

Pastoral Perspective

By Joseph L. Hogan

Parish Councils

One of the new developments in the Church during the last ten years, strongly encouraged by the Second Vatican Council, is the establishment of parish councils. I went on record as strongly urging them in all the parishes of the diocese, early in 1970, during my first months as Bishop.



Since that time, many hours of meetings, planning, study and prayer have gone into this work by priests, sisters and laity. In this process, much has been learned about what should be done and what pitfalls should be avoided. I would like to add my own comments and my encouragement to those who have been working so hard, and who continue to go through the growing pains that accompany this renewal of the life of the Church.

Recently, the National Council of Catholic Laity assembled a list of ten "Don'ts for Parish Councils" which are worthy of our consideration. They tell us very much that is positive about the nature of the parish council and its mission.

1. Don't think of a parish council as a board of directors managing a business. Because so much planning and organization and goal-settings are involved, it is easy to think that this is the group that "runs the parish", telling everybody what to do about everything. Nothing could be further from the truth. The mission of a parish council is to coordinate the life of the parish and to

serve the people of God in the parish family.

2. Don't forget that the parish council is essentially a religious body. Indeed, the parish is the Christian community gathered together to carry forward the work of Christ, and the parish council is the "parish family in miniature."

3. Don't think of the parish council as exclusively a lay body. The pastor is my delegate as spiritual leader of the parish, and has an important role as spiritual leader of the parish council. He can never abandon this role and be relegated to the position of a helpless bystander.

4. Don't revere the pastor as though he were God Almighty. I have never yet met a pastor who seriously made this claim, or offered arguments to substantiate it!

5. On the other hand, don't treat him as though he were incapable of making a good judgment. There are always those who maintain they could do better themselves, and oftentimes do not realize the responsibilities and pressures that every pastor feels.

6. Don't wait for the pastor to tell the Council what to do. The parish council can be a great blessing to the parish and the pastor, precisely because gifted and wise and prayerful people show initiative and take responsibility for important parish concerns. To wait always for the pastor to make the suggestions for every committee only increases his work.

7. Don't get bogged down in trivia. Because councils are so new, they can spend a lot of time discussing little things that

should be done outside the meeting in committee. Save the council's energy for the important matters that have deep impact on the vitality of the Church.

8. Don't try to do everything at once. Some wise man from the East once remarked that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Bless his patient heart!

9. Don't try to do everything on your own. The work of the parish council often requires professional assistance and expert advice. My staff at the Pastoral Center exists in large measure to provide that kind of help to the parishes. They are willing and ready to serve.

10. Don't forget that the parish council represents the parish. Nothing would be worse than to have parish councils become the latest version of the secret society making all the decisions behind closed doors. Those elected to be on the council have a responsibility to be the voice of the parish family, and must stay close to the felt needs of all the people.

No set of rules is going to solve the question of how best to do the Lord's work in today's challenging times. On the other hand, I believe these ten "don'ts" offer some sound advice, gathered from experience, that can help councils grow.

I am counting on the leadership that parish councils can provide to give a strong assist to the Church in the Diocese of Rochester in the years ahead. May they be blessed with enlightened minds and cheerful hearts as the pilgrim people of God go forth "to love and serve the Lord."

vatican news

Guess Who Bought a Hat Just for the Occasion? The Feminist and the Pope

Vatican City [RNS] — "One of the goals of women's liberation is to achieve a radical change in the Catholic Church's attitude towards women's role in the church," said Betty Friedan in an interview here following her audience with Pope Paul.

"The Church is in ferment," the U.S. feminist leader said. "I have been asked increasingly in the last few years to lecture to nuns and priests about the women's movement and women's fight for equality."

"Everyone knows my (liberal) stand on abortion but I am still, and increasingly, asked to talk in schools run by religious, and in any forum about women's changing role. The Church has taken an implacable stance

Pope Paul Calls John 'A Faithful Voice'

Vatican City [RNS] — Recalling the "beloved and paternal image" of Pope John XXIII, who was elected on Oct. 28, 1958, Pope Paul VI hailed his predecessor as "a faithful voice of Catholic tradition," and "the oracle of the new and future wisdom of Church teaching."

Addressing the crowd gathered in St. Peter's Square for his customary Sunday noon blessing (Oct. 28), Pope Paul said he was recalling "the beloved and paternal image of Pope John" because he felt a need to free "his saintly, humane, and pontifical person and teaching" from "abusive interpretations which

lately but in fact I see something else happening — cardinals, archbishops, they are all groping to come to terms with the changing role of women.

"And so I thought there was a symbolic and real importance at this time in the movement's history for me to have an audience with the Pope."

Father Vincent O'Keefe, assistant general of the Jesuits, was among those who helped arrange for Miss Friedan to see the pontiff. Protocol presented this "emancipated" Jewish women's leader with a problem.

"As soon as I was told I could have an audience with the Pope, I thought, What shall I wear on my head? I consulted all kinds of

some persons have made to try and justify anti-conformist doctrine and discipline."

"We can see in John's fatherly aspect," said Pope Paul, "his affability and simplicity, as well as his ever ready and witty pleasantries."

"But," Paul emphasized, "we must not forget the sincerity and strength of Pope John's orthodoxy, solemnly attested to at the opening of Vatican II, when John declared: 'The sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be safeguarded and imparted in more efficacious forms.'"

people including nuns and leaders in the women's movement. We all agreed that a veil implies the tradition of subjection but also that it was necessary to show respect. Well, I went to see Mr. John, a famous haberdasher in New York."

"Now I hate hats," she said. "I haven't worn a hat for 30 years. We looked and we looked and finally I found the non-hat-hat. It looked like a small black halo set back on the head."

"I decided to take the Pope a present of a medallion, the emblem of the women's movement, the Greek sign for woman (a circle with a cross below) with two bars across the circle to represent equality."

Miss Friedan had her audience with the Pope following his general audience of Oct. 24. "It was not just a baciamano (hand-kissing)," she said. "We had a real dialogue for five minutes. I was so delighted when the Pope greeted me in English, saying 'We want to thank you and express our gratitude for all the work you have done on behalf of the women of the world.'"

"I gave him my gift and the Pope put on his spectacles to examine it closely. Then he motioned for a jewel box and presented me with a medallion bearing his portrait," Miss Friedan continued.

"I told him I had come with the hope and expectation that the Roman Catholic Church is going to come to profound new theological terms with the



Betty Friedan en route to meeting with Pontiff

personhood of women and it is my belief that if the Church does come to such terms, then the Judeo-Christian traditions which have held women back for centuries will become a force for good.

"Pope Paul replied through an interpreter, 'We wish you to know it will not be a radical approach because the Church has always respected women.'"

Miss Friedan said she replied: "If the Church can come to terms with the full personhood of women then many of the problems oppressing women and also the Church right now will be seen in new terms and will be more easily solved."

The Pope is said to have replied that he is against anything that oppresses women and that the church will look into the whole situation, in all fields of society, to see what is holding women back.

Miss Friedan's impression of

the private audience, in her own words:

"Pope Paul seemed very warm and human to me. I got the impression that to meet someone like me was quite a new experience for him. The interpreters looked like they had never seen anything like this before. I didn't curtsy, we shook hands."

Miss Friedan said she had spoken in some five centers in Italy in the past on the position of women and found that nuns everywhere were deeply affected by the women's movement and with a desire to fulfill themselves in the Church.

She added that Pope Paul had done more for women — in her estimation — than had been done in the previous nineteen centuries.

Miss Friedan, 52 years old, served as president of the National Organization of Women (NOW) for three years.