

# Neighborhood Coffee Hours Get Parish Council Going

By BARBARA MOYNEHAN

"I hope the people who are just forming parish councils don't hurry through it. It is a learning experience, and one big thing in our favor has been our formation group," Sister Katherine Heverin said of Holy Spirit parish.

"The group has worked together for so long that they have a real spirit, a unity and understanding for what a Parish Council is. Sister Katherine is Confraternity of Christian Doctrine co-ordinator at the Penfield parish.

Holy Spirit is only six years

old and was raised on the formula of lay participation and shared responsibility, so the ideas inherent in parish councils are not new there. People have been encouraged from the beginning to be involved. In 1967, a CCD was formed and was very well organized with about the same responsibilities for the liturgy as Parish Councils will have, but the people were appointed by the pastor.

"The thrust this time is a little different," Sister Katherine said, "it is from the people themselves."

Father Frederick W. Bush,

who has been pastor of Holy Spirit since June, explained that his predecessor, Father Joseph W. Dailey, started the ball rolling over a year ago by appointing four men and two women. From this small lay group came the strong organized base for the parish council.

After Bishop Joseph L. Hogan's request for parish councils, in the beginning of January, the formation committee held a general parish meeting to expand their committee. The 35 people that attended that meeting began a week of concentrated education on the philosophy and procedures of parish councils.

"I kind of promoted neighborhood coffee hours, Father Bush explained, "since once when we were attempting parish renewal we said Mass in people's homes and talked with families that way." So the 35 people who attended the general meeting became hosts and hostesses to their Catholic neighbors to introduce them to the concept of parish councils.

"My thinking behind taking it to the houses was, people who may not speak out at parish meetings may speak out among friends," Father Bush continued.

He agreed with Sister Katherine's comment: "I go to the coffee hours, but hardly say a word and questions aren't directed to me. I see this as a healthy thing."

## 'One Parish'

# 'Neighborhood Communion'

By CATHOLIC PRESS FEATURES

In more than one parish of the Lansing Diocese, "neighborhood communions" have been introduced as a possible cure for sagging interest and participation in parish life.

"A neighborhood communion is a group of ten families within a specific territorial unit," explained the Rev. Richard Currier, director of the Office of Pastoral Planning of the Diocese of Lansing.

The families meet once each week for discussion, prayer and socializing. One of the families is selected to lead the development of worship, and this is called the "correspondent family."

Another family is put in charge of "outreach" and social action, and this family is called the "co-correspondent family."

Still another family is a "co-ordinator family," coordinating religious instruction.

In a parish, Father Currier explained, neighborhood communions are organized according to the number of blocks it takes to include ten families, with those blocks in one cluster, preferably.

After an area-identification directory is worked out, Father Currier said, "moderators," or parish lay leaders, go through the area, meeting all the families. Accompanying the moderators is a parish priest.

"The families that are to be correspondent, co-correspondent and coordinator of religious education may be elected or designated, with each family eventually having a turn," the priest said.

Each "neighborhood communion" is encouraged to adopt its own religious symbol, a religious banner, a statue of Christ, a candle, etc.

"Any sign perceived by man's senses or imagination can be



Seated at left, Diane Schmitt and her husband, Cornelius (standing) tell neighbors philosophy of parish councils. Father Frederick Bush, pastor of Holy Spirit, is seated at left.

Two of those who hosted a coffee hour and presented the idea of the parish council to neighbors were Cornelius and Diane Schmitt of 26 Timberline Rd.

Mrs. Schmitt, a CCD teacher, said that she called people in the neighborhood that she knew were Catholic and attended Holy Spirit and asked if they

knew any others. Out of the 10 couples she invited, only two turned her down. Three people called and invited themselves.

"I am happy to be involved," Schmitt said, "and would like to play as large a role as possible. If the Church has only the same small nucleus working, they can't exist for very long."

A reader asks, "What can we do to involve the young people in our parish council?"

He reports that couples with school-age children and older persons are most active in the council, even though the young people make up the biggest bloc of parishioners in his city parish.

The reader's council admits parishioners to voting privileges only when they reach 21 years of age.

The reader says his council is considering dropping the age to 16 but that he and the others advocating this change in the council's constitution and by-laws are having a difficult time selling the concept — because of the classic chicken-or-the-egg problem.

Opponents of the change — to lower the voting age — claim that since the young people are not active in the parish they should not have votes in the council.

The reader rightly suspects that, though lowering the voting age is necessary to insure the young people's participation, the amendment to this effect will not work automatically to involve the youth.

The question is then, "What other than giving an equal voice to the young people should be done to get them active in our parish council?"

A plan of action to involve the young people might include the following:

- Gather the facts. If the young people are the biggest bloc of parishioners, what are the facts that support that truth? Go over the parish census and the government census figures for your community to get the specifics.

- Talk to young people themselves. Do they know what "parish council" means? If so, are they aware there is a council and what it does?

- Talk with the persons who work with young people. Talk with the priest who is moderator of young people's groups, the CCD teachers, parents, police and other community persons who work with young adults.

- Get the other council members in contact with the youth and the persons who work with them. (It is relatively easy to say "no" to the abstraction of teenagers having a vote; it is difficult to vote against John or Mary having the vote, however.) Invite some of the council members to your home for a discussion with young people, or ask several of them to accompany you to an event or meeting in which they will have the opportunity to talk with youngsters.

- Find out what the needs of the young people are. Many of these will be uncovered in your talks with young people and youth workers. Ask the young people directly — what are your needs? Also ask them indirectly by discussing with them those elements of change in their lives — What are you going to do after school? How do you stand with the draft? Do you have or need a summer job?

- Challenge the young people. Especially get them involved in responding to the needs of other youngsters. It is a rare parish that can compete with the mass media and commercial forms of entertainment for today's young people. Every parish, however, can challenge the generosity and good will of youth and give them something to do to be of service to others, and help them grow in Christ.


## SSJ Committee Joins OXFAM Unit

The Social Concerns Committee of the Sisters of St. Joseph has affiliated itself with the Rochester OXFAM group, Rochester Concern for East Bengal.

The affiliation is part of a move by Rochester Concern to link its fund raising efforts with religious groups. The purpose of the project is to provide housing, food and medicine for those displaced in the

recent conflict which created the state of Bangla Desh.

OXFAM is an English-born relief agency, started in the 1940s. Rochester Concern, headed by a U. of R. graduate student, Bharat Parekh, has worked in the area for the past several months. The group's headquarters are in the Interfaith Chapel on the U. of R. River Campus. Other groups affiliated with OXFAM include Teen League of Rochester.



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