

COURIER-JOURNAL

Dialogue for **Renewal**

"Active sharing . . . is necessary for the Church." —BISHOP JOSEPH L. HOGAN

**Interview: Father John Mulligan**  
**St. John's Co-Pastor**

His career in the parishes of widely separated areas of the Rochester diocese enables Father John Mulligan to comment on the religious practices of the "new Church" with a broad store of experience.

Now the co-pastor of St. John the Evangelist church in Rochester, Father Mulligan has served in Ithaca, Corning and Auburn and is a representative on the priests' senate. He worked as a consultant on the analysis of the Time of Renewal survey.

The survey found that "Catholic consciousness" corresponded more directly to "tangible and religious observance" than to "attitudes and moral judgments" by the people interviewed.

Father Mulligan thinks the survey "makes explicit something a lot of us felt was implicit. It brings a vague feeling about people's reaction to the Church into sharper perspective."

There is a great deal of confusion today among its people about the Church's role and about the changes in the Church, claims Father Mulligan.

"For most of us, religious education ended at 8th grade or in high school. People thirty and above feel that religion is a very private thing. It's the old thing about 'never arguing politics or religion.'"

"The average pastor's attitude has been very defensive, an attitude that says, 'Don't upset the laity, you'll get them confused.' As a result, we haven't confused the laity because we haven't told them what's happening.

"But now, eight years after Vatican II, people are realizing that they are confused."



FATHER MULLIGAN

His pastoral experience leads Father Mulligan to question some results of the survey, which indicate that 15.6 per cent of the Catholics surveyed go to Mass more than once a week, and 52.5 per cent go weekly.

He feels that there has been a decline in Mass attendance and lays it to more than one factor.

"When Vatican II ended with its brilliant piece of thinking in the document on the liturgy, many of us felt that the liturgy would form a community among the people.

"About five years down the road, in 1970," says Father Mulligan, "we found this wasn't so. We had to build community before the liturgy. During the past 20 years the old organizations, the men's clubs and altar and rosary societies, that used to do this, fell apart.

"We have to come up with new ways to build community — but we haven't done it."

Father Mulligan had some other observations about Mass attendance and the Time of Renewal.

Sunday Mass is "the only time Catholics come together in a Christian community," said Father Mulligan, "but how many sermons have you heard that deal with the Sunday Mass obligation and give reasons for it beyond the simple commandment?"

"We did away with fish on Friday; why can't we consider doing away with obligatory Mass on Sunday? After all, Jesus never said, 'Go to Mass on Sunday.' People now ask, why do we have to go? and I don't think we've formulated an answer."

To shock Catholics at large into an awareness of the Time of Renewal, Father Mulligan suggested it might be a good idea to close down all organizations for six months or a year to give all the people a chance to rethink their commitment to the Church.

The idea, says Father Mulligan, comes from a Canadian bishop who shut down all activities in his diocese for an entire year, so that Catholics could find out which of their activities were worthwhile.

Does Father Mulligan feel, himself, that being a "good Catholic" is the same as being a "good Christian"?

"Many people are better Christians than I realize, I think. They may be awful nice as neighbors, and I don't know it, for example.

"But the radical teaching of Jesus is to love your enemies. That's where most of us fall down as Christians.

"That's the cutting edge of his teachings.

"If it comes down to liking those who like us, then it's easy."

Analysis

**The Survey and The Loss of Catholic Identity**

Rochester Catholics rely heavily on their own consciences in making moral decisions and are bothered by loneliness and a "loss of Catholic identity."

These are the most significant conclusions to be drawn from data released this week from a recent survey taken in the diocese as part of the Time of Renewal.

Interviewers for the survey found that only a minority of Catholics (23.7 per cent) expect "clear cut directives like the Church used to have" on moral questions.

Most Catholics would prefer "guidelines related to modern reality" (27.8 per cent) or "Church opinions . . . most Catholics will accept" (17.6 per cent) or "own conscience" (21.4 per cent).

This means that Catholics, for a long time thought to be quite subservient to authority figures, have declared their independence from rigid and dogmatic opinions.

Much of this can be traced to the Church's spirit of self-examination in the years since Vatican II.

There is however, a disturbing side to this new openness.

The survey found that those who indicated the most reliance on their own consciences had what the analysts called "low Catholic consciousness."

These are the people who feel that being a "good Christian" has little to do with being a "good Catholic." The survey also found that those with a high Catholic consciousness were highly involved in parish activities.

Interviewers for the survey also found what they called "loss of Catholic identity" while doing their research.

This dry phrase is the sociologists' way of saying many Catholics feel that their parishes are isolated from the Church at large, and that the Church itself is out of touch with society.

This alienation from the Church was more pronounced among Catholics under 29, the survey reported, but comments on the problem "came from all age groups."

**Regional Report:**

**Father John Hayes**  
**Auburn Region**

A recent survey of the pastors of the Cayuga County area indicates there is movement toward parish councils and steering committees, says Father John Hayes regional coordinator for Cayuga and Seneca Counties.

Each pastor has been able to provide names of qualified people to work with the region in the areas of liturgy, human development, and education. Resource people are beginning to surface.

Father Hayes does not have an assistant coordinator. Sister Ellen Ward heads education; Father Edward Palumbos of St. Alphonsus parish, liturgy, and Father Philip Billotte of Sacred Heart, human development.

Father Hayes pointed out it is hoped lay leadership will be developed to assume some of these chairs. Now he feels he is reaching the lay level as names are being suggested from parishes for various committees.

He has been calling on pastors, and found them very cordial and cooperative in discussing regionalism. They want to do what the Church wants done, he says, and



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recognize the value expressed in Vatican II, of the voice of the laity and are willing to listen.

Training teams are in the process of being formed by Sister Ellen Ward. These teams will assist parishes in forming parish councils.

Father Hayes has not been in touch directly with the laity to reflect how regionalism is being received; it will be necessary, he says, to wait until a regional conference meeting to assess this.

People are responding to a chance for greater participation, he said, citing as a good example the regional liturgy workshop held in Auburn during January. Progress has begun in the area of the human development committee; several parishes have human development committees functioning.

The area is in the process of drawing from parish councils membership for a regional conference. Representatives from each parish will go then for a county wide meeting that eventually will find representation on the pastoral council of the diocese.