

Diocesan Survey Still Very Useful

Second and last in a Series
By FATHER ROBERT F. McNAMARA

In last week's Courier-Journal, I pointed out how much food for thought is furnished to area Catholics by the recent diocesan "Survey of Catholic Households." If some of its statistics on current religious and social issues need to be taken with caution, this professional survey is still a weathervane.

In this second and last article, I shall set forth five questions that the survey raises in particular. To these I shall give my own frank interpretations.

1. Some black critics have accused the Catholic Church of "white racism." Does the survey prove or disprove this of the Rochester Diocese?

Three survey questions dealt with racial discrimination:

Question 16 read: "For what reasons, aside from religion, do you think the Catholics send their children to parochial school?" One of the choices was: "To avoid having children attend integrated schools." 6.9 per cent of the respondents checked this reason.

Question 32 asked, "What is your opinion of a Catholic who refused to sell his house to a Negro family willing to pay the asking price?" A strong 32.5 per cent picked the answer: "He was within his rights."

Question 44 asked how important the examinee thought it was for the Church to take a public stand on certain social issues. One of the choices was "Racial and other types of discrimination," another was "School busing to integrate schools." The first issue was considered important by 74 per cent, unimportant by 10 per cent. The second issue was considered important by 41 per cent, unimportant by 22 per cent.

It doesn't seem to me that these percentages prove our diocese to be strongly white racist. But I feel uncomfortable about the implications of some of the responses. Did not the American bishops declare in 1958 that "the heart of the race question is moral and religious"? Did the Catholics who responded negatively know of the Bishops' teaching; or did they know it and ignore it?

2. How does the survey reflect today's diocesan attitudes on Sunday Mass attendance and frequentation of the Sacraments?

Question 19 asked "How frequently do you yourself attend Mass?" "Weekly," said 62.5 per cent. At least once a year or oftener, said 13.7 per cent. Less than annually, 3.6 per cent admitted. (Weekly attendance was 10 per cent higher in the Auburn-Ithaca "rural" area.) Statisticians will probably say that 62.5 per cent is pretty good. Catholics will not shout hurrah. This marks a downward trend, and downward trends usually continue downward. Replies to Question 24, on the relationship of sin and Mass, form an interesting commentary on Question 16. Missing Mass was considered substantially sinful by 53. But 19 said that the true Christian concept of sin no longer applies to Mass attendance; and an equal percentage complained that the relationship between Mass attendance and sinfulness was to them uncertain and confusing.

The increase of Communion in late years is an acknowledged fact. Responding to Question 21, 78 per cent testified that they received frequently. But 70.8 per cent answered Question 27 by saying that they went to confession less often than they used to or would like to do. Asked in Question 26 to describe their concept of confession, 40.2 per cent said it was necessary for serious sins; and 34.2 per cent gave the discerning reply that it

Father McNamara

Father Robert F. McNamara has been professor of Church History at St. Bernard's Seminary since 1938. He has written three books, including the history of the diocese, as well as many scholarly articles. He has contributed many historical articles to the Courier-Journal and at one time was associate editor of the Courier. More recently he served on the "Monitoring Committee" in the preparation of the diocesan survey.



helped spiritual growth. Believe it or not, 8.5 per cent declared confession was necessary before every Communion. Of course, this is not the teaching of the Church. As the Council of Trent declared, confession is necessary before Communion only if there are grave sins to confess. Priests and catechists have been trying to get this across since 1551 A.D., but there are apparently still close to 10 per cent of Catholics who have not been reached.

3. What views on abortion did the questionnaire discover?

A good question in this month dedicated to "Respect Life."

There were two questions on the issue. Question 37 asked which of a list of reasons was thought to warrant "legalized abortion." Absolutely none, replied 24.1 per cent. But pro-abortion views carried the election. A dangerous pregnancy was thought a just cause by 51.7 per cent; pregnancy through rape, by another 46 per cent; a strong chance of a defective offspring, by 26 per cent.

However disconcerting these figures, they cannot be taken at face value, for their implications are partly contradicted by the replies to Question 35. This query asked what the examinee thought were the most appropriate actions for a good Catholic to take regarding the legalization of abortion. In this case, 67.5 per cent opted for some type of campaign against legalized abortion. It appears, therefore, that our diocesan drives in favor of human life have had some impact, but by no means enough.

4. How do the Rochester diocesan Catholics view their priesthood and religious orders?

As a seminary professor, this query was of special interest to me.

Question 39 asked how strongly they would encourage a prospective vocation to a sisterhood; Question 40 asked the same of a possible candidate for the priesthood. I would strongly encourage such a young woman, said 29.1 per cent. I would strongly encourage such a young man, said 26.9 per cent. Almost none said they would positively discourage them. But 57.8 per cent

said of young women, and 59.6 per cent said of young men, that they would urge them first to study the matter very carefully. Was this caution prompted by horse sense? Or did it reflect some disenchantment with priests and nuns in recent years? At all events, the replies indicate a marked decline in the wonderful enthusiasm which Rochester diocesan Catholics showed for religious vocations in days gone by.

Celibacy of the secular clergy, as everybody should know, is a matter of Church law, not divine law. Or to put it more precisely, the Western Church admits only celibates to the priesthood. Nevertheless, it was a real shocker to me to read under Question 38 that 33.6 per cent respondents okayed marriage for priests; and 15 per cent more concurred, if the priest's work would thereby be made more effective.

I wonder, though, whether these figures are as strong as they seem. Paul VI, in his 1971 Exhortation on the Religious Life, called celibacy "a precious gift," a charism, "fragile and vulnerable," given to the few, not the many. Furthermore, said the Pope, this gift is "in part incomprehensible" to the rest. "The rest" would include those whose personal charism is married love. I really think that when some of the respondents spoke approvingly of priests marrying, they were thinking, not in terms of the priestly vocation but in terms of what married love meant to themselves.

We priests have been very remiss, I am convinced, in not pointing out to the faithful the positive aspects of celibacy: its value as a reminder of divine love in an erotic world; its value (to quote Vatican Two) as "a sign and stimulus of charity as well as a special source of spiritual fruitfulness in the world;" its witness to an eternity in which men and women "do not marry because they can no longer die" (Lk, 20, 35-36). How often have we priests preached in this vein? How often have we Catholics heard such a sermon?

Replies to two other questions strengthen my persuasion. Those replying seem to prefer that priests and nuns continue much as before. Only 0.7 per cent favored their participating in demonstrations as the best way to help the poor (Q. 42). And the question whether priests and sisters while "on duty" should wear some distinctive garb or symbol that identifies their vocation was answered yes by a resounding 79.6 per cent — the largest single percentage in the whole survey.

This seems to me a mandate to preserve the traditional priestly and sisterly image, in some really discernible way. The American "priestly image" was spelt out rather strictly by the laws of two U.S. plenary councils which are still in effect. Priests were required to be clean-shaven (II Baltimore, 151) and to wear black street clothes and a Roman collar (III Baltimore, 77). Religious orders in the Diocese of course prescribed a religious garb — each its own, but each identifiably monastic. Surely today's Rochester Catholics would not oppose the modernization of clerical or religious uniforms. But what I think the 79.6 per cent is saying is: Please don't abandon this public sign of your commitment. Please don't reply, this is our private or group business. It is not, for a public sign is a public concern, and we should have something to say about it. Don't even be ambiguously priests or nuns in your appearance. We need so much the firm sight of your healing presence.

5. What is the main lesson of the survey?

I would say: the absolute necessity of educating or re-educating Catholics who are increasingly taking their moral doctrine from the communications media rather than from the Church. How to reach this public (preaching in churches 40 per cent empty won't do it) is perhaps the biggest problem that faces the Bishop of Rochester in his quest for our Renewal.



Harvest Sale

The Marian League of St. Jude Church, 4100 Lyell Rd., will hold a Harvest Sale, Sunday and Monday, Nov. 11-12, at the parish center, 1-8 p.m. Candy, jewelry, handbags, canned goods, candles and holders and next-to-new items will be available. Running the sale will be [seated, l-r] Esther Amesbury; Father John Steger, pastor; Rose San Filippo, chairman; Marge Benner; [standing, l-r] Carm Barnes, Sue Hughes; Olga Recchio; Mickey Quattrone; Gail Cromey.

Dr. Curran Elected

Dr. Thomas Curran of Elmira was elected president of the State Federation of Catholic School Parents at a meeting last week in Syracuse.

William A. Schauer, a Brooklyn lawyer, was elected vice

president, and J. Joseph McGlynn, a banker from Binghamton, was named treasurer.

Dr. Curran is an oral surgeon and has been active for some years in reorganization of Catholic schools in the Elmira area.

Deaths

Sr. Honorata

Mass of the Resurrection for Sister Honorata Volkmar of the Sisters of St. Joseph was offered in the Motherhouse chapel Oct. 31, 1973.

Father Joseph Reinhart, her cousin, was celebrant, with Msgr. Emmett Murphy as concelebrant and Msgr. William Naughton present in the sanctuary.

Sister Honorata's service in the diocese included almost fifty years of teaching in the parochial schools. Her last assignment was in Holy Apostles School, 1964-66, which followed six years at St. Francis de Sales, Geneva. She also taught in St. Anthony's School, Rochester, for six years and in Sacred Heart School, Mt. Morris. Other assignments were at Our Lady of Perpetual Help School, Rochester; St. Anthony's, Elmira, and St. Alphonsus, Auburn. In 1966 she retired to Immaculate Heart of Mary Convent, and in 1969, to St. Joseph's Convent on East Avenue.

Born in Greece, N.Y., Sister entered the St. Joseph com-

munity in 1914 from St. John's Parish. She earned the New York State permanent teaching certificate through the training school of her order.

Sr. Francesca

Mass of the Resurrection for Sister Francesca Fredericks of the Sisters of St. Joseph was offered at the Motherhouse Oct. 28, 1973.

Father Patrick Seelman, TOR concelebrated with Father Joseph Reinhart. Father Frederick Walz was present in the sanctuary.

Sister Francesca was a teacher for more than forty years. Her last assignment was in St. Patrick's, Seneca Falls, 1966-1971. She taught in St. Stanislaus School for eleven years, at St. Ambrose for ten, and also at Sacred Heart, Holy Rosary, Blessed Sacrament, Mother of Sorrows and St. Francis de Sales in Geneva.

Born in Elmira, Sister Francesca entered the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1924 from St. Casimir's parish. She earned the Bachelor of Education degree at Nazareth College.

Mario Petrossi

Mario A. Petrossi of Simpson Road, Irondequoit, died Oct. 28, 1973. Mass of the Resurrection was celebrated last Friday at St. Margaret Mary Church.

Mr. Petrossi was a contractor for more than 40 years, engaged in road construction and the manufacture, in Shortsville, of road building materials. He also was an inventor, with several patents on automotive parts and equipment, and was certified as a real estate broker. He was a graduate of Seneca School, Aquinas Institute and Villanova University.

The Petrossi family has been associated with St. Margaret Mary parish since its beginning in 1929.

Survivors are three sisters, Philomena, Irma and Anna.

MISSION BENEFIT

St. Helen's Altar and Rosary Society will hold a card party at 8 p.m. Friday, Nov. 9, to raise money for the mission work of Fathers John Drexel, OMI, and Raymond Quetchenbach, SVD.