

# State Bishops Discuss Parish Life

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Buffalo — Parish Life was the major consideration of the 24 bishops and more than 60 priests, religious and laity gathered last week for the Spring meeting of the bishops of New York State.

Faith — its growth and development — seemed to be the prime concern of Cardinal Terence Cooke, president of the New York State Conference of Catholic Bishops who arranged the meeting. Host for the events was Bishop Edward Head of Buffalo.

In his opening remarks, Cardinal Cooke defined the parish as a "special community of faith." He noted that the primary question facing the group was "How do we renew the parish and accomplish evangelization and human development?"

Offering his own "strong convictions" concerning the growth and future of the parish was keynote speaker, Msgr. James F. Coffey, whose 45-year career in the priesthood includes positions as the rector of two seminaries and more recently, an appointment to the pastorate of St. Patrick's parish in Bayshore, Long Island.

"As pastor, I have found both an 'unbelievable maturity among the leadership in the parish, and a weakness of faith among a large proportion of those who come to Church," Msgr. Coffey commented. Calling this large proportion "spiritually exhausted," he remarked, "If we changed back to Latin, stopped preaching and returned the priest with his back to the people, they'd still come to

Mass. They haven't been touched by the changes of Vatican II."

In order to bring faith and strength to such parish members, Msgr. Coffey urged pastors to "find new ways and new signs to express their faith and communicate it to others." He noted that "new forms to express faith grow out of conversion experiences," and reflected that conversion entailed a continuing process of expanding and shifting "our horizons — our limited notions about ourselves and God."

Picking up the theme of the importance of faith was Bishop Francis Mugavero of Brooklyn, who in his homily at a Monday evening welcoming liturgy said: "We come together not as doctors, lawyers,

priests or religious but as Catholics, Christians. Our concern is the faith community — building it and sharing it."

"When we're nourished by the Eucharist," Bishop Mugavero reflected, "then we're able to go out and share the reality of the Lord in our lives."

The group's participants, including diocesan representatives from priests' senates and pastoral councils, as well as representatives of the Advisory Council of the United States Catholic Conference, broke into small groups to consider the various facets of parish life: spirituality; worship; education; parish as family; social action; finances and collegial procedure.

Their conclusions reported at the end of the meeting stressed the need for religious education from "the cradle to the grave," the importance of developing new approaches to strengthen the faith of parishioners, the need for parishes willing to take risks with new approaches to share resources and cooperate with one another, the obligation of parishes to reach out to the community and its problems and the mutual importance of priests, religious and laity in giving shape and direction to the parish.



The Rochester delegation at the meeting included (standing, from left): Carl Loewenguth, Sister Mary Ann Binsack, Father James Marvin, Auxiliary Bishops John E. McCafferty and Dennis W. Hickey, Mrs. Marilyn Muench; (seated, from left) Sister Barbara Moore, Bishop Joseph L. Hogan and Sister Kathleen Kircher.

## ON THE RIGHT SIDE



Fr. Paul J. Cuddy

In February Father Timothy McGough (pronounced "McGoff") wrote: "Do you know any priest who could take over as chaplain from March 20 to April 1?"

Father Tim and Father Cyril Guise are Carmelites from the Waverly Monastery. The two alternate as chaplains for St. Joseph's Hospital, Elmira. Father Cyril was to return from a course in hospital chaplaincy service the end of March. Father Timothy was to leave March 21 to begin the course. This left a 10-day gap.

I phoned Father T. "I should be glad to take care of the hospital." Hospital work is congenial to my vocation, temperament and experience. So on Saturday, March 20, I arrived at the hospital in time for supper. Father Timothy took me in two, introduced me to the sisters, including his new assistant, Sister Barbara, gave me the schedule of service and services, handed over the key to the chaplain's quarters and his beeper. Then he disappeared.

What of St. Joseph's Hospital? To appreciate that hospital truly, one should know the history of the place: of its founder, Sister Rose Alice Conway, and of the doctors, sisters and benefactors who created St. Joseph's. The word "created" is deliberate because materially the hospital practically began with nothing, and under the Spirit of God and the patronage of St. Joseph there evolved a fine hospital which has never forgotten its special dedication to the poor.

Certain first impressions were

confirmed in the course of the stay: a genuine friendliness — a family-like spirit pervades the place; the extent and quality of the facilities; the thousand employees who give services so diverse, from simple emergency cases to the nuclear medicine department. I said to Sister Evelyn Connolly as she narrated incidents about Sister Rose Alice and the early days: "Sister, some one should collect these stories and put them between boards. Why don't you do it?"

From an almost primitive simple administration of the early hospital 67 years ago to its present complexity under an astute Sister Martha Gersbach, administrator, there have been hundreds of great men and women who have brought the hospital, and its fine Nursing School to their present excellence: doctors, teachers, nurses, benefactors technicians — and those splendid volunteers, both women and men without whose help the hospital would stagger.

Since the priests of Elmira are confreres of mine, I made it a point to break bread with many of them. Lunch or supper time is best for

reunion and fraternity, since then the parish schedule is not disrupted. Most rectory cooks are alerted to my healthy appetite and pull out the extra stops since they recognize one who appreciates their artistry.

Spending even so short a time in Elmira does give an impression which I think is valid. It is a friendly city, and the Catholic people have a healthy possessiveness toward their priests and religious. Saturday I met many youngsters of elementary and high school age on Main Street. All of them beamed at me, a stranger, but one recognizable as a priest, and they cordially called out, "Hello, Father." The heartiness of these youngsters indicates the evangelical simplicity of the goodness of the people at large.

Someone said rather sardonically, "Elmirans are over-interested in one another's business." The obvious response it seems to me is: "Well, isn't it better to be a bit over-interested than not to care? St. Paul wrote: 'Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep.' Not caring is that great malaise which congeals souls and communities."

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