

## Sunshine Not Far Away

# The Windshield Of Life's Tasks

Life is like an automobile windshield — a wide expanse of glass to see forward and a little rear-view mirror to keep an eye on what's behind you. That's the description given by communications expert Marshal McLuhan.

This week when I received Bishop Sheen's notice changing me from Courier editor to Avon pastor I began to see how apt was McLuhan's description — except my rear-view mirror tends these days to be a bit larger perhaps than standard size.

I'm looking forward to the chance to be a full-time priest again — after close to 14 years of being a newsboy!

This is a stirring time to begin a pastorate — when all the ideals of the Vatican Council are being translated into reality. But like a stammering schoolboy studying his Cicero, the translation can be botched or beautiful according to the amount of homework you do and the amount of help you get from an experienced teacher.

I think the people in the pews are often much better translators than the clergy when it comes to putting ideals of faith into daily practice so I certainly expect to do far more listening to the people than talking to them.

But on my way out to Avon next Wednesday, I'll have an eye on my rear-view mirror to look back on 14 years at the Courier — and that's twice the traditional Scripture seven of totality.

And that 14 years, like a cluttered closet, is a bin of many memories.

These past 14 years have been momentous in Church history.

In this time, we have had three Popes—Pius XII, John XXIII and Paul VI. We have had the Vatican Council which wrenched the Church from a largely ecclesiastical anachronism to a dynamic contemporary factor in modern life.

During these 14 years, our Diocese has grown in its faith and strength under the guidance of Bishop Kearney, Bishop Casey and now under world-famous Bishop Sheen.

Perhaps a remark of Bishop Kearney's illustrates the atmosphere in which I have been able to work as editor. Soon after Pope John announced in 1959 his intention of holding the Vatican Council, I expressed my thoughts on what some of the Council's topics might be — Mass in the language of the people, possible new consideration of the mixed-marriage and birth control questions, relaxed relationships with Christians of other denominations.

The phone soon began to jangle with angry calls of protest — the Courier was raising questions which some people thought should be left as forever answered.

I asked Bishop Kearney what he wanted me to do about it.

He said, "Oh, it's these people who can't get used to new ideas. Don't let them bother you!"

Many writers and editors of the much-vaunted daily press of the nation wish they had a carte-blanche freedom like that!

There are also a host of friendships forged over these past 14 years — with people of different faith and no faith but all with a unifying hope that somehow life need not always be tragic, that together we can see, no matter how dark the cloud, there's sunshine not far away.

I can't deny that I've enjoyed the editor's job. It's been fun as well as demanding — an education unique in its way which teaches lessons just as emphatically as any classroom.

But like Scripture says, there's a time for everything — a time to plant, a time to harvest; a time to gather, a time to scatter. I've had my time at the Courier, now it's time for a different task.

I hope at all times, God gives all of us His peace and the strength and wisdom to do our various tasks as He wants us to do them.

Father Henry A. Atwell

# Pews Say No

The pews said no to the pulpit in Catholic churches of New York State this week.

The resounding defeat of the proposed state constitution indicates Catholic lay people swelled the no-vote despite official Church endorsement of the charter.

This is one more indication that the Church's hierarchy can no longer decide what its constituents are to think.

This is not to say Catholic lay people are rebels. They just have decided to think for themselves.

The school-aid issue is not, however, settled forever.

Education, as it has been, will continue to be a major topic of concern for Americans and we will probably never really settle the question what's best for all youngsters. But the resolution of the question should be sought not in acrimony but in a continued open-minded search.

# The Great Debate

What is being called "the Great Debate" will take place at Nazareth College, Wednesday, Nov. 15, at 8 p.m.

Father Paul J. Cuddy and Father Henry Atwell will discuss "Change in the Church — Two Perspectives."

The program, open to the public, will air differing opinions as to whether the tempo of change should be accelerated or slowed and in what areas is change possible and where it is not.

# Mother of Seven Asks Priest About 'The Pill'

Are some Catholic priests permitting birth control, and if so how do they and the couples they counsel — reconcile their position with recent Vatican pronouncements on the subject?

This was the question addressed recently to a priest of the Paterson Diocese by a pregnant mother of seven children, aged 12 to 1½.

In a fairly precarious financial position, with a husband whose work is seasonal, an inadequate house, and nerves and dignity frayed, she called attention to reports that some priests, including the man she was writing to, have started to grant permission to use "The Pill."

The Beacon, Paterson diocesan newspaper, printed her letter and the priest's reply as follows:

Dear Father:

I am writing to you because your name came up in one of those inevitable conversations women have because so many of us have such huge families.

I have seven children, my gossip cohort has six or seven, and the conversation naturally came around to that (ouch!) subject of birth control. I'm afraid I'm about to put you on the carpet, so please forgive me.

My friend, also striving hard to obey the church laws, marveled at the fact that a good friend of hers with only three toddlers had supposedly received permission from you to take the birth control pills. Her situation was difficult. Tension between herself and husband, nerves, etc.

The story goes that she originally received permission to use the pills temporarily to adjust a seasonal cycle. After a few months she reported it didn't work, and you reportedly administered your blessing on her continued use of them.

I guess, by comparison with the "average" household, mine reveals in squalor. I have the seven children, aged 12 to 1½ and am once again pregnant, mainly because my cycle, which

has always been regular is now thoroughly irregular. I've never bothered to ask before because I can't see how a priest can grant what the Holy Father does not.

I was also told by another mother (or six) that her friend received similar permission in the confessional in her parish.

Now, if anyone can argue about having a "difficult situation," I can. However, I will preface my tale with the statement that I am not solely seeking permission from you to use the pills or whatever, because I frankly can't understand where or how you would have the authority to grant it. However, I am just plain confused, and I guess I'm at the point now of "nothing ventured, nothing gained."

However, again, maybe there is something I (and a million lay Catholics) don't know. Maybe in some unfathomable fashion, power was granted to priests to grant dispensations. So, here is my tale.

Now... we have a small five-room house, with no basement, no porch, no garage, no "rec" room, no nothing. The three little ones just mill round and round, ransacking, chattering, crying, fighting, sniffling, bleeding, destroying, sniffling, experimenting, etc., all day long, until my brain cells become

atrophied and I say "that's nice, sweetie," instead of "hello" when the phone rings.

My furniture (what's left of it) is wrecked. Stuffing coming out of couches, broken beds, supported on paint cans and two encyclopedia volumes. Well, that's the general picture. I won't go into the more squalid details.

My husband gets laid off periodically. Some months ago I had the good fortune to obtain part-time work, three or four nights a week, usually until 2 or 3 a.m. Then I grope around the house all day long wondering, feebly, where-or-when I went wrong...

Now, I don't mind the criticism of my friends and relatives every time I get pregnant, because they have a right to criticize. They dig into their jeans when hubby is laid off, because they can't stand the thought of these little ones going hungry. (Frankly, neither can I.) And are they hungry. Continuously.

Is it right, Father, for us not only to be unable to hold up our heads, but to impose our troubles on friends and neighbors because we make a moral decision to live a certain way and not violate church rules?

Now we must maintain outwardly as much dignity as everyone else manifests in this

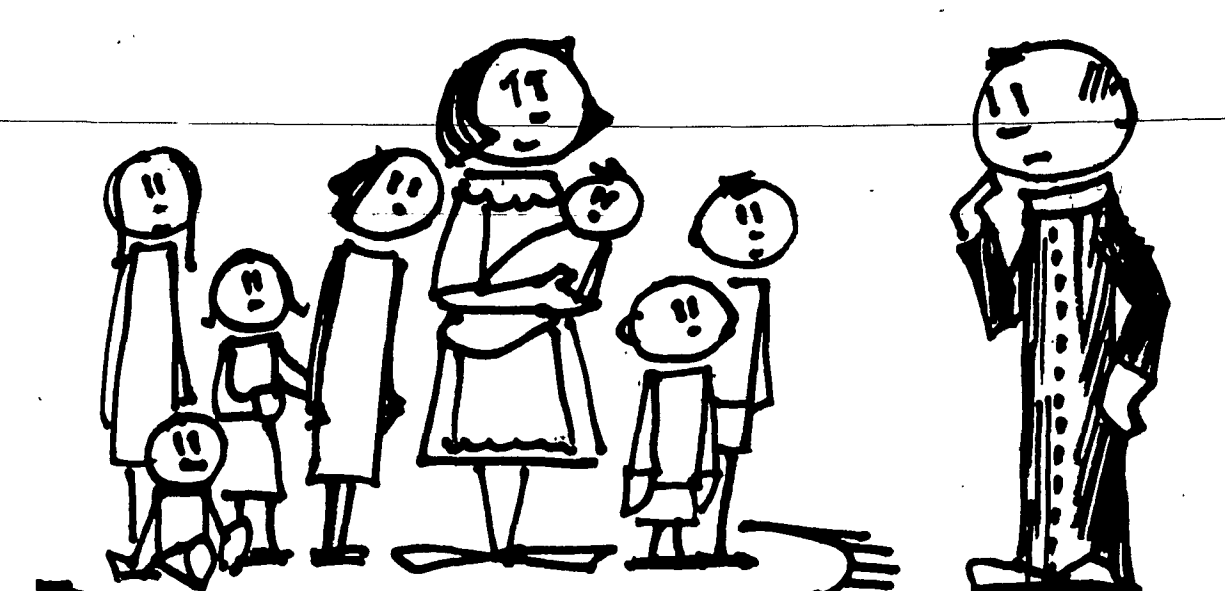
ridiculous metropolitan maze where each kid has a "room" of his own (or shares it with one other sibling) in a \$23,000 home. I must be able to converse intelligently with mayors, councilmen, school principals, lawyers and such who earn like \$20,000 or so per year and have two or three pampered children.

Somewhat I think I manage to look as normal as other women... but God forbid anyone should walk into my home. God forbid! The mess, madness and litter (which I cannot control) is beyond the comprehension of the more or less split-level mentality (and frankly beyond mine).

Where do I turn? I have about 15 more years of child-bearing ahead of me. I have tried the pills twice for four-month periods to correct my cycle, but it didn't work.

Now, what am I seeking from you? Maybe an answer that begins, "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus."

Yes, I would like your permission to practice birth control, if it is within your power to grant it, or within your ability to secure this permission from somewhere higher up. If it is not, can you kindly explain how these people I keep hearing about receive such permission and how they and their confessor's go on being "good" Catholics, MRS. N.



# Veteran Lay Apostle Pens Open Letter to Priests

By CATHERINE DOHERTY

(Editor's Note: The following letter was written by Mrs. Catherine Doherty, a veteran of 37 years in the lay apostolate. During the Thirties, she founded Friendship House in Harlem. Later she founded the Madonna House Apostolate in Combermere, Ontario. This group now has 9 missions in Canada, the United States and the West Indies. Mrs. Doherty's open letter to priests is reprinted with the permission of "Restoration," in which it originally appeared.)

Dear Beloved Fathers in the Lord:

I never knew that a letter could literally be torn out of a human heart, but now I know it can! For I have written this letter to you a thousand times over. Each word, I repeat, torn out of my heart as if it were a piece of it!

Yet, even now, as I try to "write it out," I don't know if I will be able to, because I love you so much, each one of you separately, and the priesthood as a whole... love you, each one separately wherever you may be, whoever you are, in your humanity.

Perhaps it is because of this love that it is hard to write, yet I must try, because you are the fathers of my soul, our souls — the laity. We are the sheep and the lambs of your flock. And what shall we do if we do not hear the shepherd's voice? For you are our shepherds, as well as our fathers in the Lord.

Lately your voices have been muted. We do not hear them as clearly and as well as we need to. We need to indeed — because the world around us is full of confusion and fears. Our pastures seem to be burning up. We do not know the road to the new pastures. The signposts either have been blurred, or the Prince of Darkness has mixed them up. And we stand huddled together in an ever darkening twilight.

What is a Father?

We call you "FATHER." Who is a father... what is a father? A father is a man who has begotten children. He has a family he must look after. He must provide for them the necessities of their lives, shelter, food, clothing, education, medical care.

But he must do more. He must be "present" to his family. He must give them all his love, care, and attention. He is the head of a Community of Love, which he and his wife must form for their children, whom they must lead to God. He is the head of a household, while the same time a member of it.

It is by example that he preaches his loudest sermons, and teaches his greatest lessons. For it is in the school of example and love that children learn best.

A father is concerned, not only with his family, but with his neighbors, with all the needs of his area, and in fact, with the needs of the whole world according to his state of life.

So, a FATHER is a man who sublimates his own needs to the

needs of others, his family first, and all the rest of the world next. That is the image we, the laity, have of a father.

Spiritual Fatherhood

We call you FATHER, because you "begot" us in the mysterious of a tremendous love affair between you and God. Because you participate in the one Priesthood of Christ. You are, for the present at least, wedded to the Church, His Bride. Even should the law of celibacy be rescinded, you still will be wedded to the Church, and it still will have to take precedence over everything in your life.

We call you FATHER, and we are your "family," and we need you desperately. We need you where God has placed you, as He has placed a human father to wed a human mother and bring forth a particular group of children, to love and care for. It would be tragic, would it not, if an ordinary human father should decide he belonged in a foreign mission, or in the inner city, and should leave his family there?

It would be tragic, would it not, if a human father suddenly decided to leave his family, his loved ones, his obligations, to father an orphan family around the corner, or somewhere in the blighted rural areas of his country, forcing his real family to shift for themselves, lonely, confused, frightened, lost?

It would be tragic, would it not, if the ordinary human father suddenly announced to his wife and family that, unless his needs were fulfilled, he'd have to go in search of persons and things that would fulfill "his needs"; and this, immediately?

If many human fathers did that, the chaos, the anarchy, the tragedy that would befall a community, a country, the world, would be beyond the telling of it! Yet this is exactly what seems to be happening to my dearly beloved FATHERS in the Lord, across the North American continent... across the world.

Your voices have become muted, and your flock cannot hear too well, perhaps because you are thinking of foreign missions and of inner cities, because you want to escape, maybe, from the ordinariness of parish life or teaching life, or you are a little weary of the old familiar "household of faith" to which God has called you.

Maybe you want to move in on an orphan family far away, and thus leave orphaned the family God has given you. Maybe you want to go to some far away university to learn counselling and other disciplines, then come back to help your family better.

Perhaps, under the stress and strain of changing times you too, like any ordinary father of a normal family, suddenly feel YOUR NEEDS MUST COME AHEAD OF THOSE OF YOUR FAMILY — the burden of which you find too heavy!

If this be so, no wonder your voices are muted. For what can



CATHERINE DOHERTY

a flock do when the shepherd is confused, unsure of the road he must travel?

Why So Quickly?

The strangest thing is the force of immediacy that seems to have possessed you, dearly beloved Fathers in the Lord! What you want, you seem to want right now! I cannot help but ask why. Why this impatience? Why this need to change everything at once? Why this immediacy?

As I pray in the night for you, for the Church, for the people of God, I ask myself that question over and over again. Who is it that stirs you up so much? From where does this strange urgency come?

It cannot be from love, for love is patient, love is understanding, love is kind... so the Gospel says. So it must be from some other source. Foolish of me, is it not, to consider the Prince of Darkness, in our scientific century? But consider him I do.

For I walk in a night of faith, as so many of us lay people have to do these days. And faith can become utterly dark. I guess its darkness is like the darkness of the earth, into which the seed must fall. But in that darkness one can hear well, and I seem to hear, symbolically speaking, the barely audible, slithering movements of a serpent. I may be a fool, but I have to confess that I do. And, at such moments, I fear hold me tight.

Have you considered us, the laity, dearly beloved Fathers? Have you really looked at fathers and mothers across the land, across the world, and at your children — single, old, young, middle aged... at us, who are the humble, the little ones, we who are like grass, here today and gone tomorrow, and leaving no traces in the eyes of men? Have you considered us, looked at us, meditated on us?

A Long Long Time

Take contraception. For how many centuries have we submitted to this heavy, seemingly

harsh, law! Submitted obediently, carrying the heavy cross of this obedience through the paths of centuries. Have you thought of how many of us still obey this law, though, in our unbaked, crowded cities? Who still possess our souls in patience, and try, with the grace of God to wait for the Pope's words.

Have you considered the tragedies of the divorcees, the innocent parties, millions of whom have borne the brunt of the stigma that is attached to them, and who have not remarried. They obeyed the law of God as the Church explained it to them, though they might have been puzzled and tempted by the example of the Eastern Churches and the Protestant Churches, which permit remarriage under certain conditions!

But, these extraordinary cases aside, have you considered the life of the father of a family, who has so many personal needs that remain forever unfulfilled — the father of an ordinary little family, who is always present to it, who works (still in the sweat of his brow) factually, psychologically, to provide the necessities for it?

Have you considered the ordinary father who also perhaps, has dreams of vaster or greener fields open to him... or who desires to father "spiritually" orphan families far and near? These Christian fathers lay aside their personal dreams, desires, and needs. They place them in the hands of Love. They remain where they are, continuing to carry on with the monotonous, unsatisfying, and even painful duties of the moment and tasks of the day.

Your Family Needs You

How ordinary, how monotonous, how full of pain, and yet how joyous and loving is the ordinary, average, Christian family! True, thousands of problems, inward and outward, assail it. Yet somehow because of love, because of God, probbers work themselves out in time.

We, your flock, want to do likewise. We want you to "be with us." We want you to subject your needs to ours. We want to tell you that we need to be fed by you... for you alone can give us God, the Eucharist, the Bread and Wine of life. None of us can offer Mass. None of us can heal as Christ can, only through you, in the confessional, or in the Sacrament of healing, Extreme Unction.

We can be counsellors, psychologists, psychiatrists, to name another and even to you. We, the single ones of the laity, can go and father the orphan families around the corner or in distant lands. We can go into the inner and outer cities, into suburbs and the palaces of the rich, and preach the gospel with our life.

All this we can do if you are present among us to "preach the gospel to us first, and to show us by your example, your patience, your kindness, your understanding, what it is to be a Christian. Yes, we can do all this, but we cannot offer Mass, nor preach the Word of God as you can, nor dispense the Sac-

Thank you for your wonderful letter, so expressive of both your faith and your family situation, and in such good humor too. I shall try to answer your question.

First: I should point out that the church is in a time of change. Some people and priests can't wait for change, others hold back. So it is true, different priests may differ in their advice on using the pill, depending on their personal convictions and their understanding of a particular case. As a result, those who hear what "Father said" may not get the whole story. It is difficult to make a judgment in someone else's case, by hearsay.

Second: I agree with you—a priest cannot give someone permission to use the pill. Pope Paul's statement last year excluded that possibility. The priests I've spoken to lately agree. Most priests also seem to agree that there has never been an infallible declaration by the Church that birth control is wrong.

Third: It is possible that a person, like yourself, has tried to come to a conclusion on the subject of birth control, taking into account the words of the popes and the current theologians as recorded in our Catholic press. A study of the facts may leave a person like yourself in doubt. A person with a doubt, who in good faith has tried to resolve her doubtful conscience as best she can, but finds she is unable to resolve her doubt, is free to act according to her own decision. Most priests, I believe, will respect this decision.

Fourth: The decision, made in good faith, to use the pill, must be made in the full context of marriage; two people are involved, each having his and her own conscience; the decision must not be merely selfish; necessary too is a willingness to conform to the decision of Pope Paul when it is announced.

FATHER X.

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