

Bishop Issues Call To Action

December 29, 1976

My dear People:

Two years ago the National Conference of Catholic Bishops implemented a bicentennial program to promote social justice. Phase one included the "Liberty and Justice for All" booklet presenting position papers on the eight areas of life demanding social justice. In October of this year, laity, sisters, priests and bishops formulated recommendations on these social justice areas at the "Call to Action" Conference in Detroit.

I was one of our Diocese's delegates to the Detroit Conference and, as I said in my *Courier-Journal* Reflections, "I regard the substance of what was accomplished in Detroit as a very creative, powerful, somewhat awkward and a bit raw and uneven voice of the Catholic people of this country. We need to

listen, reflect, critique and be called to conversion by this voice."

The final step in the "Liberty and Justice for All" program will be the composition of the United States Bishops' pastoral letter on Justice to the American Catholic Church next May. To me that word "pastoral" means that I should speak with my fellow bishops only after an attentive and open listening to people in all 12 counties of this diocese.

I have, therefore, asked my staff to design and implement a process for extensive dialogue in the Diocese on the positions taken in Detroit. It is an open process. It should provide me with a variety of inputs including a systematic pulse-taking of the parish councils, regions and Diocesan Pastoral Council on 22 specific issues. There will be study of the eight documents by groups able to give me quality reflection on the

materials. Any of you may write to me c/o *Courier-Journal* Office, 67 Chestnut Street, Rochester, New York 14604 on anything in the documents. I refer you to the story on Page 1.

Our time line is not long. I ask you, nonetheless, to put real thoughtfulness behind your input. We bishops of the United States have serious responsibilities before us in May 1977. Therefore, may I call upon your generosity in providing me with the thoughts you may have on the matters contained in this week's *Courier-Journal* edition.

With every best wish for a blessed New Year, I remain

Devotedly yours in Christ

Joseph L. Hogan
Joseph L. Hogan
Bishop of Rochester

BISHOP HOGAN

Cardinal Dearden's Report On The Detroit Conference

No one expects the U.S. Catholic bishops to endorse everything approved by the national justice conference in Detroit last month, according to Cardinal John Dearden of Detroit. But the cardinal thinks people do expect the U.S. bishops to continue the process of the conference "by responding with decisive action where it is called for and with honest disagreement where that seems necessary." The cardinal presented a brief report to the U.S. bishops November 9, during the bishops' fall meeting in Washington, D.C. Cardinal Dearden is chairman of the bishops' Ad Hoc Committee for the Bicentennial which sponsored the justice conference. As a process of consultation and dialogue, the bicentennial program sponsored by the U.S. bishops has been a success, Cardinal Dearden said. There were some flaws, he added. But even those flaws "can be exaggerated." Cardinal Dearden said that "the intelligence, enthusiasm and commitment of those who were chosen to attend the conference is a testimony to the discernment of the bishops who appointed them." He said the bishops "were able to bring together what must surely rank as one of the more diversified deliberative assemblies in our history."

Today I will attempt to make a brief report on the "Liberty and Justice for All" program concluding with the Call to Action conference held in Detroit two weeks ago.

Within the next several months the Ad Hoc Committee for the Observance of the Bicentennial will be preparing a final and significantly more detailed report for presentation to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. That report will cover all phases of the bicentennial program on "Liberty and Justice for All," the consultation, the hearings, the reports of the Detroit preparatory committees and the deliberations and decisions of the Detroit conference itself.

At our meeting in May it is anticipated that we will discuss what actions we can and should take to respond to this program in order to develop a realistic five-year plan of action for justice. For now, I will simply try to present a very brief outline of what has taken place.

The "Liberty and Justice for All" program encompassed seven national hearings held in various parts of the country and an extensive program of parish discussions. The hearings alone produced seven volumes of testimony. Many members of the NCCB participated as panelists at

these hearings in which some 500 persons presented views and recommendations on current concerns and issues facing the church and society.

The diocesan program of parish discussions produced responses suggesting the participants' understanding of the issues confronting the church and society and the actions which people felt should be taken to deal with those issues. A number of dioceses also sponsored regional or diocesan hearings, while individuals, parishes and organizations often submitted to the ad hoc committee their own independent reports and recommendations as well.

All of this material was referred to eight preparatory committees whose task it was to produce working papers, summarizing the material and offering commentary and reflection on the matters brought before the ad hoc committee. In addition, these committees were asked to present several recommendations for action for consideration by the Call to Action conference. Each one of the eight preparatory committees was chaired by a bishop and was composed of scholars and persons active in the life and ministry of the church.

The conference which was to consider the work of these committees took place in Detroit on October 21-23, attended by some 1,340 delegates either appointed by the ordinaries of 152 dioceses or by 92 national Catholic organizations on the basis of one delegate per organization.

The delegates met in working committees to consider and amend the proposed actions and to deliberate on recommendations dealing with the eight general topic areas of the bicentennial program, and then in plenary sessions to vote on recommended actions. The results of their labor are now before our committee. Some have been widely reported in the press. Others of equal or far greater importance have received less attention. These recommendations are one element of the entire bicentennial consultation. Together with the testimony from the hearings and the evaluative papers of the preparatory committees they reflect the concerns and judgments of a wide variety of American Catholics.

Neither the volumes of hearing testimony nor the 800,000 parish responses, nor the working papers, nor the conference resolutions, can be regarded as a fully represen-

tative sample of Catholic opinion. No one has claimed that it should be. Each contains the views and considered judgment of those who chose to participate or who were appointed to represent a portion of the American Catholic community. Together, the materials represent a tremendous investment of time, energy, and intelligence on the part of a great number of our Catholic people and witness to their deep commitment to the church.

The level of participation in the bicentennial program depended on many factors. The parish consultation touched less than half of the nation's dioceses. On the other hand, almost all our dioceses participated in the Call to Action conference.

The committee's staff was able to meet personally with half of the selected delegates in orientation sessions around the country during the spring of this year. From their own observations and those of the committee made during the Detroit conference it could be said that the intelligence, enthusiasm and commitment of those who were chosen to attend the conference is a testimony to the discernment of the bishops who appointed them. The considerable numbers of relatively poor persons and minority Americans give evidence that our bishops tried to see to it that those who are most directly involved in issues of justice were heard at Detroit.

All of this is to say that there was a rich and varied mixture of experience and background on the part of the delegates. Aware of this, the committee deliberately designed the procedures of the conference to facilitate the fullest participation of all. Every effort was made, for example, to see to it that the rules of the conference did not inhibit the inexperienced and that the authority and prestige of bishops, staff and writing committees did not limit the freedom of the delegates to amend, revise or reject the proposals placed before them.

We must remember that this was our first attempt to convene such an assembly of the American Catholic community and, working in unison, we bishops were able to bring together what must surely rank as one of the more diversified deliberative assemblies in our history. The bishops of the country were asked to appoint delegations composed of equal numbers of persons with administrative responsibility, persons active in parish life, and persons who were victims of injustices characteristic

CARDINAL DEARDEN

of a particular part of the country. Responding to this request, the bishops were also sensitive to balancing laity, clergy, and religious, men and women and racial and ethnic groups within the diocese. While we have not yet completed a detailed survey of the delegates, it was the impression of most observers that truly remarkable efforts had been made to follow these guidelines.

Hispanic and black Catholics, the young and the aged, religious and lay were perhaps better represented at the Call to Action conference than at any previous national Catholic forum. While the laity was present in great numbers, still a large portion of the delegates were priests, exercising positions of responsibility within their dioceses.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

In this connection a word on the recommendations which these delegates approved might be helpful. While the emphasis of some reports has been on the somewhat sensational features of the deliberations at the Detroit conference, a very large percentage of its resolutions dealt with matters of parish, neighborhood and family life, personal morality and religious education issues that concern ordinary Catholics.

Many of the recommendations to emerge from the process have a direct bearing on the work already under way at the national and local level. For example, the recommendations on education and family are modest but significant, lending strong support to our continuing efforts at greater

communication, sharing of responsibility and cooperative planning and programming at the parish and diocesan level. A series of recommendations ask for greater attention to multilingual and multicultural concerns in education, liturgy and training for ministry, all of which accord well with existing efforts at the national level.

The delegates endorsed our leadership in pro-life activity, they endorsed our strong statements against racism and discrimination and they pledged their support for all our efforts to combat hunger and poverty. Social action proposals, both domestic and international, for the most part provide solid backing to recent and episcopal statements on economic justice, political responsibility and human rights. These proposals suggest greater integration of social action work at the diocesan, state and national level.

In reflecting upon the program of the ad hoc committee with you today, I wish to make a few further observations.

First, we must remember that this program has attempted to initiate a process of dialogue and consultation. From the beginning it has been clear that the program was to produce advisory recommendations which would form the basis of a pastoral plan of justice. This process of consultation and dialogue has given new hope to many who had grown skeptical of sharing responsibility in their church. It has allowed many persons and groups long excluded from having an effective voice to be heard at last.

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