

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Focus for the Year 1977-1978 (Part II)

Following is the second-half of the text of an address Bishop Hogan delivered Sept. 11 to the Joint Executive Committee.

Now I would like to ask you to look ahead with me. No one can predict what the next year will ask of us. No one can tell what new possibilities will arise next year, which we do not expect presently, but I would like to cast a special light in three areas. I would like to ask all levels of Church: parish, consultative bodies, my own staff — to pay special attention to these three areas. I would like to confirm that as a principled people, as one people, we share the spirit of God who calls to our attention certain questions each year. I offer these as my attempt to read the signs of the times. I offer these as my attempt to share with you what the spirit is speaking to me.



NEW DIRECTIONS

A. The first area for our attention would be the UNCHURCHED. This is a many faceted pastoral topic. Day to day we come into contact with people who need the care and guidance the Church can offer.

1. Those who are "stay-at-home Catholics," who have not felt like they belonged or who, through some incident in their lives, have given up on the Church. We need to get to know these people again through home visits and meeting them wherever they assemble.
2. The young (15-25) especially need person-to-person contact with persons who care and are strong in faith, who take an active interest in their concerns and dreams.
3. The famous "hatched-matched-and-dispatched" Catholics deserve the warm welcome Jesus himself would give. Moments of birth, marriage, sickness and death, occasions like Christmas and Easter, are all teachable and missionary moments. Our ministry to us is to challenge them to fuller faith life in the spirit of the reconciling Lord by our personal warmth and careful preaching.
4. There is also another category of the unchurched: our own practicing members who hunger for the riches of the Church.
  - (a) Those in hospitals, prisons, or who by their circumstances are separated from full Church fellowship, yet who remain needy and lonely unless we open our arms wide enough to include them.
  - (b) Those who hunger to rediscover our own roots, those renewed by the work of the Spirit who seek yet a deeper formation in the faith. We need to explore forms of ongoing Christian formation and catechesis for our own people so that we might be strong in faith, a compassionate Body that will be a welcome place for the wandering, isolated and needy. We must take advantage of our everyday contacts in order to welcome the unchurched and develop new contacts, new opportunities, to extend the welcoming ministry of Christ.

B. Secondly, SACREDNESS OF LIFE — we serve a God who never forgets those whom he has created in love. He has shared with every person on this earth the precious gift of life and his own Spirit. He tells us though a mother should forget her child, I will never forget you. I have written your name on the palm of my hand.

We are a people who possess the mind and heart of Christ. He died for all men and women, loving us even though we are unworthy. He loves sinners, even to the point of dying for them to prove that there were no limits to the forgiving love of God.

As a group of people we carry that message to the world today. We affirm in word and deed the God-given sacredness of human life. No life before our God is unwanted or condemned as worthless. No one is ever beyond conversion or a change of heart. Our God believes in human life, hopes in it, trusts in it. As a Church, we should do the same. This message is not popular today, but we need to act on it, in season and out of season.

1. We need to speak clearly about our opposition to abortion. We must say that we are not in favor of solving problems through the violent taking of

another's life. We do not say this in anger. We do not say this to put another position down. We say it out of love and a passionate commitment to fostering human life. I am opposed to using our tax money to finance abortion, but just as firmly, I am in favor of taking steps to help pregnant women to meet the problems that the pregnancy causes.

There are other ways too of respecting life. I am in favor of our tax money being used to help the retarded and the handicapped. I am in favor of making sure that there are enough jobs available so that the poor can afford to have a family. Our political initiatives must be broad, clear and rooted, an affirmation of human life.

2. The HANDICAPPED — as a community we believe that the major handicap suffered by the human race is sinfulness. We also believe that the richest context for human living is in the midst of the community. No one should be removed from the midst of our neighborhoods and our living human community, unless it is absolutely necessary. We should adapt our institutions, our attitudes and our programs so that the handicapped can participate in them as fully as possible. I would ask all of us to examine the openness of our lives to full participation by the handicapped

3. The DEATH PENALTY — years ago the State did not assume the right to foster the violent taking of human life in abortion. Consistency today in opposing that right of the State, I think, demands that we also oppose the right of the State to take life as a solution to violence. This will be a hotly debated question next year. I think we should enter that debate.

4. I want to affirm the new vitality that I have seen in regard to providing food for the hungry. The work of PARISH CUPBOARDS, the revitalization of the CATHOLIC WORKER and other initiatives that meet the immediate hunger of people are very positive ways of showing respect for human life.

5. I endorse the affirmation of human rights by our JUSTICE & PEACE COMMISSION and hope that they will provide leadership for us in the coming year affirming the respect and dignity of everyone no matter what political system happens to prevail.

6. I intend to appoint in the coming year a Commission on Aging which will help us to discover new ways of affirming our older population as an invaluable resource and blessing for the Church. We should find new ways of receiving their wisdom and input.

C. Thirdly, SUPPORT FOR BASIC SMALL COMMUNITIES:

Many would characterize present day life by pointing to the breakdown of community. Families seem more vulnerable. Couples are constantly tested on the strength of their relationship. Neighbors seem to be isolated from neighbors. The problem of loneliness assumes a new importance. In the Call to Action consultation conducted last year, parish as a basic support for community received a high endorsement.

I would hope that this will be one of our shared priorities. I speak about small and basic communities because they are the building blocks of our parishes and our society. Let me offer four pastoral principles which should guide our efforts to foster and support community.

1. The Church should strengthen the basic communities that exist. I am speaking here most importantly of the family. I ask for ongoing renewal in practical and principled Pre Cana programs responding to the needs of all people and all cultures in our diocese. This has been an outstanding ministry of the laity up to this point in our diocese. We should test each program in our parishes to see that it aids married couples and families in every way possible. In light of the rising divorce rate new ways of providing extra counseling and crisis support for families should be developed. All of us need to deepen the spiritual meaning of marriage and family life and find new ways to honor those who have this vocation.
2. When there has been a breakdown in marriage relationships, the Church should reach out and heal. The Church should support the new needs that emerge. Failure is a fact of human existence

We should not cover up failure, but recognize it as such. However life goes on, compassionate faithful love should characterize our Church community. Blaming people and discriminating against those who have suffered from marriage breakdowns should not happen in the midst of the Christian community.

3. We should foster basic personal communities that exist and reach out to individuals through these communities. I speak here mainly of older people and singles. They often belong to personal groups which help them to relate to each other, to relate to the community. The Church should foster those groups, recognize their importance. Our services should be adapted to these groups

4. The Church should create groups where there are none. Loneliness is a serious problem in our society. We should help people to get together. Nutrition programs, craft groups, social clubs, and religious societies may not be seen as Vatican II missionary groups, but they do provide a solution to the problem of loneliness and isolation. We need to reevaluate our approach to such groups

CONCLUSION: Finally, my beloved co-workers, I cannot stress enough our role as servants who must preserve a mighty respect for the gifts of others. Growth in the Kingdom is destroyed by a contentious spirit. St. Paul had to warn his beloved people of Corinth about their energies which were being dissipated as they vied with one another and so established barriers in the early Church. The Spirit of the Lord is the Spirit of unity. The spirit of the world is a spirit of dissension. My greatest fear is that we allow our energies to be consumed in promoting our differences and supposed special prerogatives. We have to break down the barriers between male and female, black and white, rich and poor, liberal and conservative, clergy and lay, parish and diocese, parish and parish.

These directions which I endorse with all my heart are focused on people and their needs. I pray that your energies expended this year will reflect this unity of purpose.

May the Lord continue to bless us as we admit in prayer our total dependence on Him and seek always to do His will and not our own.

Pope Paul

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said. Only those who do not know him have called him withdrawn — on the contrary, he is very sensitive to the feelings of others.

Some of those interviewed felt that it was Paul's misfortune to have come after Pope John XXIII and not after Pius XII — "Inevitably, coming after John, Paul appeared to be a more pallid, less outgoing personality," said one.

Mario Pomilio, a Neapolitan writer, wondered if any other Pope had had to bear a burden similar to Paul's. He said, "He inherited Vatican Council II in full swing and a Church in the process of change. He had to conclude one and direct the other. No wonder he has seemed anxious, preoccupied and even, sometimes, contradictory."

Patrick Keegan, director of the English Family Social Action, said he had known Giovanni Battista Montini since 1946 and admired his ability to absorb and understand problems without panic.

Father Montini, he said, had impressed him as a priest, who "had this extraordinary idea that a priest is nothing and everything — not a leader but a former of Christian opinion. Paul has extraordinary patience — in his ability to deal with problems, he is a real bridgemaker. I have the impression that John XXIII would have been more rigid than he."

David Murphy, director of the English publishing house, Catholic Truth Society, commented on the enormous respect that Anglicans feel for Paul VI.

"Considering that their feelings are not well-disposed to the idea of papal supremacy, they feel a great deal of good will for Paul, which must be attributed to Paul's personality. In certain areas, Paul seems very sure of himself and they respect his personal beliefs and feeling of deep charity."

Malcolm Muggeridge, English journalist and writer, expressed admiration that Pope Paul had had the courage to produce the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* which went counter to the popular wishes of the times. Muggeridge said, "The late Cardinal Heenan told me that Pope Paul was under pressure from many to accept less rigid conclusions than those finally formulated in the encyclical. But Pope Paul, obviously under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, decided on his own course. It is a shame that Catholics do not feel disposed to accept its recommendations."