

## Expressing Disappointment over Rome Decree

# Bishop Issues First Communion Pastoral



Photo by Susan McKinney

### Bishop Teaches

Bishop Hogan gives sisters enrolled in the Institute on Pastoral Ministry a glimpse of how he carries out his special Church ministry. Sixty sisters from eighteen parishes attended the institute sponsored by the Diocesan Sisters Council. The institute offered morning classes and afternoon field experiences aimed at "testing practical theory in a living experience," according to Sister Michael Lappetito, chairman of the five-week program.

### Summer Time Is Play Time

"The play's the thing," wrote the bard, and plays are things that Rochester has been seeing a lot of lately. One troupe, the Borchard Street Players, helps raise money annually for local charities. For center story, see Pages 10 and 11.

Also caught in the acting were the performers of a new locally written and produced rock-style opera, *Becoming*, which offers flair with a message, and is based on the life of Moses. John Dash reviews on Page 18.

Bishop Joseph Hogan continues his series on the Profile of the Church of Rochester this week. Part II can be found on Page 3.

Where does all that money for cancer research go? More

than \$94,000 will go to the University of Rochester, to be administered by research scientist Dr. Betsy Ohlsson-Wilhelm, who hopes to at least open a few doors, if not find a cure for the notorious disease. Pat Petraske reports, Page 8.

Next weekend, St. John Fisher College will host the Diocesan Liturgical Institute, which will provide workshops and discussions in making the Mass more relevant for all Christians. It's being sponsored by the diocesan liturgical commission. The lowdown is on Page 2.

The DePaul Clinic, which has been providing mental health services to the diocese for 15 years, has moved from 50 Chestnut St. to the old grade school of Ss. Peter and Paul Church on West Main. Along with the new address comes a new outlook. The story is on Page 6.

Dear Friends in Christ,

I write to you in a spirit of urgent pastoral concern about the practical implications of the recent decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Discipline of the Sacraments and of the Clergy relative to the reception of First Penance and First Eucharist.

I have not written earlier because I wanted an opportunity to read the decree thoroughly and to understand the background that lead to its promulgation. Since the decree is disciplinary in nature, it seems to have thus far promoted a response that regards it as the beginning of a lively debate and not a decision beyond appeal.

I would be far from honest if I did not express my own personal disappointment with the decree as being contrary to my pastoral experience and that expressed by a majority of the Bishops of the United States.

I rejoiced when permission was granted by the Holy See to the National Council of Bishops to experiment with a child's introduction to the Sacrament of Penance some time after First Communion. Accordingly in September 1970 I endorsed Pastoral Guidelines for the Diocese of Rochester for the Reception of First Communion and First Penance which represented months of painstaking effort on the part of our Religious Education Committee. Our directives stated that children shall receive their First Communion by the end of the second grade, that First Confession need not be prior to First Communion but should be received by the end of the third or fourth grade and that parental option in the sequence of the reception of these sacraments should be respected. The guidelines were written with a true pastoral concern based on the best insights available from theology and developmental psychology. Many pastors have preserved the traditional sequence and will not be affected by the recent decree. But a majority have used the experiment, have found it pastorally sound and are presently disturbed and confused.

To them I say, so am I disturbed and confused. I have rejoiced at a new understanding of Penance that would allow for a gradual development in a child of a sense of alienation from God that would lead to a meaningful understanding of His mercy and of His gift of reconciliation. The Eucharist could precede it because this sacrament centers around a Person — and love which should be an earlier and familiar part of a child's life.

When 80 per cent of the U.S. Bishops presented a favorable report of their pastoral experience with the new experiment last Fall, it seemed assured that the option would continue. Yet, while the U.S. Conference of Bishops was asking for a two year extension of the experiment, a Committee within its own ranks was endorsing a rejection of the same experimentation. There should be some exciting dialogue and confrontation in Washington at the Fall meeting in November.

Msgr. Paul Cooke, president of the National Conference of Diocesan Directors of Religious Education, summed up my thoughts when he remarked: "The document reflects a real pastoral concern and the experiment has reflected a real pastoral concern. There is a third pastoral concern — how to blend the elements of both pastoral concerns."

In an effort to blend these elements of concern, I am now organizing a Task Force of pastors, Religious Education Coordinators, Sacramental Theologians and liturgists and parents to address itself to the practical pastoral problems caused by the declaration. I will ask its membership to undertake a survey to provide an accurate measure of the extent of the experiment in the Diocese and the values gained from it.

Immediate action of implementation of this declaration would cause some serious problems for those involved in the catechetical programs of sacramental preparation. I find it necessary to examine these difficulties more carefully and to seek solutions in collaboration with parents, educators and those engaged in pastoral ministry. **No modifications are to be made in existing programs until the issuance of new guidelines** which will incorporate the values learned from our experience. I include especially the values of parental involvement and the deeper insights which we have learned in the meaning of Penance and reconciliation. I see nothing in the Roman directive which would require the exact duplication of the catechesis of the past.

With gratitude to all of you who so generously share my responsibilities, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

*Joseph L. Hogan*  
Bishop of Rochester