

Priests - Bishops' Need: Dialogue, More Dialogue

By GERARD E. SHERRY

Chicago — (NC) — "Priests must be neither foot-draggers, nor gun-slingers in their relations with bishops," Father Frank Bonnike, newly elected president of the National Federation of Priests Councils (NFPC) declared here.

Pastor of St. Mary's Church in DeKalb, Ill., Father Bonnike said "priests must do their homework, appreciate the pressures which bishops face today, and do everything to keep open channels of communication."

The road to reduced tensions between bishops and priests is "dialogue, dialogue, dialogue," he said. "We all have to rid ourselves of the stereotypes we have about one another," he added.

Father Bonnike, elected at the federation's recent convention in San Diego, Calif., discussed a wide range of issues facing today's priests during an interview at NFPC headquarters here.

Father Bonnike, 47, a native of Elgin, Ill., has had a lively career since his ordination in 1952. He has served as administrator and pastor of three parishes in the Rockford diocese as a school superintendent, and is currently a member of the diocesan urban task force. He helped found the Rockford priests senate in 1967 and served as its first president.

Citing the need for open lines of communication, Father Bonnike said: "The important thing is to create forums where everybody can be heard, and in true faith to look for the Holy Spirit wherever people are working for the reign of God."

He added: "It is important also that bishops establish a means of direct and early response to the decisions and resolutions of their priest councils, even if this decision is to send the resolution back to committee for further study. In this way priests know that their bishops listen seriously and are concerned."

The thrust of the Church will be to explore areas of shared responsibility. To deny shared responsibility is to deny the Holy Spirit who breathes where he will," he said.

"Co-responsibility is impossible, however, without shared information. One cannot be or feel responsible or act responsibly without information."

The NFPC leader said shared

responsibility does not mean shared authority. He quoted former President Truman who often said, "the buck stops here."

"The same is true in every city and state, and also in our nation," Father Bonnike noted. "There are also limits in the formulation of theological doctrine. Hence the bishop must be recognized and accepted as final authority in diocesan life."

The priest said that shared responsibility and co-responsibility were closely related to the frequent demand for more democracy in the Church.

"It would be difficult to believe," he said, "that votes could decide everything short of theology in the Church. Our democracy has its checks and balances and so should the Church. It is more important to look for consensus. I feel also

that in certain instances timocracy, rule by the qualified, is to be preferred to monarchy and democracy."

Father Bonnike said he saw no let-up in the discussion of celibacy. He said he personally favored optional celibacy "for all priests across the board and the return to the active ministry of those married priests who wish to do so."

"More importantly," he said, "the entire people of God will have to be consulted on the subject."

The NFPC leader said that since such a high percentage of people are under 25, "it is important that young people be given a strong voice in parish councils, priests' councils and as delegates to the NFPC annual meetings or any future National Pastoral Council."

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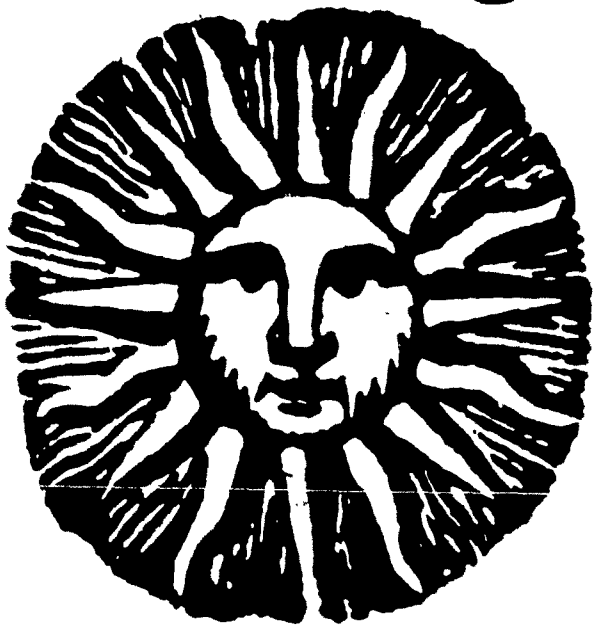
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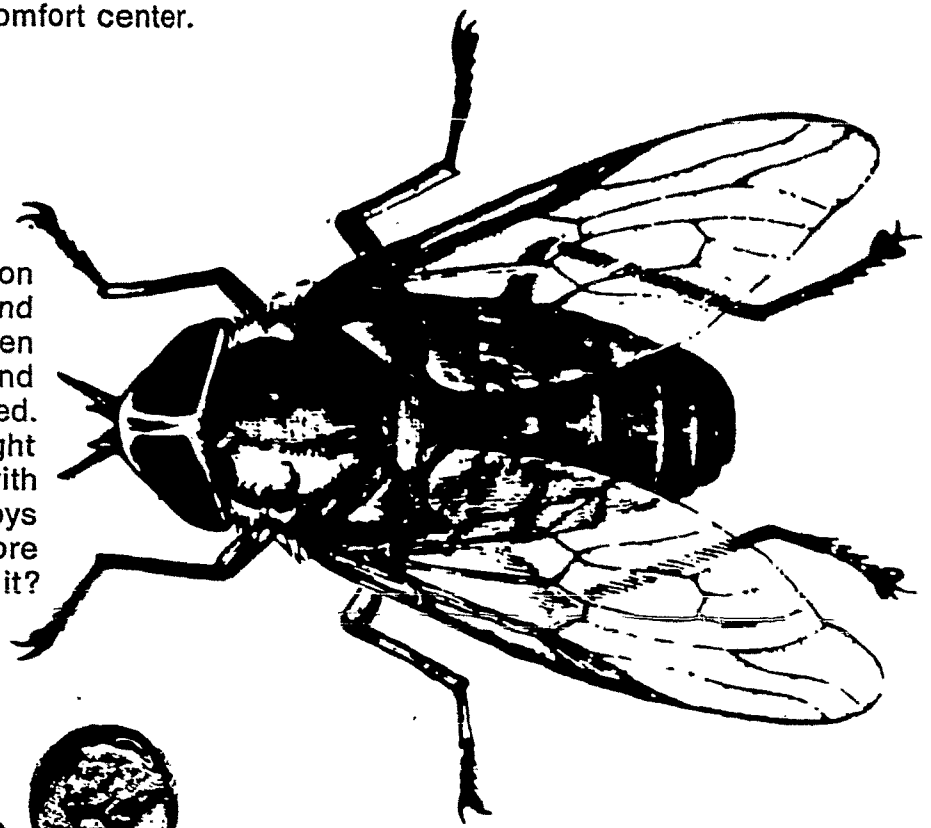
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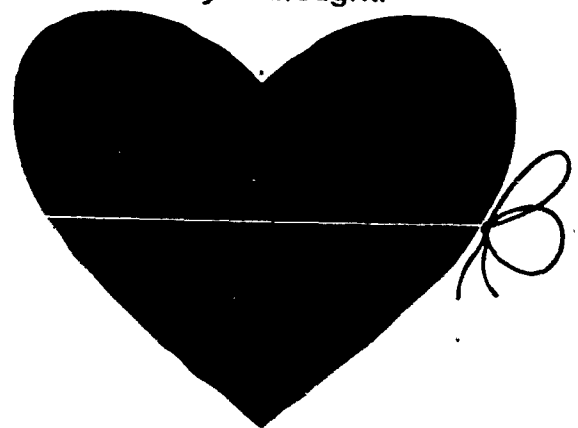


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