



Bishop Hogan

The Courier Journal Survey Report

In any important enterprise it is valuable from time to time to step back and take a look at the picture. Where are we in reference to our goals? To what degree are we succeeding in what we want to accomplish? Are we doing the job?

The Courier-Journal has recently attempted to do just that through its readership survey. The great danger in looking at one's own work is the human inclination to fall short of objectivity, to blind oneself to the realities. Thanks to modern science this danger can be all but eliminated and a high level of objectivity achieved. The Courier-Journal has done this in the hiring of a professional organization to do the looking for them. We can, therefore, be reasonably certain that the results of the survey show "where" the Courier Journal and is at" rather than where it would like to be at. So now we can take a hard look at the Courier-Journal and be assured that it is the best and most objective look we can get.

Every public enterprise comes under fire from this quarter or that. One of the criticisms most frequently leveled against the Courier-Journal is that it is simply not read, that it ends up in the circular file in the post office or at home. This contention is, of course, based on individual experiences of that happening. But what of the reality, the overview? The survey shows conclusively that the Courier Journal is widely read, regularly read and extensively read by the people who receive it.

I know we have the readership. The next question is: how valuable is it to the total mission of the Church to have people read the Courier-Journal? Respondents tell us clearly that they need the paper to keep up with what is going on in the Church and the diocese. Especially fascinating was the enthusiastic response of presidents of Pastoral Councils. As you are well aware we will inaugurate the Diocesan Pastoral Council next spring. We can ask ourselves: if so many people, especially leaders, regard the Courier-Journal as an important source of their information about what is taking place in the Church, how could such a project as the DPC survive without shared information and formation? If the Courier Journal did not exist, what substitute form of communication from Pastoral Center to parishes and parishes to other parishes would be available? Innumerable mimeographed bulletins? Public media? Obviously not. The projected result of the Courier-Journal going out of business would be the return to isolation of our parishes, each doing its own thing. Such a projection is a contradiction to what Diocesan Pastoral Council means and a rejection of Vatican Council II with its call to wider sharing in the mission of the Church. One diocese which closed down its diocesan paper some months ago has already put it back in business. The falling off of communications became intolerable.

Another problem which comes up occasionally is the problem of financing the Courier-Journal in parishes.

Pastors and/or parish councils have opted for block cancellations of the Courier Journal as a means of saving monies in the face of dwindling financial resources. I feel very deeply for the squeeze which so many parishes find themselves in. Nor can I quarrel with the need to save every penny they can. But the solution is not in resorting to the most painless way of cutting down on expenses. It is rather in the re-assessment of priorities and asking where the Courier-Journal stands in the rank of priorities. The survey shows clearly that the Courier-Journal is used and used widely, not merely as a source of information about events, but as a tool of education. Let's take that "educational value" and examine it. We are becoming more and more committed to adult education. What are the present alternatives? Lectures, sacramental preparations, liturgy, adult ed courses and a few others. Once we consider the number of people reached, the quality of the material presented and the cost per family (\$.09+) per week, we can perhaps get a better perspective on the educational value of our diocesan newspaper. Where can one get more education value per dollar expended. We do not have to go into the dollar expenditure on our parochial schools and we regard them as a necessary part of our apostolate. But when we consider the per capita expenditure related to the number of people reached, we see clearly that parish money spent on the Courier-Journal comes to a small amount. I might add that with a certain amount of planning, parishes can recover substantial amounts of money expended on the Courier-Journal. I think these should be tried rather than writing the whole thing off as an expendable item in the budget.

Sometimes parish councils will opt for mass cancellations of the Courier-Journal, simply because they are not aware of the importance of the paper in the life of the diocese. I sincerely hope that the results of this survey will convince them that it is an important tool of our mission. Pastors should take the initiative in teaching their parish councils the meaning of priorities and the bases for judging the value of the tools we employ in our mission.

Hopefully the survey shall have put an end to questioning of the value of the Courier-Journal. It is not perfect but what human enterprise is? But the survey has opened the door to ways to improve and we are certain that will be the case under the guidance of competent professionals. The final question is this: what would we do without it?

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+Most Reverend Joseph L. Hogan, D. D.
Bishop of Rochester