

# The Family Farm

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O'Rourke, once told an audience that "If farmers do not create bargaining organizations within our generation, then agriculture as we know it will cease to exist." At the same time, he made a strong plea for the survival of the family farm.

The family farm, the smallest unit in the complex economic system which has come to be called agribusiness, has been a priority of United Methodist Women. In 1976, the Women's Division of the United Methodist Board for Global Ministries designed a program to "promote the survival of the family farm" and to "encourage stewardship of land and resources."

The ambitious project deployed Methodist women throughout the farm states researching land titles, surveying tax structures and government regulations and studying labor supply and cost and U.S. food policies.

This interest in the family farm is not a new trend. In 1951, representatives of the National Council of Churches and the National Catholic Rural Life Conference met with then-Undersecretary of Agriculture Clifford J. McCormick to discuss family farm policies.

In the late 1950's and in the 1960's, the churches turned to priorities such as civil rights and the Vietnam war. Protestant denominations maintained their rural life offices or town and country ministries divisions and most Catholic dioceses had rural life commissions of some kind, but these agencies were not given prominent status nationally.

But things started happening in the 1970's when the energy issue, environmental problems and the world hunger threat so closely involved the small farm.

It is those small family farmers who are striking today. The average family's on-the-farm income for 1977 is expected to be \$5,300.

Small farmers become outraged when they realize that land all around them is owned by huge corporations which also buy their produce. These corporations have ways to cope with crop shortfalls, dust-storms, droughts or the hundreds of plagues which can befall a farmer.

In the event that a corporation's farmland does not pay for itself one year, it is subsidized by the conglomerate and wages continue. If the market is too high to sell, the corporate farmer can store grains and wait for a better market.

That padding is not available to the family farmer. The small farmer must pay his bills from this year's profits. And often, the bill collector is the rich next-door-neighbor, relaxing on the corporate cushion.

Hank Frundt of the NCC-related Inter-faith Center for Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) writes in "Rural Life," the NCRLC magazine, "The big grain companies strongly oppose attempts to either stabilize commodity prices or to give farmers some control over export sales."

There is action afoot to slow-down the land-amassing habits of U.S. corporate goliaths. The U.S. Department of the Interior is preparing legislation which would enforce a 1902 land reclamation law limiting the amount of federally irrigated land to be held by an individual to 160 acres.

ICCR, Mr. Frundt's agency, claims that Southern Pacific, the railroad company, owns and farms 85,000 acres. Southern Pacific is said to have prepared 25 pages of comments opposing the enforcement legislation. Other land-holding companies and conservative farm groups oppose it as well. However, small farmers and many church groups, including ICCR, favor the measure and are filing comments saying so, according to ICCR spokesperson Michael Clark.

In March, 1977, the American Lutheran Church issued a statement which would warm the hearts of striking farmers. The statement prepared for ALC president David W. Preus was read in his absence before the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry. "Farmers," it said, "should be guaranteed recovery of at least their out-of-pocket production costs if they are to be counted upon to produce at levels that will assure our nation and the world access to an adequate level of food stuffs at reasonable prices."

It said that 54 percent of the ALC's 2.4 million members live in five Midwest agricultural states. It also asked for a crop insurance plan which would divide the cost of crop damage between the producer and the consumer.

The Roman Catholic Campaign for Human Development has, in the recent past, made grants to groups which work on agribusiness issues, such as the Center for Rural Affairs in Walthill, Nebraska.

The Center publishes such intriguing reports as "Wheels of Fortune" and "Who Will Sit Up With the Corporate Sow?" According to the "Wheels" report, the highly successful pivotal irrigation system is used by "non-farm" conglomerates to out-produce their poorer small farm neighbors. In the other report, the Center said that in 1976, "13 percent of the pigs farrowed in Nebraska come from large, non-individual and non-family owned confined pig factories."

These statistics the Center views with alarm since, it is felt, corporate growth in the farm business spells financial disaster for the family farmer and even loss of his holdings.

The current director of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference recently restated its long-held belief that farmers should collectivize to bargain for produce prices.

"Since farmers represent a combination of labor, management and capital we can find plenty of precedents for this kind of action," said Father John J. McRaith.

But he questioned the "morality" of the current national farmers strike. "If most producers refused to plant a crop," he said, "it would mean hunger and hardship for many. Continuing the strike into the growing season, even as long as June 15, would mean that most of our agricultural land would remain idle for an entire year."

Father McRaith observed that the current strike attempt is the third such threat. The first came in the 1930's; then the National Farmers' Organization attempted to hold produce from the market in the 1960's to make the price gains through collective bargaining. The priest noted that "neither achieved lasting success."

So the farmers do have the ear of the churches. They are gaining the ear of the consumers and hopefully Washington is listening.

## DPC to Discuss Bingo, Diocesan Priorities

**Canandaigua** — Action on diocesan priorities proposed by the Ministerial Review Committee and discussion of a proposal concerning bingo will be major items on the agenda of the Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC) at its meeting Saturday, Jan. 21 from 11:15 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Sheraton Inn here.

As preliminary work to its analysis of the diocesan budget, the Ministerial Review Committee (MRC) has rank ordered diocesan priorities. That order will be discussed and voted on by the DPC. The next step will be the application of the priorities to the 1978-79 diocesan budget, due to be completed in May, 1978.

For the rank order, diocesan activities were grouped under seven headings, and then placed in

order of importance. Each heading includes all diocesan efforts in that direction; for example, education, named the first priority, includes not only Catholic schools, but also all religious, adult and continuing education.

Following education, the MRC listed: the unchurched, sacredness of life, neighborhood ministry, small communities, liturgy, and structure in service of ministry.

With a diocesan survey of bingo games partially complete, the DPC will again discuss the proposal from St. Michael's, Rochester, parish staff concerning bingo scheduling. The proposal asks that bingo games be forbidden during Holy Week, and that the diocese "forbid or at least

discourage" parishes from beginning a second weekly game.

The survey revealed that of 105 parishes reporting, 43 sponsor bingo games, and 22 plan to hold their games during Holy Week. The survey revealed that nine of the parishes plan bingo for Palm Sunday, one for Good Friday, two for Holy Saturday, and four for Easter Sunday. Six reporting parishes sponsor two games each week currently, and another is discussing adding a second night.

In other action, the DPC will elect a member to the DPC executive committee, to replace Ernest Curran, who recently moved to New Jersey.

Betty Anderson and John Crowe also will report to the council. They were the diocesan delegates to a Region II meeting to elect regional delegates to the United States Catholic Conference Advisory Council. The council advises the nation's bishops on various matters, meeting twice yearly for three days. Crowe was elected to a three year term on the council.

### Unity

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Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches. It is endorsed by U.S. Catholic bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs.

Observed worldwide, the Week of Prayer is described as a "permanent dialogue of spirituality which expresses what should happen during the whole year." It is a forum in which Christians become increasingly conscious that they are no longer strangers, but brothers and sisters.



Sarah Child

It is that time of year. Today alone I talked to three people experiencing the post holiday blues. Counting me, whom I cannot seem to sidestep, that's four.

It should be written down somewhere as part of some immutable holiday law that the blahs are as much a part of the season as the cheer, the making merry, the partying, the goodwill and the gift exchange.

### Carter Group Sees Prelate

**Warsaw (RNS)** — Mrs. Carter and an aide to President Carter met here for 40 minutes with Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Primate of the Polish Catholic Church.

The meeting was arranged by Polish-born Zbigniew Brezezinski, White House assistant for national security, and a Roman Catholic, whom Mrs. Carter accompanied on the visit to the cardinal.

Brezezinski, who speaks fluent Polish, told reporters afterwards that the cardinal had praised Carter for his "strong religious stand" and for his position on human rights.

Father Joseph Glemb, the cardinal's secretary, told Religious News Service that the cardinal had said he was happy the president had come to Poland and wished him well.

If somewhere some document existed that read that between Jan. 2 and say, Jan. 21, the entire population was to undergo a period of disorientation and "discontent," as an epilogue to the holidays and a prelude to a pre-spring rejuvenation, think how much worry and self-flagellation it would eliminate.

As the letdown, the deflated feeling that is the normal experience after a concentrated period of festivities and rituals descends upon us, we could each look at the calendar and assure ourselves that far from being alone in our misery we are in the company of literally millions.

As we look in the mirror on a bleak, sunless morning and discover that the wrinkles have deepened and

the gray hairs multiplied, we could garner some measure of satisfaction that all over the country of hers were cringing at the same revelations.

As the day wears on and we become convinced that whatever could go wrong has already done so, that life is fraught with obstacles barring any kind of personal achievement and that we are worthy of neither friends, spouses or family we could reassure ourselves that the rest of the multitude had arrived at somewhat the same conclusions at about the same time.

Then, knowing that the plague was universal and temporary instead of terminal, we could go on about the business of muddling through until the haze dissipated at the prescribed time.

**DIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCIL MEETING**  
Saturday, Jan. 21, 11:15 a.m. to 4 p.m.  
Sheraton Motor Inn, Canandaigua

1. Opening Prayer
2. Acceptance of Minutes and Agenda
3. Bishop Hogan's Remarks
4. DPC February Retreat, Hilda Stebbins
5. Discussion of Bingo proposal, Andrew Molloy
6. Report on USCC Advisory Council, Betty Anderson, John Crowe
7. Proposed Diocesan Priorities for 1978-79, Joseph Mercier, Andrew Molloy
8. Election of DPC member to Executive Committee, Andrew Molloy
9. Presentation of Bishop Selection Committee Membership, Father John Mulligan
10. Reports from Standing Committee Chairpersons:  
Ministerial Review, Joseph Mercier  
Social Mission, Father Joseph Jankowiak  
Worship and Life, Les and Gail Raymond  
Teaching Mission, Sister Mary Jean Smith  
Pastoral Organization, Frank Riesenberger
11. Reports from Priests and Sisters Councils, Father Charles Latus and Sister M. Francella Quinn
12. Open Forum

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