

# 'Servers' Join Altar Boys at St. Monica

By PAT PETRASKE

"What? Me serve with them?"  
"You're kidding!"

The breaking of tradition by the girls of St. Monica's Parish brought groans and short lived protests from their male contemporaries as skirts began to flash under long red cassocks. St. Monica's, the first in the diocese, has altar girls.

It began in September of last year with a discussion of Pope Paul VI's decree barring women from any kind of formal role in the ministry of the Church. One female member of the seventh and eighth grade religion class promptly suggested the idea of having girls serve on the altar. The idea snowballed and the girls' enthusiasm caught fire:

"We were going to fight for it and even protest in front of the Church if they didn't let us, said Linda Pugliese, an eighth grader.

Such fanfare wasn't necessary as Richard Ensmann, director of Mass servers and a member of St. Monica's staff decided with the parish priests, "if they stuck it through the program and were really interested, then they could become altar girls."

The "program" is the two-month training course held every Fall; nine girls in the seventh and eighth grades completed their training to join the ranks of the Mass servers. St. Monica's was used to female participation since Sister Barbara Moore, pastoral assistant, already had been preaching the homily and distributing Communion.

"The only negative feedback

was from the boys themselves, but no one refused to serve with them," Ensmann said. Traditionally the Church has had only male servers; "You can see how this idea has been really engrained in the kids," he said.

Altar boys as an institution

**'Some people think it is an anachronism but I feel it is an opportunity to acquaint the kids with the Church community. In this way they are given a special place in the Church.'**

came into existence around the rise of the Industrial Revolution. "Men were not available to serve Mass so young boys were used. Altar boys as well as the idea of parochial schools emerged about the same time," said the young director. In 1937 the Knights of the Altar developed as an organization of individual altar boy units and set up a standard program. It came under the auspices of the Holy Cross Fathers of Notre Dame in 1948, with headquarters in Marseilles, Ill.

Ensmann explained that like the Boys Scouts, the Knights of the Altar had codes, and advancement tests. A boy would start out as an apprentice and then work up to the rank of page, squire, lord and so on modeled after the hierarchy established in the feudal systems.

"With the new liturgy in the 1960's, the role of the altar boy began to diminish. A lot of the rote functions he used to perform no longer existed as the congregation began to participate more," Ensmann said. The Knights of the Altar still operate out of a small parish but "for all practical purposes they are inactive."

The focus of attention, maintained Ensmann, should not be on the novel idea of having altar girls but on the question of what is the role of a Mass server. "Some people think it is an anachronism but I feel it is an opportunity to acquaint the kids with the Church community. In this way they are given a special place in the Church," he said.



Julie Webster [right] and Linda Pugliese kneel in front of the main altar in their new roles as the first diocesan altar girls at St. Monica's.

St. Monica's is attempting to integrate "the experiences on the altar with the experiences off the altar," Ensmann explained. The servers do not only assist at the Mass but run special projects on their own initiative. A carnival for the muscular dystrophy campaign netted \$100. In December the servers went Christmas caroling.

Ensmann sees the use of altar boys and girls as "a real potential for reaching the kids of the Church. They are not just told how to serve Mass but why they are serving and what each step

means."

The importance of becoming a server was heightened after the completion of the training course when the children planned their own "investiture." Everything from the selection of the reading, Desiderata, to the dropping of the balloons from the balcony was suggested by the servers whose families gathered at the foot of

the altar to share in the celebration.

St. Monica's now has 50 of what they term servers, although the girls themselves sometimes lapse into the old terminology and call themselves altar boys. This year the program will be open to girls in the fourth grade, the age level when boys usually begin to serve.



## To The Fair

Eleanor Grabenstetter, coming through doorway, was anxious to get started for the Monroe County Fair. She is a member of the senior citizens group affiliated with Charles Settlement house which made an afternoon excursion to the fair grounds Aug. 18.

## Crossword Answer

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## Bishop Minihan Dies in Ireland

Dublin [RNS] — Auxiliary Bishop Jeremiah F. Minihan of Boston died suddenly August 14 while on vacation here visiting relatives. He was 70 years old.

A Mass of the Resurrection was held at the Cathedral of Holy Cross in Boston on August 18, with burial in Haverhill, Mass.

Bishop Minihan's parents were natives of Ireland, and he was prominent in Irish-American social and cultural affairs.

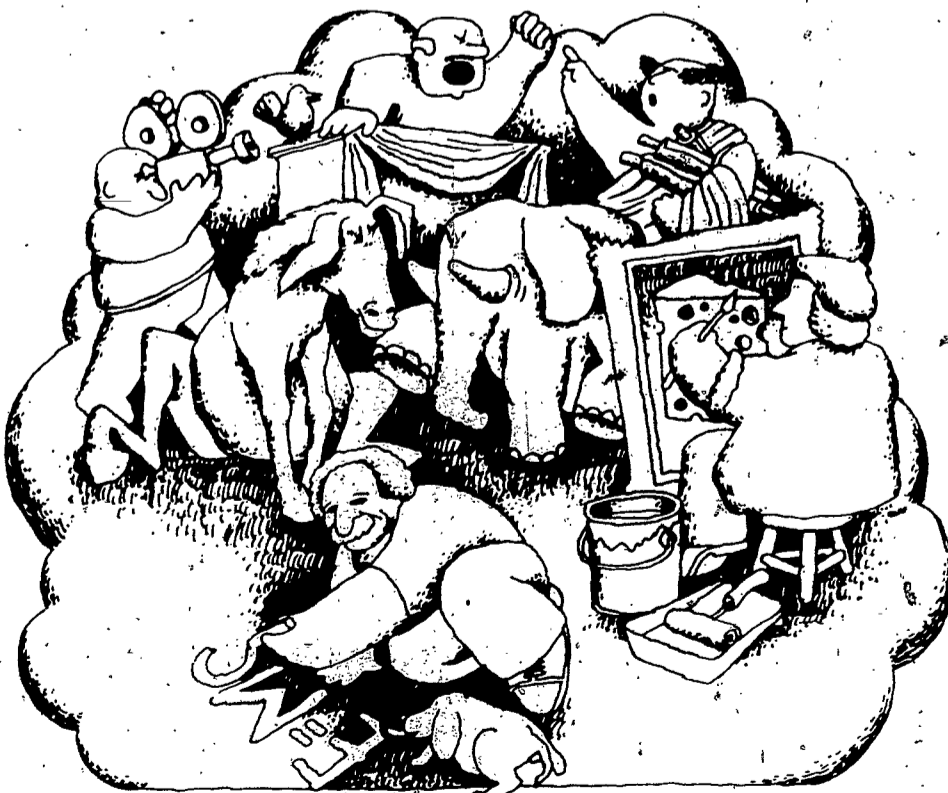
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