

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Women in the Church: Our Problem, Too!

Before leaving for Rome, I wrote several columns to be published in my absence. In casting about for a topic of interest to us all, my mind reflected upon the events of the Summer. Certainly, it was a difficult one for our Episcopalian friends:



As you know, on July 29th, 11 women deacons were ordained priests by four bishops of that Church. The ceremony, held in an inner-city Philadelphia parish church, was attended by nearly 2,000 persons. It was described to me by a friend as "being like a wedding where one set of parents did not approve and, therefore, did not attend — a ceremony mixed with joy and sadness." The sadness, of course, came from the fact that the bishops had decided to act in disobedience to the established norms of the American Episcopal Church. Although earnestly discussed at the last General Convention of that Church, approval for ordaining women to the priesthood was not won. The four bishops and the women,

feeling that this lack of action was unjust, decided to dissent and proceed with ordination without permission. The ordination was later declared invalid by the House of Bishops but the matter is still far from settled.

My concern, however, is not only one of general interest. For us in Rochester, there is a local interest and concern. My friend and colleague, Bishop Robert Spears has no doubt suffered greatly. One of his deacons, Ms. Merrill Bittner, was one of the eleven who were presented for ordination. She, too, has suffered. It was Bishop Spears' painful duty to suspend her for a while and forbid her to work as a priest. Misunderstanding and confusion certainly resulted in the minds of the persons-in-the-pew.

The problem is one that will have to be worked out by the Episcopalians themselves. It will be painful and challenging. Certainly, they do not need advice from us of the Roman Catholic faith. All we can give them is our promise of prayer that they will be able to carry out God's Will as they face this difficulty.

As Roman Catholics, we must stay alert to the issue. It is the wise man who learns from

others and takes their findings to heart, lest the same mistakes be made again. Certainly, the day is soon coming when we Roman Catholics will have to face the question of official recognition of the ministry of women. Already there are many women who read the scriptures in our churches, many who help to distribute the Body and Blood of Christ. In nearly 30 parishes throughout the diocese, there are Sisters who are working as pastoral assistants, full-time members of a parish staff, who do some of the work traditionally done by priests. Many people have already begun to ask when these women will be ordained. Will it come in our lifetime? How will they be received?

I am not given to predictions from a crystal ball. Nor do I have any inside information about the thinking of the nation's bishops or the Holy Father. But I am convinced that we must begin to pray and think about the issue. We must realize that St. Paul said nearly 20 centuries ago that, in Christ, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor freeman." We must open our minds and hearts to the Holy Spirit. We must consider where He is leading us. Certainly, we believe that if we follow His lead, it will be toward justice and truth.



Church Notes 50 Years



The folks at St. Theodore's Church celebrated the 50th anniversary of the founding of their parish with a special afternoon-long fete on Labor Day, Sept. 5.

The program for the day included the unveiling of a plaque in the Gates Lincoln First Bank branch office, commemorating the site of the first Mass to be celebrated for the parish.

That liturgy was held on the porch of the home of Michael Kenney, July 20, 1924. Present at the unveiling [picture center left] were Mrs. Raymond [Kenney] Monagan, her

daughter and Father Raymond J. Epping, founding pastor and now pastor emeritus of the community.

Following the unveiling, a Mass was concelebrated by the three priests now serving the parish [picture above left], Father Gerald Dunn, pastor; Father Epping and Father Francis Falletta, associate pastor.

The crowd gathered in the Lincoln First parking lot to share in the celebration [bottom picture] and members of the Genesee Valley Antique Car Society displayed antique automobiles to lend a

period flavor to the fete.

Following the liturgy, the parish held a barbecue which Auxiliary Bishop Dennis W. Hickey attended [above right].

During the day, an historical exhibit of photographs and items collected by Dominick White over the past 20 months was shown in the parish hall.

James Corlew, assistant vice-president of Lincoln First and manager of the Gates branch, noted that the celebration was unique in the history of the bank.

