

That FIRST Detroit Meeting... 1 Year Ago

Last in a 2 part series
By MARTIN TOOMBS

Women's ordination is not a new subject of discussion in the Catholic Church, but it was given a new emphasis Thanksgiving weekend, 1975, when the "Women in Future Priesthood Now: A Call to Action" conference drew 1,200 to Detroit to discuss the subject. They took an expanded interest in the subject back to their home dioceses and local conferences soon were addressing the question. Many of these conferences have examined two aspects of women as priests: the historical perspective, and the gifts women would bring to the priesthood.

Despite statements by Pope Paul and Archbishop Bernardin that women can't be ordained, many don't see it as a closed issue. The NCCB Committee on Pastoral Research and Practices issued a report in 1972 which said, "The question of the ordination of women is an old one in the Church, but it has not been thoroughly researched for Catholic theology. There is no explicit teaching concerning ordination of women that settles the question."

The positions of Archbishop Bernardin and Pope Paul are similar, both citing tradition as the most important prohibition of women's ordination. Archbishop Bernardin, in his statement of October 1975, said, "There is a serious theological issue throughout its history the Catholic Church has not called women to the priesthood." To support his statement, he quotes from the report by the Committee on Pastoral Research, that "tradition is a source of theology." The report concludes that "the constant tradition and practice of the Catholic Church against the ordination of women, though not formally defined, is Catholic doctrine."

Many dispute the importance of tradition. Father Richard McBrien, speaking at Cornell University in April 1976, said that "tradition had to be taken into account" as the practice may have resulted from good reasons, and it is those reasons that are important. He questions the weight of tradition itself, asking whether we may "still be in our babbling stage," and if the ordination of women isn't a change that is acceptable now, and needs to be implemented to prepare the Church for its maturity.

Leonard Swidler, a professor of religion at Temple University, points out in an article recently published in the National Catholic Reporter that women have been ordained before, as deacons in the early Church. "Evidence is extremely strong that for hundreds of years women were ordained deaconesses," he noted. "No one in the first centuries of this tradition thought this a non-sacramental ordination."

Archbishop Bernardin also said that "no one male or female, can claim a right to ordination," and therefore the Church does nothing wrong in excluding women.

Father McBrien replies that this statement could be used to "exclude black males from ordination, or Indians or Chinese, or — given an extraordinary inversion of circumstances some day — even white males," he said. "If no one could possibly have a right to ordination, then no one can unjustly be excluded from ordination."

Swidler asks, "Why of all the ways of being human is only sex paramourly important? What about skin color? Jesus was white, therefore blacks cannot become priests? Jesus was a carpenter, therefore only carpenters can become priests?"

In fact, Jesus also chose only Jews as his apostles and disciples. No Greeks or Romans, for example, were chosen, although available, Swidler says.

The statements of St. Paul prohibiting participation of women in the Church (1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35) are often given as reasons why women can't be ordained. An NCCB report in 1974, "Theological Reflections on the Ordination of Women," dismissed this argument, stating "that these Pauline texts should not be cited as arguing against the ordination of women." The prohibition against women speaking in Church has been countermanded by the Church, with women acting as lay readers.

Another statement of Paul shows a different attitude toward women: "For all you who have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:27-28)

Women's ordination groups divide their time between studying the issue of women in the Church, and discussion of the potential ministry of women priests. The women's ordination Core Commission's stated purpose is "the ordination of women to a transformed, renewed priestly ministry."

Cited often in the discussion of women priests' ministry is the work of pastoral assistants and other women working in pastoral roles in parishes throughout the country. Sister Margaret Traxler, SSND, says of women priests: "I think it will be a different kind of ministry." As an example, she notes that "I visit many homes for the elderly, which are visited by priests maybe once a month. I think that there would be

women (priests) in residence in those homes. It would be a different call."

Women's ordination will be discussed by the nation's bishops when the recommendations of the "Call to Action" conference are presented at the NCCB Spring meeting in May 1977. Should the bishops approve the recommendation that women should be ordained, which is not expected,

the proposal would then have to go to the Vatican.

One year ago, the question was "can women be ordained?" For many, the issue now is "when will women be ordained?" While the activities of the past year may have brought such an event closer, even the most fervent advocates of women's ordination are unwilling to name a date when the first woman will be ordained.

Pastoral Changes Announced

Monsignors Joseph and Gerard Gefell, who resigned last Spring from pastorates in Auburn and Ontario, respectively, have finished their studies at St. Joseph's Seminary, Dunwoodie. Msgr. Joseph will be administrator of Holy Cross parish, Rochester, during the continuing illness of Father Robert Fennessy, and Msgr. Gerard will be associate pastor of St. Lawrence,

Greece, the Pastoral Office announced last week.

Father Ralph Fraats, who has been at St. Lawrence, will go to St. John's Clyde, and St. Patrick's Savannah, as associate pastor, and Father Gerard Hafner will move from the Wayne County parishes to Penfield, to be associate pastor of St. Joseph's.

Diocesan Appointments



Msgr. Joseph Gefell, to temporary administrator, Holy Cross Parish, Rochester, from study leave.

Msgr. Gerard Gefell, to associate pastor, St. Lawrence, Greece, from study leave.

Father Ralph Fraats, to associate pastor, St. John's, Clyde, and St. Patrick's, Savannah, from associate pastor, St. Lawrence, Greece.

Father Gerard Hafner, to associate pastor, St. Joseph's, Penfield, from associate pastor, St. John's, Clyde, and St. Patrick's, Savannah.

State Catholic Unit Cites Government Intrusions

Albany [RNS] — The New York State Catholic Conference has announced plans for a major study of the rights of volunteer groups and their role in providing public services.

Charles J. Tobin Jr., conference secretary, said that "when government squeezes voluntary groups out, either by preempting the field or by slapping extensive regulation and heavy supervision on groups trying to help others, then you have a real problem for America... the specter of statism or complete government control and regulation of our lives."

"The freedom to choose is at stake, if every kind of service except government service gets either legislated or regulated or starved out of existence," Tobin said.

He noted that churches are the major non-governmental agency in meeting such public needs as education, health, adoption and child care.

The New York State Catholic Conference represents the state's eight dioceses. The report on the proposed study of volunteerism was presented to and adopted by the New York State Bishops Conference at its Fall meeting.

The report indicated that another aspect of the problem develops when the government "pulls out" of programs leaving the voluntary groups uncertain and unable to continue.

For example, the report said, government creates a co-op program of health care for sick and elderly people. Private groups are asked to staff and build the program and the government promises to provide payments for the service rendered. However, after the program is under way, the government cuts back on the

payment or builds its own facility. The private groups are forced to close facilities and are often left with huge debts. Meanwhile, the existing needs are still not met.

"We go into these programs in good faith, and then find our fiscal partner leaving," Tobin said. "It presents a real question of whether the government and the public understand the role of the voluntary agency in providing human services or not."

He said that "at the root of the problem is this: when you come down to one agency, the government agency, providing all the service, there is no freedom left. You cannot choose anything except to accept the government service. This is a real erosion of our American way of life."

Not Changing, Says Defiant Archbishop

Alencon, France [RNS] — Rebel French Roman Catholic Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, C.S.S., said here that he has no intention of changing his course of opposition to Pope Paul and the Vatican.

"I am determined to continue training real priests," the 70-year-old prelate told a meeting of Catholics. "It is not a question of cassocks and Latin. It's a question of faith."

Archbishop Lefebvre, a leading ultra-conservative foe of liturgical reforms promoted by Vatican II, was suspended from his priestly and episcopal functions last July for ordaining priests and deacons at his seminary in Ecône, Switzerland, in direct contravention of Canon Law prescriptions and explicit papal orders.

The Neediest Cases

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her into hardship. Five are in school and need shoes, coats and winter clothing. Because of these problems there will not be any money for Christmas treats.

Fund

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Courier-Journal with such cases. Though all are true and are within the diocese, they represent only a small part of the caseload being attended to by the Catholic Family Center. The persons described live in urban and rural settings. Any parish in the diocese with special requests is invited to contact Catholic Charities.

Readers may contribute to individual cases but because some may receive a great deal of attention and others none, Catholic Family Center must use its expertise in distributing the aid so that as many as possible are helped.

The Catholic Charities office is not able to accommodate gifts of clothing, food or toys. Non-perishable food items and toys may be left at St. Michael's, 669 N. Clinton Ave., and at Immaculate Conception, using the Edinburgh Street side of the school, non-perishable food at Mount Carmel, 60 Woodward St., but call in advance to arrange delivery. Also many parishes throughout the diocese accept non-perishable food items. We advise anyone interested to contact his own parish.

All contributions should go to: Courier-Journal Christmas Fund, Care of Catholic Charities, 50 Chestnut St., Rochester, N.Y. 14604.

This year, because of the UPS strike, the U.S. Postal Service reports that their volume of mail is much greater than previous Christmas seasons. So contributions must be made early to be more effective.

38 The story of Mrs. B. is the plain truth of the true needs, of a family needing food and clothing and the extras that children look for at Christmas such as toys. This 37-year-old mother has children, 5, 11, and 16 who could use money for jackets, coats, pants, shoes, socks, caps, gloves, boots and underwear.

39 Mr. and Mrs. V. were a very happy family. They have seven children and he had suitable employment while his wife remained at home taking care of the family. Then the situation drastically changed. Mr. V. became very ill and the doctor has told Mrs. V. that he will never be able to work again. Because of Mr. V's condition, his wife has to remain home and is also unable to work.

40 Mrs. R. has lived in the city for three years. Her husband abandoned her recently with a new baby. She could no longer afford their furnished apartment and moved into a substandard unit. Mrs. R. has no relatives in the city and she is in desperate need of furniture, baby items and household necessities.

41 Mrs. D.D., mother of 13 children, seven still at home, could use some help to lighten her load of being mother and father, too. Mrs. D.D. and her children need all the basics of life.

42 Mrs. S., 33, lives with her three children, two daughters 12 and 10, and one son, 11. Their income is from Social Security. The father died in 1975 and they need all the help they can get. The mother does a good job with the money she receives, but nothing is left for extras for her or the children.

43 Mrs. R., 39, lives with her five daughters, 17, 15, 7, 4 and 2. Her income is from welfare and she does what she can. These girls miss a lot of things that other children have. The mother is ill most of the

time and because of this, she is not able to provide for her family as she would like to. The girls make all their clothes when they get some material, which on their budget is not often.

44 J. is 19, her brother, 18. Last year their mother and father both died in unrelated, sudden illnesses within two months, leaving J. and 12 other children ranging in age from 4 to 18. Jane's parents both worked. Scant insurance covered burial and caught up bills but that was it.

45 A rent increase, added doctor bills and the loss of a loved one brought sadness this past year to Mrs. L. Your remembrance during this holiday time would help to brighten her days.

46 Mr. H. is 56 and has no family except for his wife who is in a nursing home. His income from Social Security is limited and he often does not have enough money to buy food.

47 Mr. and Mrs. R. are a young couple with a one-year-old child. Because of employment difficulties, they face a bleak Christmas.

48 Mr. and Mrs. M. and their four children are facing a dismal Christmas because Mr. M. had a mental breakdown, now they have little income and have exhausted their financial resources.

49 Miss G. is a bright student who had to drop out of college because of financial difficulties. She is working at a "sub" shop to get enough money to go back to school.

50 Mrs. S. and her three children have been managing on a tight budget. But now that Mrs. S. will not be able to work for a while because of a leg injury, they face a bleak Christmas.