

**"Deo
Gratias"**

People of
St. Thomas More Parish

THE DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER



PIKE STAINED GLASS STUDIOS

145 ST. PAUL STREET ROCHESTER, NEW YORK 14604

"Behold how good it is and how pleasant where brethren dwell as one"

Psalm 132

 **Chemung Canal
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The Selection of Priests Always of Special Concern

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Twenty-five years have now passed since Father McNamara wrote in 1943 and changes have been made not only at St. Bernard's but also in the whole seminary system.

St. Andrew's is no more. In 1965 it became a four year Seminary instead of the traditional six year Minor Seminary; in 1967 it became King's Preparatory School — a coeducational high school—a pioneering project of Rochester's new and dynamic Bishop Sheen — established upon an entirely new concept in religious vocational education.

"Its aim," the Bishop stated, "would not be vocation, but education—education of leaders, a 'spiritual elite'."

With the openness of its program, and its provision for healthy social relationship, decisions to continue studies for the priesthood should be firmer. And with a very fine faculty of priests, Sisters and lay teachers it should provide a well trained laity as well. The teacher-pupil ratio is the best in our high school level of education.

It is too early to predict the future of King's Preparatory. But the adjustment of the faculty to the new role in education has been phenomenal.

Becket Hall is also a newcomer to the seminary scene. In fact, it was the institution of this program that led to the changes in the Minor and Major Seminary programs, to prepare for and to adjust to the new training of the middle four years.

I was appointed by Bishops Kearney and Casey to inaugurate this program—unheard of in the Eastern United States but in operation for some years in the Midwest. In May of 1965 I proposed the change to the clergy of the Diocese in two conferences, one in Rochester and the second in Elmira. This change would divide our total seminary program into three divisions of four years each ("the 4-4-4 plan" as it is called) instead of the traditional two divisions (the 6-6 plan) which has been traced back to the days of St. Vincent de Paul in the XVI Century.

I told our priests in these conferences that every efficient human organization had to take inventory of itself from time to time; if it was to remain vital, it had to continually reassess its efficiency, its morale, and its shortcomings. The Seminary could be no exception to this rule for it is a human institution, established in its traditional



Priests of the Diocese, all graduates of St. Bernard's Seminary, concelebrate with Bishop Sheen, (left, center) in the Cathedral sanctuary in a centennial ceremony, Oct. 25.

structure long after Christ founded His Church and given no divine guarantee of permanency.

If I were to select a date for an official encouragement to re-examine our Seminary structure, I would chose September 23, 1950. That is the day that the late Pope Pius XII issued his Apostolic Exhortation "Menti Nostrae." Further incentive came from Pope John XXIII and, of course, the II Vatican Council which fostered the present renewal in the Church. We should not be surprised to find this renewal affecting an institution so vital to the Church as the seminaries.

The immediate occasion for the change in the seminaries of our diocese was a challenge given to us by the State Department of Education and the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools to "upgrade" our educational standards.

The approval of the State Department was a must if we wished to continue to grant degrees under her charter; the approval of the accrediting agency was necessary if we were to offer any accepted guarantee that we were providing a quality education.

And we accepted the challenge in the spirit of Bishop McQuaid who back in 1899 was asked his reaction to standards set by agencies independent of local teaching authority.

"We shall never have first class study in our American Semin-

aries," he said, "until the standard of the institution is raised high by competent authority. Whenever the State raises a high standard we must get up to it. Only up to it? We who are working for the Lord God — only up to it? No, above it; above their best standard without boast or brag."

And so Becket Hall began in September 1965, affiliated with St. John Fisher College, an accredited school conducted by the Basilian Fathers. In September 1967, thanks to the generosity of the good people of the Diocese, the House of Studies was opened on the campus to provide a residence hall and a house of spiritual formation. The first graduates from the program (21) entered St. Bernard's Seminary this past September.

But St. Bernard's has been in the process of change too. With the advent of Becket Hall into the program, it has become a four-year school of theology. Its enrollment has been reduced to 125 largely due to the loss of two years of Philosophy which are now part of the middle four years. Its ratio of students to faculty would be the envy of the most exclusive school in the world.

Bishop Sheen has taken an active interest in the program from the day he arrived in Rochester. He has selected outstanding teachers for full and part-time status, many of them from European schools. The curriculum offerings have been considerably increased and the re-

quired class hours lessened.

The ecumenical spirit fostered by Vatican II has led to an affiliation with Colgate Rochester Divinity School and Bexley Hall, an Episcopal Seminary recently transplanted from Kent, Ohio, to the campus of the Divinity School. The potential of this affiliation has only begun to be explored. St. Bernard's students are now taking elective courses at Colgate.

Supervised in-service training in various forms of apostolic service in all sections of Rochester is also a new feature of seminary training at St. Bernard's.

A great change has occurred, too, in the Seminary discipline. This, of course, has been the subject of much discussion by those of us who were trained in the old system where daily life was well regulated by bell and fixed schedules. Yet, I feel that that so-called "new freedom" directed to personal responsibility is in total agreement with the philosophy of Bishop McQuaid who wrote:

"Sufficient liberty to permit the eyes-server to jump the fence from time to time, will indicate to superiors those who are held in bounds just long enough to carry them through the Seminary and land them in the priesthood."

Our Seminary system on its three levels has seen many changes within a span of three years. On this basis I am sure it is safe to predict that there will be many more before the

end of the first decade of the second century of Diocesan history. What they will be only the good Lord knows. What they may be, we can hazard a guess.

We may very well see the closing of St. Bernard's—a decision which will be based on considerations largely financial. The buildings are venerable but old and the cost of renovation seems prohibitive and impractical. What will happen when this decision is reached? The Bishop will have to make a difficult decision and one which will surely meet with some opposition.

Among the possibilities as I see them are:

1. Firm up plans for affiliation with Colgate Rochester and Bexley Hall by building a new school of theology in a new location close to the Divinity School. We would maintain our own staff and conduct our own School of Theology and share facilities and faculties in the areas of common ecumenical interest.
2. The Bishops of the New York province consisting of eight dioceses could decide on one already existing Seminary in the Province as THE SEMINARY for candidates for the priesthood within the State. The advantages are many—full use of modern facilities, qualified teachers drawn from all dioceses represented, and operational costs supported by fees for each student paid by the dioceses represented (minimal in comparison to present costs of maintenance of several seminaries).
3. Our Bishop could assign students to many Seminaries throughout the world for the study of theology. The Diocese could eventually benefit by the variety of training reflected in its priesthood. The loss involved would be the common bond of loyalty to the one Alma Mater that has fostered a unity among us in our Diocese.

Throughout all the present change and the uncertain future there will ever remain the one constant in the training of priests: the mission of Christ's Church will always demand special care in their selection and training. The injunction of St. Paul to his beloved Timothy must guide a Bishop in his decision:

"Do not impose hands lightly on any man." Timothy, 5/22.

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