, but at the end somehow new life will spring up. That's what we have to hope for and work for here. The purpose of the July 20th convention is to provide people with the energy and the knowledge and the sense of commitment to build something positive out of this sorry mess." He paused and added. "I really think there are larger forces that are moving this forward. Many people call it the work of the Holy Spirit and I'm comfortable with that."