

Our Parish COUNCIL

by Bernard Lyons

"What do you suggest that the parish council do to help fallen-away Catholics?" a reader in California recently asked.

The Church has always changed. These last few years, changes have come more rapidly. Further changes will come.

The process of change is a painful thing to many people. Especially if they feel that it is something that is being done to them, rather than something they are participating in.

When you talk with a non-practicing Catholic you will find that he, or she, may have a different story about why he is no longer active, but invariably the reason will match all the others — in that it was something outside of themselves that "forced" them to leave.

The parish council should be presented to the fallen-away Catholic as a clear indication that the Church is you, is us. He has a responsibility in his Baptism that matches his gift of the Kingdom of God.

If you can help the person to see the council as an expression of the "people of God," and the person's relationship to this, all the other answers to his arguments will come with grace and time.

If the parish council is functioning well and concerned about all the parishioners and the people of the community, they must also reach out to those who have "left" the Church or who have dropped their active participation in the worshipping community.

The first thing the parish council must do is to identify those persons and families who have "fallen away."

This can be done through the parish census on a periodic basis.

The identification can also be done on a continuing basis, if the council participates in a community wide welcoming

program. This program, interdenominational in nature, welcomes each new person or family to the community. Part of the welcome includes a census card to be turned over to the church of the person's choice.

These census cards can then be followed up by the parish.

With the identification, the parish council must listen to the "fallen-away." The reasons for their "dropping out" will help you to approach them with the message of Christ.

If there is a Legion of Mary in the parish, the council might work with them to develop visits and programs for non-practicing Catholics.

If there is not a Legion of

Mary in the parish, the Council might contact the diocesan chaplain to get help to organize a group in the parish.

In addition, the council can sponsor "open houses," "inquiry programs," and other opportunities for adult Christian education.

In all of this, however, the most important activity will be the Christian life of individual parishioners.

If individual parishioners, who are true friends of Christ, become friends of the "fallen away" Catholics, the parishioners will help them renew their friendships with Christ, through the Catholic community and its riches of the Mass and sacraments.

Pope Paul Endorses 'Respect Life' Program

Washington, D.C. (RNS) — Endorsing the week-long Respect for Life observance of the U.S. Catholic Church, Pope Paul invoked God's help upon all those "working on behalf of the defenseless and those threatened by views and practices alien to man's nature and contrary to God's will."

In a message sent by Cardinal Jean Villot, Vatican secretary of state, the Pope expressed "Prayerful solidarity" with American Catholics "in imploring Almighty God to grant increasing concern and reverence among all for human life."

The Pope's message was sent to Cardinal Terence Cooke of New York, who heads the U.S. bishop's committee that planned the observance.

Cardinal Cooke, in launching his own archdiocesan program, keyed on abortion and poverty as he spoke from the pulpit of St. Patrick's Cathedral.

He said that Americans "cannot allow respect for life to be removed from even the smallest segment of our population. We cannot — we must not — allow

any human being to stand outside the pale of our respect for life."

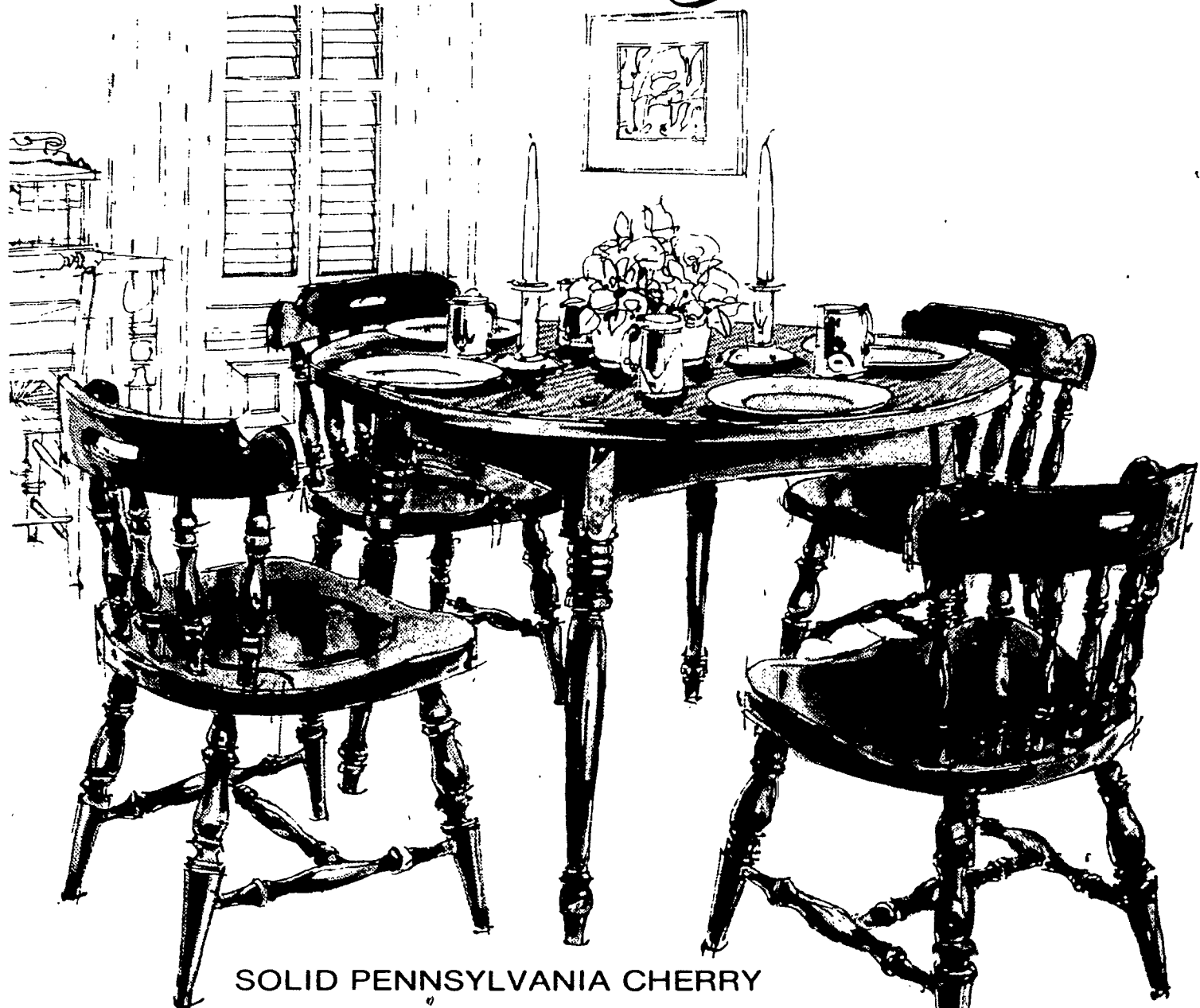
Observing that in New York State alone, "one-half million abortions have been performed since July 1970," the prelate said, "we must work to restore legal recognition to the inherent rights of the unborn and work as well to end the situations that lead some to see abortion as a final solution."

On the subject of poverty, he said Americans must realize that the nation's great wealth also determines a "greater obligation to assist others out of poverty which can degrade the human spirit."

CYO COACHES

The CYO Parish Basketball League has slated a coaches meeting Thursday, Oct. 19. Elementary school coaches will meet at 7 p.m. and high school coaches at 8:15 p.m., both at the CYO. A call has also gone out for volunteer coaches.

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