

COURIER-JOURNAL
 Dialogue for **Renewal**
 "Active sharing . . . is necessary for the Church." — BISHOP JOSEPH L. HOGAN

INTERVIEW: Father John Hedges, Father William Graf

Father John Hedges and Father William Graf have the backgrounds to balance each other's comments on parish life.

Father Hedges is head of a large pastoral team at St. Charles Borromeo; Father Graf teaches pastoral theology and homiletics (preaching) at St. Bernard's Seminary.

Both have been campus chaplains.

Father Hedges was ordained in 1943 and has spent most of his time as a priest serving parishes, apart from five years as full-time chaplain at the University of Rochester. For 11 years, while an assistant at St. Mary's, he was part-time chaplain on the local campus. Father Graf was ordained in 1960 and, besides teaching, has spent time in parish work and six years as a chaplain at Ithaca College.

What impact have parish councils had on the life of the parishes?

Father Hedges: "They have only been partly successful. You have to admit that from the statistics."

Father Graf: "There hasn't been enough publicity given to them, people don't know what they're doing."

Father Hedges: "Of course, not all of them have been organized yet, and they are still in the process of being formed."

Father Graf: "The parish council is as good as its leaders, namely the priests. If they don't see it as alive and viable, then it won't be."

Father Hedges: "There is a whole process of educating parish council members as to their role. The parish council is a new concept in the Catholic church, and so people aren't used to thinking in these terms. It goes back to the parish staff to make them aware of their role and responsibility."



Father Graf suggested the seminary set up courses for future priests in working with group dynamics.

Father Daniel Holland, in charge of the Time of Renewal survey, later pointed out that the survey was taken early in the winter; since that time, he said, activity toward the formation of the councils has increased to the point where "nearly 90 per cent" of the parishes have them.

Why did the survey find that most people thought the parish council was most effective when it was handling finance?

Father Graf: "Most parishes have a couple of CPAs (accountants) and businessmen, but some of them don't have persons with a wide background in philosophy and education."

Father Hedges: "The laity feels comfortable about taking over finance."

Both priests admitted to being "appalled" by the ignorance about parish councils turned up by the survey. Fewer people answered that particular query than any other on the questionnaire.

Both priests agreed that the survey had shown them the need for extensive adult education.

Father Graf laughed about his comment before making it, since he teaches homiletics in the seminary, but said, "I think the sermon is very important. It's an area where much adult education is going on. I think sermons are going to have to be well-prepared, creative, and have solid theology leading to solid action."

Later, Father Graf added, "The home, Mass is where a lot of education is going on. When Bishop Sheen started saying Masses in the homes, people learned a lot about the liturgy. Also, the confirmation and baptism classes are educating a lot of people."

Father Hedges: "That's very effective. In Pre Cana — there's a lot of education going on. It has got to be brought down to small groups. The days of the big classes and the lecturer are over. In small groups, the people come through with basic questions and needs."

Both said that there was a new need "to educate people to change in the Church, so they'll know things won't always be the same."

Now is the time, said Father Hedges, "to bring up the real issues," even though the answers may not be apparent.

Analysis

The Survey On Parish Life . . . A Surprise

Catholics don't think highly of their parishes. That is the most startling conclusion to be drawn from the survey analysis this week released by the diocese.

In part, the analysis reads, "parishioners evaluations indicate that they are looking for improvement in every aspect of the parish."

Responses show that Catholics think their parishes do a "not-quite adequate" job in meeting their needs. Even respondents who are most conscious of being Catholic rate them "only modestly higher."

Parishioners feel that the administration and business affairs of the local Church are well run, the survey shows; what they are asking for is not tangible improvements.

They are "asking a commitment of the mind to improvement," reports the survey.

Respondents pointed to several areas in which they want improvement. One was a lack of "sufficient religious services other than Mass." Another area was "special concerns such as the youth and education opportunities."

A large number of those questioned felt that the sermon and the administration of the parish were meeting parishioners needs "adequately" (41 and 47 per cent respectively).

In no case did a majority think that their parish was meeting their needs "fully." The highest percentage in this area was 26 per cent who felt that meaningful Masses met their needs "fully."

On the positive side, the laity feel that they are doing well in those areas they have assumed the most control of since Vatican II, administration and liturgy.

The Catholics questioned see the parish council as a financially significant body for the parish, but seem unaware of its potential for providing the kind of guidance and "community" they say they want.

Whether this will continue to be a problem is uncertain; parish councils have been coming into existence rapidly across the diocese during the past year, and there seems to be a lag between their formation and an awareness of them.

Catholics in general seem well-prepared, however, to take part in parish government once it is established. The highest percentage of "needs improvement" answers were racked up in the area of lay involvement in the parish. This indicates that the ground is fertile for planting the seeds of parish councils among the lay people of the diocese.

Regional Report:

Father Douglas Hoffman North Region

The young priest responsible for organizing the Monroe County North Region was a seminarian when Vatican II began making administrative and liturgical changes in the Roman Catholic Church.

Now, 11 years later, it is Father Douglas C. Hoffman's job to organize 12 parishes, nine elementary schools, one high school and two residential institutions, to share resources and work together.

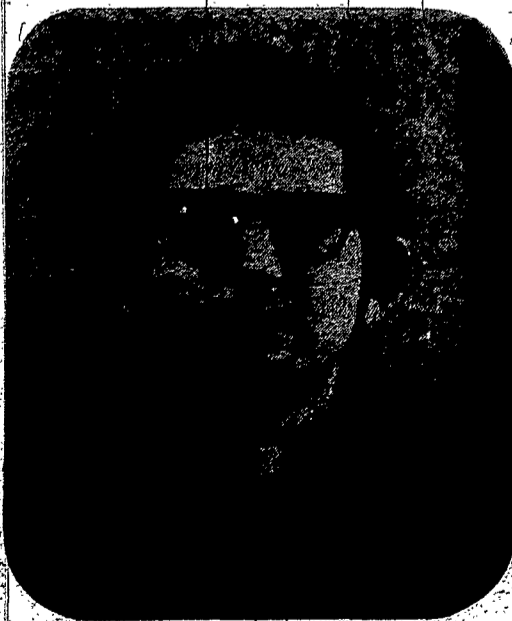
Vatican II was a good thing as far as Father Hoffman is concerned.

"It issued a new challenge to the laity, stating that the mission of the Church to build the Kingdom of God on earth must be cooperative between the religious and the laity" said the assistant at St. Thomas the Apostle.

He sees regional organization as the opportunity for laity to take part in the mission of the church, but he doubts many are ready for it.

"Whether a large majority of the laity are ready to take an active part in the mission of the Church, I don't think so," the coordinator admitted after about a year of working for regional organization.

Regional organization is essential to the diocesan pastoral council which was originally to be a working reality by spring 1974.



FATHER HOFFMAN

Father Hoffman is happy with the progress in the north region, however. All parishes are represented at the monthly meetings, seven parishes have councils, five have steering committees, and the first regional conference took place March 8.

The philosophy of the 15 people on the steering committee of the region is to begin with the laity already interested in education, human development work or liturgy.

"We are trying to generate regional spirit with leadership," the coordinator continued. About 60 people are working together now to come up with human development projects, parish council training plans, religious education workshops, and youth programs for the region at large.

The laity involved in regional work at this stage are divided into these five committees: human development, directed by Father Lawrence Cross, chaplain at Bishop Kearney High School; liturgy, Sister Mary Ann Weiland of St. Thomas the Apostle; education, Peter Ciavarri, of Our Lady of Perpetual Help; youth, Father Terence Fleming of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, and parish council renewal, Father William Lum of St. Margaret Mary.

Father Paul Schnacky of Holy Redeemer is assistant coordinator of the region that includes St. Ann's Home, Bishop Kearney High School, Rochester General Hospital, St. Andrew's, St. Stanislaus, St. Theresa's, St. George's, St. Margaret Mary's, St. Thomas the Apostle, St. Salome's, St. Cecelia's, Christ the King, Holy Redeemer, Our Lady of Perpetual Help and Annunciation.