

Stones Cry Out

Faithful of Southern Illinois

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." He said in reply, "I tell you, if they keep silent the stones will cry out!" Lk. 19: 39-40

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Accused by the Vatican of promoting radical feminist themes and not being vocal enough against the ordination of women, abortion, contraception and homosexual relationships, 900 sisters of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious debated at their annual meeting in August on how to respond to these accusations.

The sisters gathered in St. Louis, stunned, shocked and humiliated by the Vatican's reprimand of being told that their practices and beliefs were not Catholic enough. As prayer, contemplation and discussion filled the four-day agenda, the public learned about a leadership structure that, indeed, is very non-Catholic. We discovered a group of intelligent women governed by a structure of participation and collaboration, of inclusion rather than exclusion. We found an organization with a forum for communal discernment and decision making in which everyone's voice counts – a leadership model rarely experienced in the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church.

As their story unfolded in the news, we learned that the sisters did not move away from the directive of Vatican Council II that called those in religious life to reflect and rethink their mission and goals. The sisters courageously accepted the Vatican challenge, realizing more than ever before that, as the Scriptures tell us, we grow in wisdom, in age and in grace. We change and we become more. Our decision making and our choices become significant; the selection of our actions determines the shape and development of the world.

Empowered by genuine and sincere evaluation and moved by the spirituality of their hearts, the sisters discovered the essence of what it means to become the People of God. Their lives embody what it means to put faith into action, for they are the pro-lifers in our communities, caring for the sick and lonely, feeding the hungry, managing hospitals, maintaining schools, lobbying for just wages and health care and providing legal assistance to the marginalized. They are neighbor to everyone.

At the conclusion of their meeting, Sr. Pat Farrell, LCWR's president, stated that the sisters would enter into a "conversation with church leaders – a conversation conducted in deep prayer, mutual respect, careful listening and open dialogue." Inspired by the LCWR's courageous and communal style of leadership, we are confident that the sisters will, once again, deliberate and determine how their actions in the future will continue to parallel the actions of Jesus.

STANDING WITH THE SISTERS IN ST. LOUIS



Sr. Pat Farrell, LCWR President, addressing the St. Louis supporters

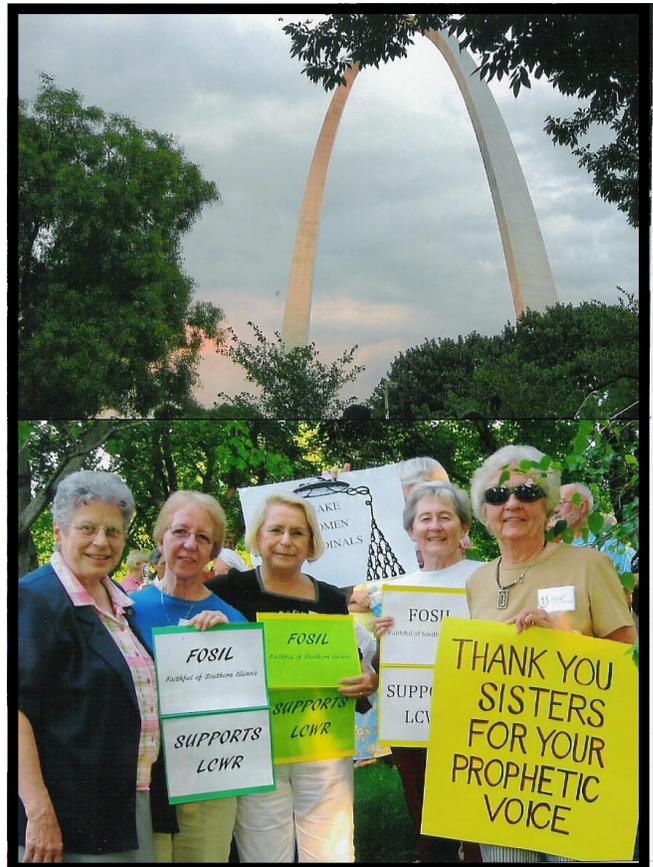
On April 18, 2012, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) launched a crackdown on the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), an organization formed in 1956 with the Vatican's approval and representing some 80% of the 57,000 women religious in the United States. The LCWR was harshly criticized by the Vatican for radical feminist conference themes, for failing to speak out against same-sex marriage and abortion and for focusing too much on social issues like poverty. The organization was placed under the oversight of three U.S. bishops and ordered to revise its statutes, programs, speakers, liturgical practices and its justice affiliations.

LCWR officials replied, saying "the Vatican critique was based on unsubstantiated accusations that arose from a flawed process and had caused scandal and pain throughout the church." The LCWR leadership then went to Rome seeking clarification of the mandate, but the meeting was characterized as "a dialogue of the deaf" by Cardinal Levada, the outgoing prefect of the CDF.

The LCWR leadership consulted with its regional groups before gathering in St. Louis for its annual national assembly, August 7 – 11. At the conclusion of the four-day assembly and with the approval of the 900 sisters at the assembly, Sr. Pat Farrell, LCWR President, announced that the group will continue discussions with church officials regarding the Vatican mandate, but will reconsider "if it is forced to compromise the integrity of its mission." "We live in hope," said Sr. Pat. "They can crush a few flowers but they can't hold back the springtime."

This year the LCWR annual assembly was held in St. Louis and presented a wonderful opportunity for FOSIL members to welcome the sisters to St. Louis at Lambert International Airport and to participate in several prayer vigils throughout the area. FOSIL wishing to publicly thank the sisters for their prophetic voice in building up the kingdom of God, their collaborative dialogue, generous service, and empowering love for all, held a prayer service at the Cathedral on May 19, before the scheduled Eucharist at 4:00 pm.

Supporting the sisters in St. Louis are FOSIL members, Sr. Virginia Kampwerth, PHJC, Judy Huelsmann, Marabeth Petermeyer, Mary Molitor and Marg Beckmann





BISHOP REMOVES PASTOR FOR CHANGING WORDS IN EUCHARIST

Fr. Bill Rowe has ministered as a priest of the Belleville Diocese for 47 years as well as serving four years as an Air Force chaplain and 20 years as chaplain in the Air Force Reserves, retiring as a lieutenant colonel. Throughout his priestly ministry, Fr. Bill has made an effort to make the prayers at the Eucharist more meaningful and understandable for his parishioners by altering and clarifying some words in order to fit a Scripture theme or a homily message.

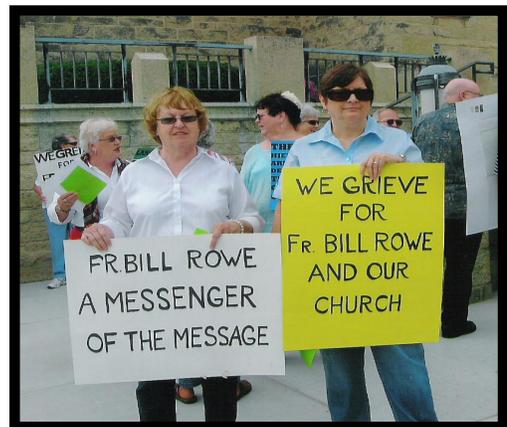
After the implementation of the Third Edition of the Roman Missal in Nov., 2011, Edward T. Braxton, Bishop of Belleville, demanded that Fr. Bill follow the rubrics of the Eucharist exactly as printed in the Missal. Fr. Bill, in good conscience, could not comply and eventually he and the bishop reached an impasse. In June, 2012, Bishop Braxton not only suspended Fr. Bill as pastor of St. Mary's Parish in Mt. Carmel, IL, where he has served the last 18 years, but imposed one of the Catholic Church's harshest penalties – the withdrawal of his priestly faculties. Today, Fr. Bill cannot function as a priest in any capacity.

Fr. Bill's compassionate service, kindness and commitment to the Gospel are beloved by both clergy and laity. Acknowledging this humble man, members of FOSIL held a prayer service at the Cathedral and the Southern Illinois Association of Priests signed and issued a press release, stating that the bishop's actions were "irrationally disproportionate to the supposed crime." We invite you to go the website: www.iamfrowe.org to learn more about Fr. Bill and express your support.

Fr. Bill appealed Braxton's decision to the Vatican; the appeal decided in favor of Fr. Bill on one of three counts, saying that Braxton did not follow proper procedure. It ruled that Fr. Bill can preside at the Eucharist in other dioceses with the local bishop's approval and when he acknowledges his error and formally promises to dispose himself to adhere to the rights and rubrics of the sacred liturgy set down by lawful ecclesiastical authorities." Fr. Bill stated he could not do this and that he would not appeal the rulings against him. He is currently ministering as a lay volunteer in a neighboring parish.

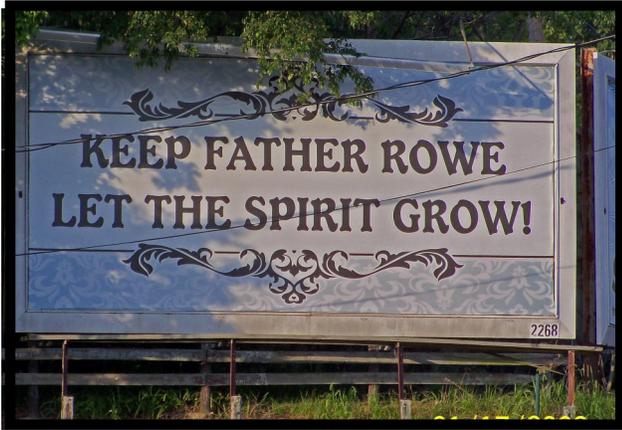


Supporters of Fr. Bill at prayer service outside Belleville Cathedral



FOSIL supporters, Theresia Herzing and Rita Cox

FOSIL was outraged when we learned that the Vatican referred to 1 Corinthians as a reason for revoking Fr. Bill Rowe's priestly faculties. Instead of identifying with the message of the author, the Vatican used it as a weapon of control against him. So we asked Scripture Scholar, Roger Karban, to write a brief exegesis of this Scripture passage.



Billboard at Centerville Ave. and South Belt Line, Belleville

One of the most incongruous reasons for Bill Rowe's removal from active ministry comes from the Vatican's reference to 1 Corinthians. The decree's quote of John Paul's encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharista* gives the impression that, by changing the Eucharistic words in order to make them more meaningful for his community, Bill is somehow at odds with the church's earliest understanding of the Lord's Supper. Nothing could be further from the mind of Paul or the earliest Christian communities.

During the first Christian centuries, there were no set words that had to be said by the Eucharist presider. Liturgists presume that the prayers created and used during those formative years revolved around the community's obligation to remember what Jesus did on the night before he died, with a constant emphasis on his dying and rising. We see that especially in 1 Corinthians 11, where Paul reminds his readers what Jesus said and did during his last meal with his followers. The problem triggering Paul's reference to the Eucharist both here and in chapter 10 had nothing to do with the words used during the actual celebration. In each instance, it revolved around the unity of those celebrating the Eucharistic meal.

In chapter 10, the problem springs from divisions in the community caused by the tensions created by Christians with strong consciences and those with weak consciences. As one way to overcome these divisions, Paul forces

his readers to reflect on the unifying aspects of the Lord's Supper in which they all participate. "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf." (Talking about disobeying 1 Cor. . . how many of our parishes serve individual hosts, not one loaf?)

Paul refers to a parallel situation in the next chapter. Here the division is between the rich and the poor. Because the earliest celebrations of the Eucharist occurred in the context of pot-luck meals, Paul must deal with the problem of who brings what. Obviously, the well-to-do can bring more; slaves and the poor, practically nothing. It appears the wealthy begin the meal long before the poor arrive, leaving nothing for the latter to eat or drink. After reminding the Corinthians that whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the "death" of the Lord, Paul accuses some of "unworthiness" in receiving the Eucharist. But Paul's definition of unworthiness had nothing to do with any of the sins we, from an early age, had to confess before we could go to communion. The sin here revolves around "not discerning the body." In this context, these words can only mean not recognizing that the community with whom we celebrate the Lord's Supper is actually the Body of Christ. Those who refuse to build and recognize that Body have no business participating in the Lord's Supper.

Bill, like myself, was taught how to "say Mass" by Fr. P. Francis Murphy, the late auxiliary bishop of Baltimore. Frank began his instruction back in the Fall of 1964, by informing us that our main task in presiding at the Eucharist wasn't just to say the right words or employ the appropriate gestures, but to . . . "form the community participating in that celebration into the Body of Christ." As we know from our Christian Scriptures, Paul and Jesus' earliest followers couldn't have agreed more. And I presume that, in altering the "given text", creating such unity was always Bill's intention.

A Day With Michael Morwood

by Les Himstedt, member of FOSIL's Steering Committee

This is being written two days before our 2012 presidential election. It's the last weekend before Election Day, the day that finally brings to an end the most prolific, negative electioneering most of us can remember. No, I'm not referring to the negative advertisements sponsored by wealthy, faceless activists; I'm referring to American Catholic bishops across the country who have been issuing last-minute voting directives to their lay members. These bishops have become real negative partisans, some even threatening eternal damnation for those who do not vote as they suggest.

Every diocesan bishop in Illinois has reminded parish priests of their obligation to preach against any candidate who supports "intrinsically evil" moral issues, primarily sins that apparently only the laity practice. As Catholics know only too well, clergy sexual abuse of children does not make the grade of "intrinsically evil".

Michael Morwood's presentation on October 13, sponsored by FOSIL, did not directly reference the election, but his beginning remarks provided a portrait of a Catholic institution that would operate this way. Michael used references to both the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the 2000 encyclical *Dominus Jesus* to explain how the Church, i.e., the hierarchy, determines what Catholic tradition and Catholic Scriptures really say. Only the hierarchy can explain, without error, the true messages found in our Scriptures!! Catholics, then, must totally agree with the hierarchy or they're not considered to be Catholic.

Just a small aside: Even though Catholic bishops are busy electioneering during civil elections, our Church does not allow its members to elect their own leadership.

Having presented the status quo of today's church administrators, Michael quickly moved to his real message. He showed us how the Jesus of John's gospel preaches a profound mystery that helps us find the divine presence within us and all around us. It's a mystery how this divine, creative, energizing presence that

we call God comes to expression in men and women in all places, in all society. It is a love that bonds all that exists.

John reminds us that the message of Jesus is to feel the pulse of the divine in ourselves and in all that surrounds us. Like Jesus, the heart of our mission and our ministry is to change the culture of the 21st century by addressing important issues, such as healthcare and immigration. The question – How are we doing? – can be painful.

The synoptic gospels speak not of an institutional church, but of "the way", i.e. how the disciples of Jesus followed the way in which Jesus sought to bring about the Kingdom of God; to make the beatitudes a reality in 1st century communities. Our challenge is to imitate that way.

Vatican Council II echoed this spirit of discovering a more positive and inclusive sense of church and a more ideal way in which Christians can envision the divine. Jesus was not intent on simply unlocking the gates of heaven; rather, John's gospel and subsequently, the Council Fathers, tried to show how the Kingdom of God really finds its fulfillment in us – the Christian "way". The true gospel and Council spirit then is not about life after death, not about winning a place in heaven but about manifesting God on earth.

On the 50th anniversary of Vatican Council II, Michael offered his own critique of how the hierarchy spends so much energy in translating the **words** of that Council but not its **spirit**.

If we are satisfied with the church of "no" which the Catholic hierarchy advertises today, we can find comfort in the assurance that we will surely be saved. But if we listen carefully to the



Michael Morwood

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true gospel message of the “way” and accept the spirit of Vatican II, we will seek opportunities to *hear* the prophets of today, such as Michael Morwood. My writing fails to translate the awesomeness of Michael’s message; it needs to be physically heard and experienced.

GUS AND ARLOU KOCH AWARD

Before their deaths, Gus and Arlou Koch were faithful FOSIL members, both being strong proponents of openness, justice, equality and inclusiveness in the Church and in society. In 2009, FOSIL established the Gus & Arlou Koch Award to keep their spirit alive and each year this award is given to an individual or organization who exemplifies the determination and values of Gus and Arlou.

This year, the recipient of the award is Rabbi Susan Talve, one of the first women to be ordained a Rabbi in the United States. Susan received her Doctor of Divinity degree in 2006 and is the founding Rabbi of Central Reform Congregation in St. Louis. She leads her congregation of more than 750 households in promoting justice and inclusivity by developing relationships with African-American, Muslim and LGBT communities. Her recent practice of hospitality included opening the doors to her building to allow two Roman Catholic women to be ordained there.



Rabbi Susan Talve

Past recipients were proponents of reform within the Roman Catholic Church; this year’s recipient reaches across religious dogmas and traditions to welcome one another, seeking to work together to heal our world.

FOSIL thanks all of you for your continuous support,

and wishes you a blessed new year

in which you experience the spirit of Jesus

who set us free so that we would live in peace.



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