

The Mass and Teenagers

By FATHER WILLIAM J. O'MALLEY, SJ

The Problem

It's hardly news that more and more young people are finding something better to do with their Sunday mornings than go to Mass. Most parents of those who still go can testify that it's usually a hassle and, quite often, when the teenager is unfettered and goes away to college he leaves his Mass habit at home. Priests conducting pre-Cana conferences more and more frequently find that the couple's wedding Mass will be the first (and last) for a long, long time. All of which proves that, to an increasing number of young people, Mass is neither meaningful, nor relevant, nor important. (In their defense I might add that, even for quite a few weekly Mass-goers, membership in the Church seems as peripheral to their lives as membership in the Kiwanis, but I will stick to the focus of the title.)

Parents and pastors anxious to discover the reason for young peoples' "vacation" from religion are often quick to blame the Catholic high schools. When I'm thus attacked I usually

Father William J. O'Malley, SJ, is chairman of the Theology Department, drama director, and English teacher at McQuaid Jesuit High School, all contributing to his interest in liturgy. He has written numerous articles, four musical plays, has a book, "Meeting the Living God," due for October publication and also a featured role in the movie "The Exorcist," which is awaiting release.



reply that I've had the boy for only one year and the school for four, but the parent and parish have had him for 18 years. Teachers in turn unfairly put all the blame on the diocesan clergy and parents — or on TV or Madison Avenue or the bomb or God knows what. I think it's time we stopped trying to assign guilt, admit we have a common problem and start to find ways to alleviate it.

Parents tend to suspect that when their child gives up religious practice, the child has lost his faith in God. I don't think it's that simple. First, Mass attendance is an external act, and guessing another's motives for going or not going is just that: guessing. I have a difficult enough time assessing my own motives to be so certain of others'. And I have testimony from quite a few that, although they don't go to Mass, they do still pray. Similarly, when I was a scholastic, if one got up for morning visit at six o'clock, the rector could assure himself that we all went upstairs after it and dutifully put in our hour's meditation before Mass. Actually, we dutifully put ourselves back in bed for an hour. And yet we did manage to keep praying. One's external practices are indicative of his inner self, not proof, and the embers of belief may be waiting for a marriage or a bout with suffering to enliven their meaning.

Second, after seven years of teaching theology to about 1000 high school seniors, I suspect a teenager's dropping Mass may not

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Priests Council Acts on Issues

The Priests Council acted on diverse fronts at its monthly meeting last week.

The council:

— supported Bishop Joseph L. Hogan's task force which was called to study the issue of First Penance and it also supported the Bishop in his allegiance to the Holy See.

— established a committee to formulate overall consistent policy in regard to all ecumenical matters involving the diocese.

— heard Father Douglas Hoffman, new director of the Pastoral Ministry, outline goals for his department.

Full details of these stories are on PAGE 7.

Diocesan Appointments



Father Paul Freemesser, to associate pastor of St. Francis Xavier Church, Rochester, from the Diocesan Mission in La Paz, Bolivia.

Father Frank Lioi of Annunciation Church — Eastman School of Music.

Father David Gaesser of St. Mary's, Canandaigua — Community College of the Finger Lakes.

Father Paul J. Ryan of St. Michael's, Penn Yan — Keuka College.



Photo by Susan McKinney

Ah, Kindergarten!

Carol and Mary Jo Barbero, twin daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Barbero, and Michael and Mary McGrady, twin children of Mr. and Mrs. Bernard McGrady, are among the new faces at St. Louis School's kindergarten. And the faces are certainly expressive enough to require no further explanation in words.