

# THE LAYMAN'S ROLE

## In Mapping Southeast School Project

By BARBARA MOYNEHAN

No one should call the recent decision to consolidate Blessed Sacrament and St. John the Evangelist junior high grades slapdash or dictatorial.

Eighteen lay people and religious met twice monthly for more than six months to discuss the educational and financial aspects of merging.

The proposed plan was then taken back to each parish at large for future discussion and final acceptance or rejection.

The General Committee of Consolidation was made up of long-standing members of parish school boards of financial committees, school principals and pastors who shared commitment to Catholic schools but often differed bluntly on particulars.

But, after six months of meetings, the lay people were satisfied with the plan arrived at and with the way the meetings were run.

Five laymen who took a most active, vocal part in the process agreed also that lay people should have had an active part in church decisions long ago.

Frank Abate, senior vice president of Johnston/Paviour/Sibley Inc., who has been involved in decision making at St. John's since its school board was established in 1967, sees laity involvement in Church decisions today as simply a matter of necessity.

He feels life has become so complex that it demands "a great deal of input."

"I don't feel lay people should run the Church, but I do feel their input should help those who will make the decisions," said the father of three St. John the Evangelist alumnae.

Paul Gartlan, general sales manager for the New York based, Non-Ferrous International Corp., and active member of Blessed Sacrament's parish council, feels people are tired of being dictated to by the diocese or Rome or the parish priest.

"Years ago," he continued, "if a priest said something, we would agree. Now we argue and question their opinion, decisions can no longer be made, informing the laity after it is settled."

He agreed with Abate's opinion

that the Church must use the skills of its laity, since they are the ones who have expertise in business and planning.

He realizes the transition from a hierarchical Church to a democratically run institution is hard on many in it.

"I think it is difficult for some priests and sisters who are used to making all the decisions," said Gartlan, "as well as for the laity, because they were taught unquestioning obedience."

During an interview in his home on Highland Parkway, Gartlan went as far as suggesting that Bishop Hogan should act as "president of a company and go unannounced to meetings of his sales managers (priests), and distribution managers (laity). He should come unannounced to see what the laity and religious are doing in their meetings," the businessman maintained.

Gartlan, like the others interviewed, is a strong supporter of Catholic schools. Four of his children went to Blessed Sacrament and his youngest is in the eighth grade there now.

Bill Biche, a project manager at Kodak, also of Blessed Sacrament, has two children who will be bused to St. John's next year as a result of the decision to consolidate.

Biche, who has been active in parish decision making for four years, refers to the time prior to Vatican II as "a time of comfortable religion." There were a lot of rules and not much questioning going on then. He called it "a quiet time."

"The transition we are now in," he feels, "is very responsive to changes in the way of life in the United States."

And he is happy with the transition. "It has been demonstrated time after time that we are listened to in all liturgical and administrative decisions we make," Biche said, qualifying his statement by adding, "at Blessed Sacrament anyway."

The former chairman of Blessed Sacrament's finance committee and present chairman of its parish council explained that from sitting on the consolidation committee he has learned that not all parishes are as far along as his is where lay involvement is concerned.

John Casey, assistant vice

president of Lincoln First Rochester Bank, is now vice president of St. John's school board and has been active on it for five years.

After one of the recent bi-monthly meetings, Casey explained that he thinks the Church offers, doesn't push, plans for consideration that are eventually used.

As an example, Casey continued, two or three years ago the diocesan office said consolidation was the only way to maintain Catholic schools and no one accepted that. "Here we are two years later and consolidation is what we have decided on. They left it up in the air and gradually their idea is being used."

Casey, who has two children at St. John's now, two to come and one graduated, feels very strongly about cooperation between lay and religious.

"I feel we should be working in close cooperation. We are all working for Christ, for the same end."

Jack Trabold, comptroller at Superba Cravats, was president of The St. Boniface school board when the consolidation meetings began, and thinks lay people's role in Church decisions is long overdue.

St. Boniface school was not included in any active way in this year's pilot project. They favor the merger concept and want it to expand to include them in 1974, but no concrete plans will be made until the pilot project is evaluated.

### Legion Sets Fr. McGrath

Father Aedan McGrath, a Columban missionary, imprisoned for 27 months by the Communist Chinese and one of the principal organizers of the Legion of Mary in China, will speak at Acies ceremonies, Sunday, April 1, at St. Joseph's Church, Penfield.

The rites include a Mass which will start at 4 p.m.

The Legion's annual reunion dinner will follow the ceremonies, in the church hall. For reservations to the dinner call John A. Smith, 594-8228.



BILL BICHE



PAUL GARTLAN

Trabold remembers the people's skepticism when The St. Boniface school board was set up seven years ago.

"At that time the people felt the pastor would still have his way, but," Trabold happily reported, "often decisions have been made against what the pastor wanted."

The five men interviewed agreed that lay people are now involved in just about every level of the Church, not just the parish level, and the primary contribution the lay can make, as Fran Abate put it, "is to relieve pastors of much of the headache work in finances and maintenance and thereby allow them to devote their time to what they do best."

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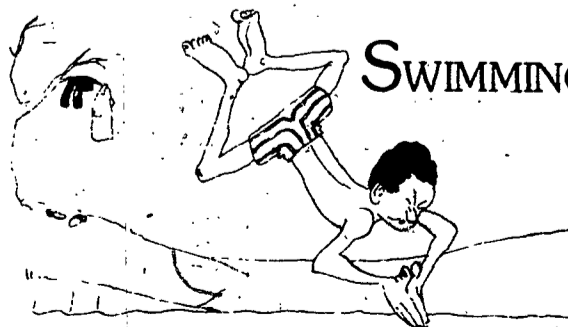
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