

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

My Fondest Hope and the Dawn of Reality

[Address delivered by Bishop Hogan at the opening of the Convocation of the Diocesan Pastoral Council on June 13, 1975 at Becket Hall.]

I think you know, dear friends, how pleased I am to speak to you tonight. And these moments at the beginning of the first session of our Diocesan Pastoral Council are special moments. I wish to drink them in and savor their fullness. They come in the brief quiet following four years of what were very difficult birth pangs for this organization. But they also joyfully anticipate what will soon follow: the halting sounds of new life as we begin to work together. And so in these few minutes in the "in-between" allow me to offer my reflections in order that we may be more aware of what we do and why we are doing it. Let me give you a meditation on the moment.

The great Protestant theologian, Paul Tillich, used to speak frequently of what he called the **Kairos**, the moment in time when God's kingdom breaks into man's earthly life. When this happens, there is, of course, a profound change. Man can no longer go on in his rut, since the divine has provided new light and new direction. If he is faithful, man must respond: he must pack his bags and move on where the Lord will show him. But how frightening! One must follow what is sometimes unknown. One must choose now what will so profoundly affect the future.

Tonight to me is such a **kairos**. Here and now, I firmly believe, God is breaking into our life in the Church of Rochester with new light and new direction. And we must respond. It is time that the People of God of this diocese have a forum in which to dialogue and make definite suggestions for the direction of their mission. It is time that they take responsibility for priorities and projections. And so we are here to respond. I do not pretend that we have the perfect vehicle. Our Council may be too big or too small. It may not be representative of all the people. It may not have the perfect Constitution. And certainly it is a risk: we do not know what the future brings by way of new challenges. But we are here. We are here as a response to that constant call of God to His people to minister to one another and to care for all men. And it seems to me that in a moment when God breaks in and man responds, we have a sacred moment. Perhaps we are remiss not to remove our shoes.

But if these moments fill me with an awareness of the sacred, so also do they speak to me of the practical. For nearly six years now I have said to you that I was unwilling to be a bishop in the style of a medieval king. I would not — and could not — make decisions in a vacuum according to my likes and dislikes. And so I have worked for and prayed for this moment: a realization that there was a broad-based group of people in the diocese who would be willing to work on major problems and try, however impossible the task, to begin to find some solutions. My list is long and some will say totally unrealistic but I share it with you because of the beauty of the moment which is "in-between" and which allows me to talk about what might be. I ask you, dear Council members, to think with me about some of these pressing questions which have been on my mind for several years.

1) How can we bring about effective spiritual renewal? All over our twelve-county diocese I see more and more hopeful signs of spiritual awakening. More people are praying and reading the Word of God, more are celebrating the sacraments. But people cry out for leadership: How do we pray? Teach us to pray! Lead us in prayer! This is an ancient role for the Church's leaders and yet we seem so ill-prepared. What can we do to meet this need?

2) What of the relationship between our Church and our society in the next ten years? Will we, as Christians, simply fit comfortably into the American affluence or can the Church of Rochester begin to effect some transformation in the society in which it lives? Can the Church call society to a life filled with more gospel values, to live a more simple life-style in keeping with the life of Jesus? Can our local Church bring about a more equitable distribution of food, energy, of money, of persons even in our own communities?

3) What of Church structures in the next decade? Certainly, all the signs point to the fact that something major will have to be done. Perhaps most revealing were the statistics which Bishop Hickey presented recently based on a study done by our Personnel Board. These figures show that the next five years will be lean years for priests with fewer ordinations and a large number of retirements. We must work with this new problem in a creative way. Are there new sources of religious vocations that we are not reaching? How will Sisters, who each year become better prepared, be employed in ministry? And most importantly, how will laypersons help in ministry? What new needs will produce what new roles? Is it ever

possible for a group such as ours to anticipate the problems before they happen, rather than to have to face the crisis only when it arrives?

4) Even as I speak of new structure, I am aware that we must not confine our Rochester mission to those within that Church. It was Jesus who told us, "Go you, therefore, and teach all nations." We must concern ourselves with not only our own but with the 50 per cent unchurched who need to be cared for and served. They must be shown in some concrete way that the Gospel does indeed have meaning for their lives, that Gospel values improve the quality of life and provide means for the reconciliation of man.

You can see, dear friends, that my hopes are high for what this group might have the courage to face. My hope runs high that very soon we will be setting budgets and allotting personnel because we have chosen to set our priorities according to the Gospel and the real needs of God's people.

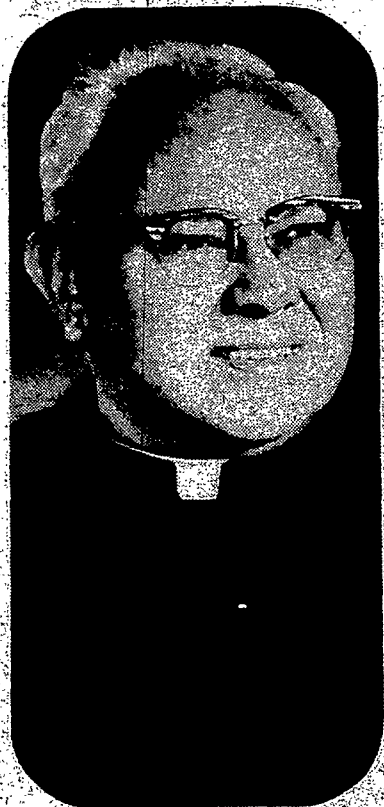
Finally, this evening these few moments are special because they are so filled with expectation; expectation for not only what we can do for the Church of Rochester, but also what we can be for each other. I look to you to be strong in this endeavor. There will be work and pain. There will be need for hard dialogue on "gutsy" issues. There will be need to share yourself and be open to others. There will be need to reach Christian consensus. I look to you to return to your regions of your constituency and keep lines of communication open. And, more than anything else, I expect you will pray — pray frequently and earnestly that we might seek out the Lord's needs and do them with generosity.

In turn, I promise you to listen and try to hear what each of you is saying. I promise you respect for your opinion, and admiration that you have the courage to speak it. I promise you many more hours of glad service. I am not yet about to turn from our common task. And finally, I too will pray — unceasingly.

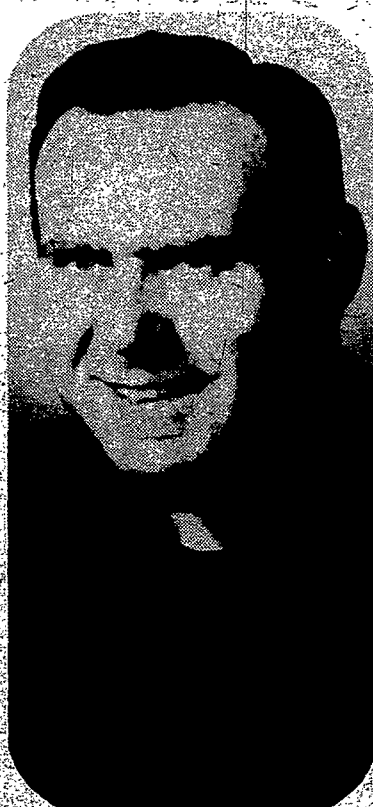
And so you have heard your Bishop. My words have not been those of a great wise man nor of a prophet. But please know that they come from one most sincere and interested in the Church and its people. All that I say is for that reason. All that we must be for that reason.

Blessed are you, Lord, our God, King of the universe, who has brought us to this special time. May we use it to Your eternal glory.

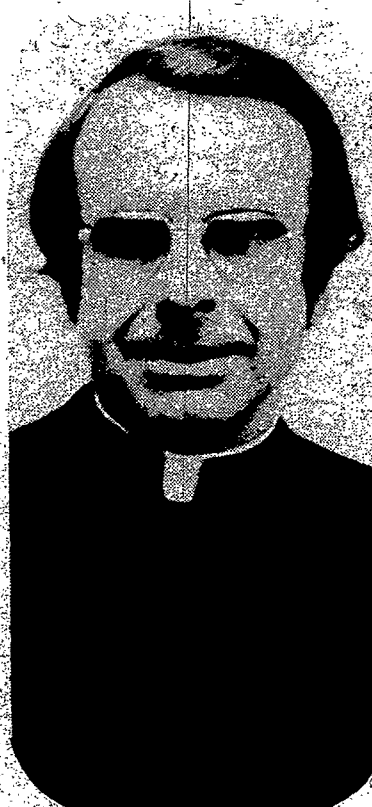
Four New Pastors Named



FATHER KUCHMAN
St. Michael, Montezuma;
St. John, Port Byron



FATHER DOWNS
St. Pius X, Van Etten



FATHER SCHNACKY
St. Patrick, Cato;
St. Thomas, Red Creek



FATHER METZGER
Holy Redeemer