

Legislature Ponders Prison Reform Bills

By KATHLEEN POWERS
Capitol Correspondent

Ever since the 1971 uprising at Attica, reform within correctional facilities in New York State has been a high priority among public officials and private groups, including church groups. The Catholic bishops of this state think criminal justice so important that they have selected it as their theme for the state's participation in the nation's bicentennial.

In the state legislature many proposals have been introduced this year dealing with prison reform. Many proposals are sponsored by Sen. John Dunne of Nassau, who was head of the Senate's Crime and Correction Committee at the time of Attica. Among his prison reform proposals are:

*S760 would permit inmates serving long sentences to go home on parole for a week at a time in order to maintain family ties. At present inmates may receive temporary releases to attend funerals, to visit with family members who are dying, to receive medical care not

available at a prison and to take part in certain work release programs.

In 1970, Sen. Dunne's committee held public hearings at which former inmates and members of their families testified that one of the greatest problems during prison confinement is keeping families together. In 1972 the legislature passed a limited furlough program, which has been praised by many officials working with prisoners.

Wrote Rabbi Daniel Kerman to Sen. Dunne, "As a chaplain at Attica Correctional Facility for quite a few years, I've been impressed by the immeasurable lift in the spirits of the inmates after they return from furlough. Their brightened outlook and more hopeful view of themselves is much longer lasting than I had anticipated it would be." Rabbi Kerman suggested that furlough programs should be expanded to include more inmates.

*S767 which passed the Senate would end the arbitrary distinction of crediting parole time against prisoners' sentences while not crediting conditional release time. Under this proposal conditional release time would also be credited. Recommendations similar to this bill were made by the State Special Commission on Attica and by the Select Committee on Correctional In-

stitutions and programs. A similar bill passed the Senate last year but died in the Assembly Rules Committee.

*S761 prohibits private and public employers from discriminating against ex-convicts seeking jobs. The bill passed the Senate during 1973 and 1974 but did not pass the Assembly either year. A similar law exists in Florida.

The purpose is to provide more job opportunities for former convicts. At present some former convicts who receive vocational training in prison are refused jobs in the areas in which they trained because the state will not license them as a result of their prior convictions. According to Sen. Dunne, some state agencies apply job prohibitions against ex-convicts "which have absolutely no connection with the crime which has been committed."

"The opportunity for an ex-convict to obtain meaningful employment which would lead him to a productive life in our society is extremely limited," said Sen. Dunne. "This bill intelligently broadens the opportunity to some degree and, hopefully, will lead to a reduction of the high recidivism rate among ex-convicts."

*S764 would establish inmate employment lists for prospective employers. The Department of Correctional Services would provide an up-to-date list of inmates eligible for parole, along with job qualifications. Employers interested in hiring ex-convicts would be able to interview eligible inmates prior to parole. This bill passed the Senate in 1973 and 1974 but has not been acted upon by the Assembly.

*S762 would establish union training programs in prisons designed to make inmates eligible for union membership upon release. These programs would acquaint prisoners with up-to-date machinery and marketable skills. They would also break down the employment barriers to ex-convicts, barriers which at present are sustained by unions.

*S763 would force boards of parole to furnish prisoners a written report of why they are denied paroles within two weeks after the prisoner seeks parole. This proposal is similar to New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Connecticut laws which require that inmates receive such reports. In New York at present, prisoners receive no reasons for denial of parole.

*S765 requires that any defendant pleading guilty to a criminal offense have an on-the-record inquiry in open court to determine the voluntariness of his or her plea. This proposal would minimize the haphazard fashion in which plea bargaining is carried out at present, usually in an informal, private conference between judge and attorneys at which the defendant is not even present.

Last year a similar bill passed the legislature but was vetoed by Governor Wilson. An amended version of this bill was passed by the Senate last week.

many. Liturgy tends to be rather flexible in nature and pluralistic, at least in non-essentials. Because of our mobility (at least until gas rationing) people will be moving to churches which more reflect their own thinking and style.

I must comment on the examples of differences you gave. For better or worse, depending on your viewpoint, the bishops have made certain restrictions and called for uniformity in certain areas: no girl servers, no communion in the hand, and no skipping the sign of peace. Personally I don't think any of these matters have enough importance to be very concerned about, but in my own case as pastor I feel that as long as they have so stipulated, I should go along with it. Part of being open is being flexible and I'm sure all of us want to be open to the Spirit wherever He breathes.

Registration Set At Sacred Heart

Registration at Sacred Heart School, 311 Flower City Pk., is scheduled for March 3-5, from 9 a.m. until 7 p.m. at the school office. The school has kindergarten and eight grades.

The minimum age for kindergarten pupils is five, and for first graders, six, by next Dec. 1. Birth certificates are required. Baptism certificates are required for all new pupils who were baptised outside the parish. The registration fee is \$25 for a family new to the school and \$10 for a family re-registering.

COURIER DEADLINE

The Courier-Journal deadline is noon Thursday for articles intended for the following Wednesday edition.

THE OPEN WINDOW



Fr. Louis Hohman

Dear Father Hohman,
We recently moved into a new area which borders three different parish boundaries, consequently we attend Mass at any of the three depending on convenience, but are very surprised to see the drastic differences at each church. We have always assumed the diocese directed the rules which each church must adhere to. Are we wrong?

For instance, one church still kneels for communion, the others do not. One has girls serving Mass, the others have boys. One allows the people to serve themselves communion, the others don't. Could you please clarify who sets up the rules?

Mr. and Mrs. W.

Dear Mr. & Mrs. W.,

The directions for the celebration of the liturgy are called rubrics, because said directions were printed in red (the Latin for red is ruber). In pre-Vatican II days these rubrics were very strict and very explicit and variations were not tolerated (even to the way a priest should extend his arms in prayer). Since the decree on Liturgy in Vatican II there is a great deal less rigidity. It is preferred that celebration be more human and personal and less mechanical. So today there are many options allowable, mostly relative to prayers, blessings, opening rites, as well as types of music and symbols (e.g. the dance as a liturgical expression, or a morality play or audio-visual in place of the homily, or special kinds of offertory processions).

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Dear friend,
Who cares about Holy Land refugees?
Who cares if the baby born tonight in a refugee tent will have a clean blanket?
Who cares if eager breadwinners deprived of their livelihoods can be re-trained for new jobs?
Who cares about the orphans of war?
Our Holy Father cares.

Ever since these wars began, our Pontifical Mission for Palestine has been caring in practical terms: shoes, blankets, hot meals, medicine, new houses, new classrooms, self-help family loans, re-training, scholarships.

The world is beginning to care a lot about the hazard to everyone's peace in the unsettled status of 1,800,000 Holy Land refugees. While diplomacy remains bogged, your priests, nuns, and lay workers are feeding, healing, teaching, mending the peace person-by-person—by caring where it counts.

We believe that you care too. About shivering children, about Christ's homeland, about peace, about the humane thing.

The headlines of recurring crises in the Holy Land will not let your caring rest. We beg you to invest in people who need you, with the handy coupon below. Your gift will go to work right away.

- And thanks for caring,
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