

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

Ministry New — Mission Perennial

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

It has been, perhaps, a little over seven years since the superiors general of our religious congregations were first asked if they would embark on a new venture — a "full-time Sister" coordinating religious education for a parish's Christian life. At that time, a religious education coordinator was an undefined role, prompting many lively conversations. As anything new generally raises many questions, the new title and function became something of a curiosity piece for many church members.

Prior to 1967, the words "religious education" to many simply meant organizing a limited number of classes of religious instruction or participating in some way in vacation Bible School. Yet those were the humble beginnings from which religious education grew in our diocese. Today, the Church of Rochester can boast of eighty-two men and women dedicated to serving the diocese in the capacity of religious education coordinators.

The number of coordinators presently working in the field of religious education, together with the principals and administrators of parish programs, is a genuine tribute to the vision and leadership of such men as Msgr. Albert Schnacky, Father Albert

Shamon and Father Daniel Holland. It was the vision of these three pioneer priests that laid the groundwork for the development of the role and function of today's parish religious education coordinator.

There are growing educational needs within the parish structure to which the religious education coordinator must respond directly. The coordinator must not only attend to the weekly instruction classes for the children and youth of the parish, but must help the adult community to search for insights into how their faith should be lived out in our rapidly moving contemporary world. Preparation for the sacraments no longer involves only those receiving a particular sacrament for the first time, but also includes instruction for parents in renewing their understanding of the sacrament and their responsibility to the development of their children's faith.

There are endless tasks which could be cited that fall upon the responsibility of the religious education coordinator. Over the past seven years the need for a professional person to work with the parish staff for the purpose of nourishing and sustaining our Christian heritage has emerged very clearly as an important ministry in the Church.

The teaching mission of the Church has always been a primary responsibility. The teaching mission as embodied in religious education is the extension of Jesus' work on earth and His concern to make God the

Father's presence known to all men and women. The process of revealing truth about the Father provides people with insight into their own lives. Moreover, there is the need to keep God's plan for salvation before the minds and hearts of all people. There is the need to discover God's presence in our lives and to proclaim His truth, if Christians are to grow in their faith and awareness of Gospel values.

The staff from the Office of Religious Education has selected as the division's motto a quotation from the prophet Isaiah 61:1 — "The Lord has anointed me to proclaim the Good News." This serves as an appropriate expression of the challenge and responsibility addressed to religious education.

Tomorrow, the religious educators are gathering to celebrate what they are simply calling 'Religious Education Day.' Their intention is to acknowledge gratefully and prayerfully all the good efforts of the men and women who have contributed to the development of religious education in our diocese. Tomorrow, I shall concelebrate a Eucharistic liturgy for and with them, gratefully and prayerfully acknowledging their good efforts, asking for God's continued blessings on this very important work for the Diocese of Rochester. They are the 'in' people of the Church — whose ministry may seem new, but whose mission is as old as that proclaimed by Isaiah and confirmed in the synagogue of Nazareth by the Teacher of all who would dare to proclaim the Good News.



vatican news

Pontiff Proclaims Joy in Christ's Victory

Vatican City [RNS] — Pope Paul, in an Easter message to the world, proclaimed Christian "joy" in the "victory" of the risen Jesus Christ over death.

"Today our message is that of joy," he told a huge throng in St. Peter's Square at noon on Easter Sunday.

"To you believers," he said, "we proclaim joy and peace. May you enjoy the truth of this happy day

To you who are suffering and oppressed by the burdens of life,

we direct the same invitation. For you, however, the message of the risen Christ is more specific: 'Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest.'

"To the whole world — be it attentive or deaf — with the hope that the Word of salvation may one day be a seed of life, we also proclaim our joy over the truth: Jesus Christ is risen! Yes, He lives — and He lives for us all."

When the Pope stepped out on the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica overlooking the Square, where a crowd estimated at close to

100,000 had gathered, he was greeted by a sea of waving handkerchiefs and by hand clapping. Many children in the crowd released balloons, which slowly floated upward.

Prior to his balcony appearance, the pontiff celebrated an open-air Mass in front of the Basilica.

In his message, Pope Paul reminded the faithful of their own resurrection:

"The stone has been rolled away from the tomb (of Christ), and one day the stone will be rolled away from our own tombs and our ashes will once again take on form and vigor in a transformation exceeding our present nature.

"A miracle, yes. But it is a miracle of the resurrection of the body proclaimed by our Faith: 'I believe in the resurrection of the body and in life everlasting.'

"This is our joy. It is our victory. It is our salvation, now contained in hope, but based on the reality of the resurrection of Christ and guaranteed by the Word of God.

"Victory over death? Is such a thing possible? Yes! This is our paschal message. This is the reason for our joy — a joy that has no bounds and no comparison."

Reflecting on the implications of the resurrection message, Pope Paul remarked that it "upsets" many of today's value judgments, and denounced pleasure-seeking life styles.

To base one's own existence primarily or exclusively on materialistic values, he warned, "means to build on sand; it means this especially for the person who makes his own egotistical pleasures and well-being the supreme aim of his existence, thus deceiving himself."



Easter Greeting

Pope Paul VI waves to a cheering crowd packing St. Peter's Square after he gave his "Urbi et Orbi" blessing to the city of Rome and the world. [RNS]

"Hedonism," he added, "which has become the false gospel of so many men and women of our time, is in the long run the philosophy of illusion and death."

The pontiff recalled the Christian teaching that it was "the gospel of the Cross — the law of duty, of service, of sorrow, of love, of sacrifice — that has prepared for the celebration of the paschal mystery."

The gospel message of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus "is the wise and true interpretation of human life," he said. "And although human life ends in temporal death, it conserves in itself the immortal seed of rebirth, of resurrection, and of everlasting life.

"And so today, Easter Sunday, the feast of the resurrection of Christ, which has already taken place, is likewise the feast that anticipates our own resurrection. Yes, it is so. And may this Easter message of life and of joy encircle the world, with our apostolic blessing."

At the end of his formal address in Italian, the Pope said a few words of Easter greetings in 13 languages, including English, Russian, Chinese, and Vietnamese.

He then imparted his apostolic blessing, Urbi et Orbi (To the City of Rome and the World).

The papal address and blessing were relayed live on international television and radio hook-ups.

Jerusalem's Future A Worry to Pontiff

Vatican City [RNS] — Pope Paul has once again expressed concern over the future status of Jerusalem.

Speaking on the general theme of "reconciliation among men" at his weekly general audience, the Pope also indicated concern over the problem of Palestinian refugees.

The topic has consistently been at the forefront of the Pontiff's words for the past several months.

Referring to what he called "a state of conflict" in the Holy Land, the pontiff declared:

"Besides an appropriate statute with international guarantees for the Holy City — Jerusalem — and convenient juridical protection for the Holy Places, there is a great need for a just and equitable settlement of the refugee population."

Pope Paul then recalled that on April 5 he had issued a document calling attention to the needs of

the Christian community in the Holy Land, and expressing his "anxiety" over the continuation of "the state of tension" in the Middle East.

In the document, the pontiff called for an internationally guaranteed "juridical basis" for the city of Jerusalem, where Jews, Muslims, and Christians could feel themselves to be "citizens."

Expressing his encouragement for the "sincere efforts of all who worked loyally for concord in the world," the pontiff emphasized the need for reconciliation on a personal one-to-one basis, in matters of "private disagreements," citing Jesus' injunction:

"If you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering." (Matt. 5: 23-24)