

# Voice of Faithful can meet in Boston

## Group has been banned in other archdioceses

Gregory L. Tracy/CNS

BOSTON — Cardinal Bernard F. Law of Boston has agreed to permit existing chapters of Voice of the Faithful to meet on church property in the archdiocese, but said it would be "inappropriate for new chapters" to do so until he receives "further information" about the organization of Catholic laity.

The cardinal's action, disclosed in an Oct. 12 letter to Father Paul Keyes, pastor of St. Michael Church in North Andover, reversed an earlier decision of Boston Auxiliary Bishop Emilio S. Allue, barring the St. Michael's chapter from meeting on church property.

Cardinal Law's letter was sent a few days after Archbishop John J. Myers of Newark, N.J., denounced the Voice of the Faithful agenda as "anti-church and, ultimately, anti-Catholic" in his column for *The Catholic Advocate*, Newark archdiocesan newspaper. He said the organization would not be allowed "to use any archdiocesan or parish property, facility or assets."

Similar bans against Voice of the Faithful meetings under parish or diocesan auspices are in place in the dioceses of Camden, N.J.; Rockville Centre, N.Y.; and Bridgeport, Conn.

In his letter, Cardinal Law said he is in the process of learning more about Voice of the Faithful and its three stated goals: to support victims of abuse, "priests of integrity" and "structural change within the church."

"Given my present state of knowledge of the group as a national organization, I decided it would be inappropriate for new chapters to use church property until I had received further information about Voice of the Faithful," he wrote. "It was my intent that this policy would apply only to new chapters requesting use of parish property for their meetings."

The St. Michael chapter of Voice of the Faithful, or VOTF, began meeting at the parish in late spring, according to a parish employee.

John Vellante, a spokesman for the North Andover group, said in a statement that he was "extremely gratified by this action" and hoped it marked "the beginning of open and honest dialogue between the church and Voice of the Faithful."

"At the same time, however, we hope the cardinal will see fit to allow all VOTF affiliates to meet on



Lisa Kessler/CNS

Some 4,000 people attend Mass at the Voice of the Faithful conference in Boston July 20. Some archdioceses have recently banned the group from using any archdiocesan or parish property, facility or assets.

their respective church properties," he added.

Archbishop Myers, in his regular "Sincerely in the Lord" column in the Oct. 9 edition of the newspaper, said "the realities of daily life in the church of Newark clearly show how much Voice of the Faithful misunderstands the church."

Citing numerous responsibilities on both the parish and archdiocesan levels which are fulfilled by lay people, the archbishop added, "Lay involvement in the everyday affairs of the Archdiocese of Newark is a successful reality that does not need encouragement from outside; it thrives on its own, and we would not want it any other way."

But he said Voice of the Faithful also has offered itself "as an umbrella group for numerous causes that are divisive within the church and that encourage open disregard for our discipline and teaching."

"Married clergy, ordination of

women, abolition of the tradition of celibacy, altering church teaching on sexual morality, and defiance of the apostolic authority that has guided the church since its founding 2,000 years ago by Our Lord Jesus Christ, have all found a place in the ranks of Voice of the Faithful," Archbishop Myers said.

"The Archdiocese of Newark will not interfere with the right of the group Voice of the Faithful to assemble," he added. "However, the group is not permitted to use any archdiocesan or parish property, facility or assets."

In Camden, Bishop Nicholas A. DiMarzio outlined his concerns about Voice of the Faithful in a late September letter to a local Catholic who had met with him about starting a chapter in the diocese.

"The organization claims that it accepts the teaching authority of the church and takes no position on many other issues that divide

Catholics," Bishop DiMarzio said. "Yet, there are those in prominent leadership positions within the VOTF organization who are associated with groups which openly dissent from church teaching on a range of issues."

In his statement Bishop DiMarzio said. "As chief pastor and shepherd of the church of Camden, it is my duty to safeguard the truth of the faith and to ensure that it is brought forth faithfully and without confusion to the people of the diocese."

"For this reason," he said, "I cannot recognize Voice of the Faithful as a group supported by the Diocese of Camden. As such, I cannot permit the diocese or its parishes to promote the group and its activities or allow the group to use parish or diocesan facilities for its meetings."

Earlier, Bishops William F. Murphy of Rockville Centre and William E. Lori of Bridgeport announced similar bans on use of church property by Voice of the Faithful.

As bishop, "one of the things I must be concerned about is the unity of the church, and I must protect the church," said Bishop Murphy in an interview published Sept. 18 in his diocesan newspaper, *The Long Island Catholic*.

"I make no negative judgments about anybody in Voice of the Faithful," he added. "I presume that everybody involved in it is doing so with good intentions, and I presume that they're doing it with the best of motives."

But, he said, "I made a judgment" that this group which began in another diocese "should not be setting the agenda for the good people of the Diocese of Rockville Centre when I, as the bishop, the responsible shepherd, have set an agenda through the synodal process that allows everyone to be able to have their voices heard."

Bishop Lori announced a ban on Voice of the Faithful Aug. 13, saying the organization "appears to promote dialogue and cooperation, but ... in reality prosecutes a hidden agenda that is in conflict with the teachings of the Catholic faith."

"I believe Voice of the Faithful is using the current crisis in the church to advance an agenda which neither I, nor the vast majority of Catholics, can embrace," he said. "For this reason, I cannot sanction Voice of the Faithful groups meeting in parishes or other church property in the Diocese of Bridgeport."

Contributing to this story was Liz O'Connor in Rockville Centre.