

Clustering When Parishes Work Together

By MARTIN TOOMBS
Southern Tier Editor

Elmira—Elmira parishes have a long history of inter-parish cooperation on Catholic schools, more than 10 years. The success of that cooperation has been followed by the establishment of other inter-parish programs.

An example is the combined CCD and sacramental program operated by St. Casimir's and St. Anthony's parishes.

Sister Mary Ann Sliwa, who also teaches second grade at St. Casimir's School, coordinates the program, working with Father Vincent Panepinto of St. Anthony's. Father Paul Gibbons and Sister Mary Cogan of St. Casimir's also teach. The 10 lay teachers also represent both parishes.

In its second year, the program grew from a realization that St. Casimir's CCD classes were small, and St. Anthony's were large, Sister Mary Ann explained. By combining the grades 1-6 programs, two classes of 15 to 20 students were set up for each grade. Classes are at St. Anthony's on Monday afternoons.

Both parishes participate in the combined junior high CCD program at St. Patrick's Junior High, which also involves five other parishes.

Father Panepinto noted that both St. Casimir's and St. Anthony's are national parishes, basically in the same neighborhood. Many CCD students, although from different parishes, go to school together, he pointed out, so few problems with distance have occurred.

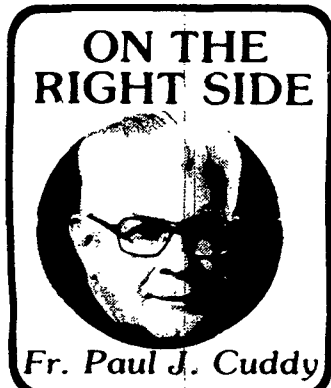
The parishes also cooperate on the First Communion preparation program, which includes those second graders attending Catholic schools and CCD. The program is based on the Christiane Brusselmans program, "We Celebrate the Eucharist," which features monthly Masses for the class members and their families.

The program was explained to the parents at two meetings in the Fall. They are asked to assist in their child's education; Sister Mary Ann emphasized the necessity of parent, teacher, priest and student cooperation.

Last year the Masses were offered in each parish, which caused some scheduling problems. This year, after the urging of the parents that the program continue, special Masses are held on Saturday evening, alternating between the two churches. Sister Mary Ann said that the response to the eight monthly Masses has been "very favorable," and that attendance is excellent. Often when a family is unable to attend, she noted, they call ahead of time to tell her.

When the preparation is completed, the children receive their First Communion in their parish as a class, or they can receive before that with their family or at a home Mass, Father Panepinto said.

The program has been more than an experiment in cooperation. Sister Mary Ann and Father Panepinto agreed that the added instructional materials and volunteer teachers made available in the combined program has resulted in better quality instruction for the children of both parishes.



How do you think the Church is faring?

Do you mean universally? or in the States? or in the diocese?

Universally she is in tough shape. In China the Church is practically destroyed, excepting for some pockets hopefully preserved by the Chinese Legion of Mary. Europe? Behind the Iron Curtain, constant harassment or suppression. In Communist controlled countries, excepting for Poland, the Church has neither the prestige nor a hierarchy strong enough to defend herself. I frequently meet men who have lived under Communism and am always impressed by the mixture of dread and hatred they have for Communist oppression. Solzhenitsyn's books and lectures have alerted some Americans, who normally think: "There is no Communist danger." Who will read Solzhenitsyn when they can park their brains on the mantel and gape at Mary Hartman, or Kojak or soap operas?

What of the States?

Since Vatican II powerful, organized, vocal groups of Catholics oppose our Holy Father, the Holy See; they cast suspicion on the hierarchy; and worst of all they undermine Catholic teaching — even intruding into catechetical texts and programs. They cultivate opposition to the laws of the Church. They re-interpret the words of Christ: "Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church; and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. To thee will I give the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, that what you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; and what you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Mt. 16:18)

Where can I get something on the subject?

Send me \$1.25 plus 25 cents postage and I will send you one of the best: Decline and Fall of Radical Catholicism by Prof. James Hitchcock. Or get it through your book store. Keeping Your Balance in the Modern Church by Hugh O'Connell is fine, but it requires some philosophical background to appreciate it.

What of our own diocese?

It's easier to discuss the Church in New Zealand or Cape Horn than one's home diocese. The priests I know well are loyal and devoted to the Church and the people. Most of the Sisters likewise, though I do think some have let their underpinnings become weakened by fad and novelty. But I suppose that's true of over-all Catholic people. My observation of the Grass Roots Catholics is that they are loyal to the Holy See and to the Church, but troubled and beginning to growl.

Why troubled?

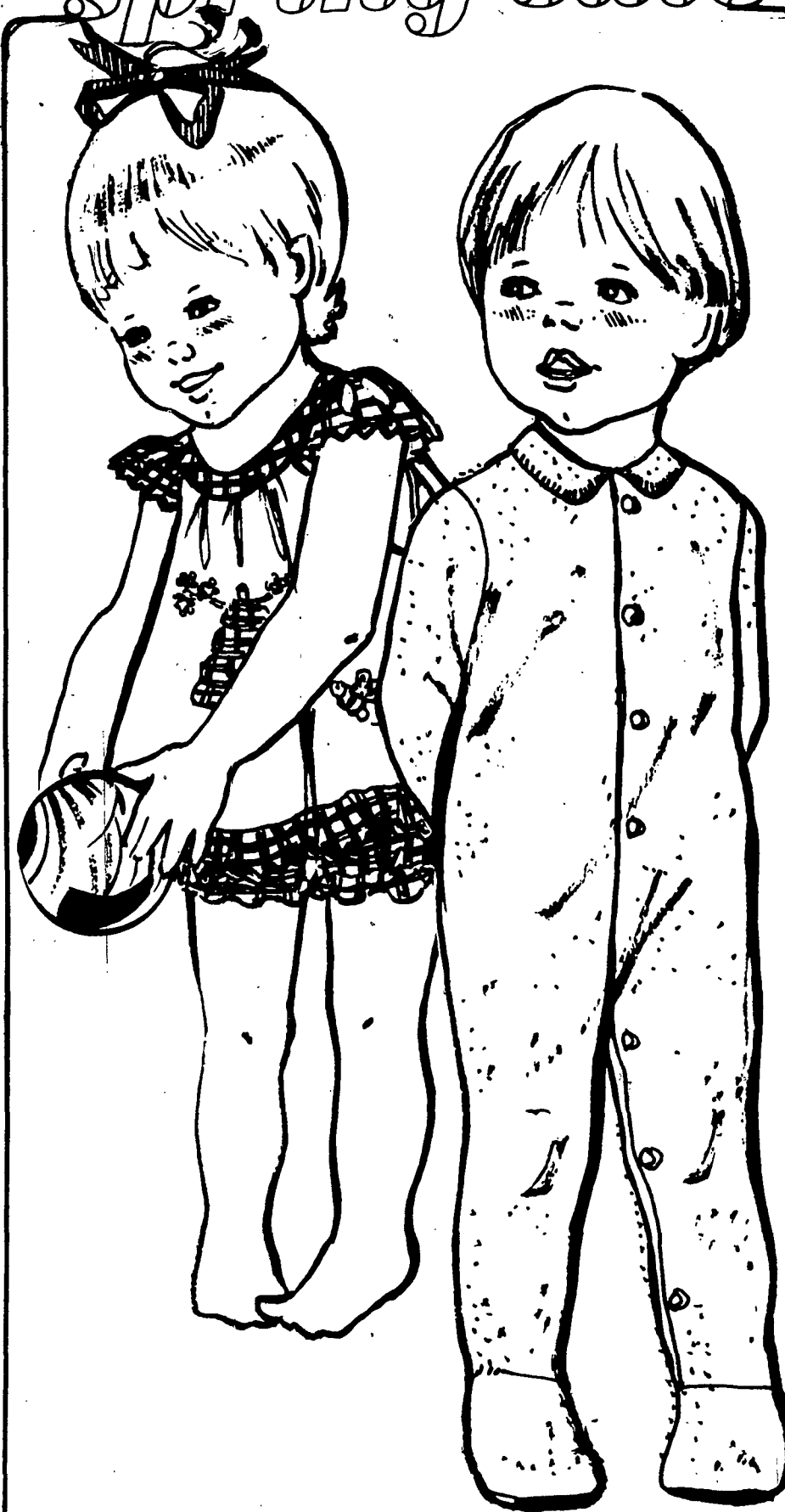
Grass Roots Catholics are not usually concerned about theological subtleties or biblical research. The popularity of the recent beautiful TV presentation of Jesus of Nazareth indicates that. But they are troubled by the inconsistencies between Church law, and the contempt for the law by some priests and parishes. A traditional cooperative and law-accepting people find it hard to accept the arbitrariness of the anti-law people. But cheer up, there are wonderful things in the

diocese. Cursillos are deepening the understanding of the Faith; Pro-Life Groups are active. Marriage Encounters are strengthening many marriages. Teen Seminars stir the souls of Teenagers. Legion of Mary members quietly carry on their apostolic work. Thousands of Catholics are involved in parish activities, CCD, fundraising programs, educational and spiritual programs.

Recently I had a "rap session" with our Webster Council of the K of C. To get the discussion under way, we gave out small sheets of paper, with the words: "I have often wondered about . . ." The men handed in what they were wondering about. And what were some? Communal Penance. (One man said: "My wife is going to one tonight and I wonder is she really receiving the Sacrament." I explained the difference between liceity and validity). Devotion to Our Blessed Mother; the struggle against our Holy Father regarding priestesses in the Church; the changed and changing laws in the Church, etc.

It was edifying to find these men whom I thought so involved in bingo, fish fries, Country Fairs, and other fund raising affairs that they were not concerned about the spiritual aspects of the Church, are deeply interested and deeply concerned. The Grass Roots people are really the mainstay of the Church.

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