

The Time of Renewal.

Part VIII: Catholic Priests and Nuns.

Survey Report

This is the eighth article in a nine-week series based on a recent opinion survey conducted by the Catholic Diocese of Rochester.

The sample questions to the right were taken from that part of the survey which deals with this week's topic: Catholic attitudes toward priests and nuns.

The survey revealed that Catholic opinion is strongly divided over whether priests should be allowed to marry. Opinion was almost equally divided between those who uphold the present policy of celibacy, and those who approve of marriage of priests under some, or all circumstances.

Despite this conflict, most Catholics would not discourage a young man from entering the priesthood. While 27% would strongly encourage him, 29% of the people felt he should compare the priesthood with other careers and 30% felt he should talk with someone for guidance.

Although the Catholic laity is playing a greater role in parish affairs today than ever before, the success or failure of a parish is still closely linked with the activities of its priest. His accessibility, his competence, and his willingness to represent the parishioners at the diocesan level are seen as basic ingredients of a successful relationship between parishioners and priest. Many Catholics perceive that increased lay participation in parish administration should remove time-consuming burdens from the parish priest,

The following questions appeared in the recent Diocesan Time of Renewal Survey.

In your opinion, what should the Church's position be in regard to marriage of priests?
 Allow
 Not allow
 Allow, under special circumstances, if his work would be more effective
 Don't know

If a close friend or relative expressed a desire to explore becoming a priest, would you be most likely to: (one answer)
 Encourage him strongly
 Suggest he talk to someone for guidance
 Suggest he compare this with other careers
 Strongly discourage him
 Don't know

The importance of a close personal relationship with the parish priest is reflected by the fact that fully a third of all Catholics would turn to him first before all else—even before a spouse—as a source of guidance in time of serious trouble. This type of relationship is especially desired by the most traditional, often older, Catholic.



Family visit by parish priest, 1890.

It is encouraging, that with all the changes in life style and work schedules of priests and sisters, the Catholic layman still places high value on the role and work of his leaders. He would still encourage a young man or woman to become a priest or sister. Sadly, at this time when the Church's widening apostolate requires more priests and sisters, applications have fallen off considerably.

The strong support for the idea of priests and sisters aiding the poor to organize and learn to help themselves indicates that the people are conscious of Jesus' own example—helping the social outcasts of His day. Eight priests and twenty sisters work full-time at this in our Diocese. In addition, most parish priests are

To your way of thinking, should priests and nuns while "on duty" wear some garb or symbol that identifies their profession?
 Yes
 No
 Makes no difference
 Undecided

What one statement expresses your opinion of the MOST appropriate action for priests and nuns in helping the poor?
 Join demonstrations at offices of public officials
 Aid poor people in organizing and presenting their story to officials
 Aid poor people in organizing and learning how to help themselves
 Encourage contributions to existing Catholic agencies which help the poor
 Let public agencies who are paid for it worry about the poor

Survey questions related to each weekly topic will be printed here throughout the Time of Renewal newspaper series. The complete survey, answers and findings will be published in a book, "Dialogue For Renewal", available this Fall.

on social issues. This same group often believes, too, that reduced restrictions on marriage and garb would make religious careers more attractive to young people.

Among Catholics as a whole, less than 1% believe priests and nuns should carry social action so far as to join demonstrations to help the poor. 69% feel that the appropriate action is to aid poor people in organizing and learning how to help themselves. The vast majority (80%) want priests and nuns to wear some sort of identifying clothing or symbols.

The priest clearly retains great importance, both among individual Catholics and in the parish as an organizational entity. But, the survey revealed a shift has apparently occurred since Vatican II. Previously, the parishioner and his priest served the Church and Christ. Now, the role

Today's rectories and convents are no longer quiet, peaceful cloisters—removed from the turmoil of modern living. Table conversations range from such topics as the Neighborhood Association's last meeting, the town or village elections, the increasing price of gasoline, a federal cut-back in services—to the more traditional conversation and concern about a new document from the Vatican, a recent letter from the Bishop, or a new book for prayer and spiritual reading.

In the past, most people saw the priest's duties as limited pretty much to sacramental ministry, religious instruction, and balancing the parish budget. Nuns were usually divided into strict teachers and compassionate nurses. Neither picture was complete, and both are now out of date.



Family visit by parish priest, 1890.

is God's gift of celibacy—a gift which allows priests and nuns to give silent public evidence of their convictions of faith. A life of love, dedicated to God and in service to others, is what celibacy is all about. The priest's daily life is his strongest sermon about the mystery of God's love for all mankind—a love that endures beyond the limits of this world.

Next week, Part IX: Three Catholic Profiles.

Building a Christian community is one of the priest's primary responsibilities. Although more people re-locate more often today, they clearly value close personal bonds with their priest. While the priest adjusts his daily work schedule to all the new demands upon his time, he consciously strives to be personally available to and concerned about the well being of his parishioners. Meeting emergency human needs, caring for the sick, and one-to-one counseling are still high priorities for most parish priests. This, along with his sacramental ministry, is the way the priest attempts to strengthen the Christian community.

The mystery of a person's call from God to become a priest or sister remains a mystery. It is still an invitation to serve the members of the Church—and with them, to serve this struggling world. Part of the mystery