

COURIER-JOURNAL

Dialogue for **Renewal**

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

INTERVIEW: Father Calimeri Sr. Marie Brown

This week's survey report deals with Catholic attitudes toward priests and nuns. In keeping with the theme of the questions, this week's interview was conducted with a priest and a nun.

They are Father Anthony Calimeri, pastor of St. Jerome's Church, East Rochester, and Sister Marie Brown, SSJ, religious education coordinator there.

One of the questions on the survey was: In your opinion, what should the Church's position be on marriage of priests? More than 48 per cent said that priests should be allowed to marry.

Father Calimeri was reluctant to trust a percentage that high. "These surveys are all relative," he said. "There are no definite answers."

In general, Father Calimeri would favor celibacy for priests and for other men in vocations to which they must fully dedicate themselves. "For most professional people," he said, "if they really want to do a bang-up job, family obligations are a drag."

Father Calimeri might agree with a married clergy for country pastors who are "isolated." Said he with a smile, "It's not good for a man to be alone."

Asked if he thought that a married clergy might increase the number of priestly vocations, he said that blaming the decline in vocations entirely on celibacy was "ultimately an escape."

Inability to marry is not a major reason why there are fewer priests, Father Calimeri said, giving other reasons for the decline.

First, he said, "there are many, many more careers open to people" who are looking for a profession.

Also, "the materialistic bent of people" today discourages many from seeking the commitment that a career like the priesthood requires, he said.



Another often-heard reason for discontinuing the celibacy vow is that a priest, if married, would be better able to counsel couples with marital problems.

However, Father Calimeri said, "I don't see the priest as a marriage counselor. He should be more of a resource person."

In these days of specialization, he sees the priest as a "general practitioner" who knows his limits and can refer people to other more qualified professionals.

On the whole, he would "opt for an unmarried clergy as doing a better job . . . We should go with what has worked."

Four-fifths of those in the survey said that they preferred priests and nuns to wear some sort of uniform or identifying clothing symbolic of their profession. This was where Sister Marie raised an objection.

The question, she said, was "superficial," and did not indicate at all what people understand of the priesthood and sisterhood.

"I resent the fact," she said, "that the habit is equated with sisterhood."

She said that a lot of people are "turned off" by the older, traditional garb. Sister Marie, who



has taught in grade schools, said that this is noticeable among children, who are "more honest and comfortable" with someone who wears normal clothing.

Although the issue is superficial, she said, it has become important, like the issue of long hair on men. "It will take a lot of time," she said, for people to adapt to new styles of clothing for religious, because "it's a whole different thing."

The important thing, though, she said, is to "be sensitive to the people we're serving."

Father Calimeri thought that religious should usually wear some sort of identifying apparel. "If they're working, they should be dressed for the job," he said.

Like Sister Marie, he said that in this case, a priest should be "sensitive to the majority of his congregation."

The Roman collar, he said, is relatively modern. "At the turn of the century, the clergy had to wear shirt, tie, and suit coat."

Personally, Father Calimeri prefers wearing the traditional collar and black suit. "It's much easier," he said, "just to get up in the morning, and put it on," rather than having to decide what to wear.

Analysis

The Survey Shows Catholics Favor End of Celibacy

A preponderance of Catholics questioned in the diocesan survey think it is all right for priests to be married.

Survey results released this week by the diocese show that a total of 48.6 per cent of Rochester Catholics favor allowing a priest to marry, either unconditionally or "if his work will be more effective."

Only 31 per cent of the parishioners asked by the survey thought the Church should not allow priests' marriages.

Priestly celibacy has been an issue between conservatives and liberals in the Church for more than a decade; large numbers of ordained men have left their positions as pastors and church officials to get married, and a decline in the number of priests has been blamed on the traditional discipline of celibacy.

On the other hand, more conservative Churchmen and lay people have argued that abandoning celibacy would mean giving up much of the priest's freedom to minister and would tie him to a family.

This remains the key issue, for without the 15 per cent who favor allowing marriage "if his work will be more effective," the two opposing groups would be approximately matched, 33.6 to 31 per cent.

How does the average Catholic feel about other parts of the priest's and the nun's role?

Most parishioners still want a priest to look like a priest and a nun to look like a nun. A solid 79.6 per cent favor "some garb or symbol that identifies their profession" while religious are on duty.

Only a negligible number (2.6 per cent) actively favor blending religious into the population without distinction, but 17.7 per cent think that it makes no difference what they wear.

How religious should work to help the poor aroused a more significant response. Less than one per cent of those asked thought religious should "join demonstrations at offices of public officials," and the greatest number of positive responses to this occurred in Rochester suburbs.

Most Catholics felt attracted to aiding the "poor in learning how to help themselves" and "encouraging contributions to existing Catholic agencies." This indicates antipathy on the part of many Catholics to a wide range of diocesan programs which "aid the poor in organizing and presenting their story to officials." Only 6.2 per cent support religious doing this.

Regional Report:

Father Eugene Emo, Livingston-Steuben

Heading up regional activities in Livingston and Steuben counties is Father Eugene Emo, pastor of St. Mary's Church, Dansville.

The 24-parish, 11-mission region has 11 functioning parish councils. The rest have steering committees.

The response of the people of the area to the concepts of regionalism has so far been "cautious." "It's simply something they're not used to," Father Emo says.

Another problem is distance. Though St. Mary's is centrally located near the Livingston-Steuben county line, it's at least 50 crow-miles from northwestern Caledonia to southeastern Corning. Says Father Emo, "It's hard getting people together."

On the brighter side, Father Emo was encouraged by the "good turnout" from the region at the recent Mass of Christ in Canandaigua.

A regional meeting in April saw the drawing up of a regional budget, which was



FATHER EUGENE EMO

passed and approved. A regional constitution is being written. The first regional conference is tentatively scheduled for early June, most likely at St. Joseph's Church, Wayland.

Father Emo's regional assistants are Father Eugene Sweeney, associate pastor of St. Patrick's, Corning, and Father John Widman, associate pastor at St. Ignatius, Hornell.

Chairmen of the region's three standing committees are Father Lewis Brown of St. Ann's, Hornell, Education; Kathy Cain of St. Patrick's, Corning, Liturgy; and Father Henry Atwell, pastor of St. Agnes, Avon, Human Development.

Progress in these three areas has been good. The Steuben-Livingston County task force on Human Development is in its second year, and carrying on right-to-life activities.

All parishes have Education and Liturgy committees. Since a large part of the area is equipped for cable television, Father Brown has been working on possible sacramental education programs that would contact the small towns through this medium.

He has already made one series of programs on renewal in Hornell.