



National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management

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For Immediate Use

PRESS RELEASE

LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE SUPPORTS CT BISHOPS IN OPPOSITION TO PROPOSED LEGISLATION

WASHINGTON, DC, MARCH 10, 2009: **The following is the prepared statement of the Leadership Roundtable executive director, Kerry Robinson, for the State of Connecticut Judiciary Committee 03-10-09:**

- i. My name is Kerry Robinson. I am the executive director of the National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management, a national network of 200 senior level executives from the corporate, financial, philanthropic, judicial, educational and charitable sectors as well as from the Catholic Church itself. We are a nonprofit organization whose mission is to serve the Church by strengthening the management of human and financial resources in the Church. Our headquarters is in Washington, D.C. but my principle domicile is in New Haven, CT and I am an actively engaged Catholic in the Archdiocese of Hartford.
- ii. State of Connecticut Raised Bill 1098 seeks to improve financial controls, accounting and reporting practices, and other administrative responsibilities of Catholic parish corporations. Surely we agree on the values of such goals.
- iii. I am an equally ardent supporter of the Church and impeccable financial management. I appear before you today to oppose Bill 1098. The goals of sound governance, financial transparency, accountability, exemplary stewardship and effective lay participation, can all be achieved without violating either the United States Constitution or the Church's own Canon Law – to which the Church is bound not only in the State of Connecticut, or in the United States, but in terms of the Church worldwide.

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- iv. The Leadership Roundtable has supported and worked with dioceses in Connecticut and throughout the country that have committed to implementing and adhering to standards of ethics and accountability and best practices in their temporal affairs. Dioceses and parishes across the country have at their disposal contemporary policies and procedures which are in full compliance with both civil and canon law statutory requirements. In the three and a half years that the Leadership Roundtable has been in existence, we have witnessed renewed and ongoing commitment to managerial excellence. Following recent high profile cases of financial mismanagement or embezzlement, Catholic parishes and dioceses within Connecticut (and indeed across the country) have established improved financial controls and increased financial audits and reporting.
- v. There are concrete examples of diocesan and parish measures taken that demonstrate commitment to the very goals Bill 1098 advocates, within the existing structure of the Catholic Church, which violate neither the Constitution nor Canon Law. Three examples:
1. In the Diocese of Bridgeport:
 - Active Finance Councils in all parishes responsible for oversight of the parish's preparation of annual budgets, preparation and publication to parishioners of quarterly and annual financial reports.
 - Standard, not-for-profit, parish financial statements for quarterly and annual financial reporting for all parishes.
 - Web-hosted financial accounting and reporting system to assist local parish staff and for monitoring parish financial activity.
 - Comprehensive, online financial and administration manual for parish policies, procedures and controls, including 'from the basket to the bank' control of offertories.
 - Annual reviews by external auditing firms of parish compliance with financial policies, procedures and controls covering parishes with over 85% of parish revenues and expenses and the remaining parishes reviewed annually by Diocesan finance staff.
 - Whistle-blowing process established to allow parishioners to obtain answers to concerns about parish financial matters that they were unable to resolve at their parish.¹
 2. An archdiocese has produced consolidated financial reports for all diocesan entities as part of a commitment to financial transparency, publishing all financials on their website and ensuring that it is freely and easily read and comprehended by all.²

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3. A diocese committed each of their 72 parishes to implement 55 Standards for Excellence, detailed performance benchmarks covering governance, financial, legal, fundraising, reporting and other aspects of administration.³

In each of these cases, Church authorities engaged professional assistance to ensure best practices were being followed and the expertise of qualified auditors, financial planners, lawyers and management specialists directed new policies, procedures, and accountability mechanisms.

- vi. In closing, the Leadership Roundtable strongly advocates for exemplary financial stewardship, for practices and systems that allow for financial transparency and accountability within our Catholic institutions, and for the particular expertise and competencies of laity to be utilized in service to these goals. I challenge the assertion by supporters of this proposal that the Church will not implement and adhere to high standards of financial transparency and accountability within the existing canonical and constitutional structures. We exist to serve the Church in exactly that pursuit and attest to the progress being made in all of these areas. We oppose this legislation. We support the Church. And we remain committed to serving the Church by strengthening temporal affairs and demonstrating to the faithful and the public at large that transparency and accountability are indeed being addressed seriously and effectively in the Church.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

On the Leadership Roundtable's *Standards for Excellence*

<http://www.nlrcm.org/standards>. Contact: Michael Brough 908 400 3435

¹ The Diocese of Bridgeport, CT. Parish Finance Program

(<http://www.bridgeportdiocese.com/finances.shtml>.) Contact: Mr Norm Walker, CFO.

² The Archdiocese of Boston, MA. Financial Transparency Project

(<http://www.rcab.org/Finance/HomePage0605.html>.) Contact: James McDonough, Chancellor

³ The Diocese of Gary, IN. Implementation of Standards for Excellence: An Ethics and Accountability Code for Catholic Parishes. Contact: Bishop Dale Melczek.

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