

# Teachers Focus on Problems of Divorced, Separated

By MARY ANN GINNERTY  
 Seneca Falls—The title of my address is the teachings, past and present, of the Roman Catholic Church as they relate to divorce and remarriage," began Sister Kathleen Kircher, SSJ, director of the Ministry for Divorced, Separated and

Remarried Catholics. "I've given this presentation at least one hundred times, but the fact it still needs to be heard is apparent, as our office receives 20 to 30 calls a week from divorced and remarried Catholics seeking reconciliation with the church."

Sister Kathleen's presentation marked the beginning of an unusual Finger Lakes Association Teacher's Conference Jan. 27 at St. Patrick's School here.

According to Sister Kathleen the meeting, attended by some 110

Catholic school teachers, was the very first meeting which concentrated on the problems faced by divorced and separated Catholics and their children.

Sister Kathleen said that divorced and separated Catholics can be in good standing in the Church with all the rights and responsibilities of church members. It was never universal church teaching that they be excluded from church participation and the sacraments.

Yet, she said over the years misconceptions arose from a law intended to reinforce marriage. It is difficult to know how the misconceptions were popularized but it is important how it has affected the lives of thousands of Roman Catholics who are separated or divorced, she said.

Sister Kathleen referred to the 1883 American Bishops Council in Baltimore which addressed itself to writing the Baltimore Catechism for a church made up mainly of immigrants.

A scandal occurred in the United States when a prominent American Catholic divorced and married his mistress. "The bishops," she said, "in their fatherly concern that marriages may be influenced by the mores of

society, decided that the excommunication of a Catholic who divorced and remarried without a church annulment would be a deterrent."

In 1965, a document titled The Constitution of Church in the Modern World (Sect 48) referred to marriages as an intimate participation of life and love. The clarification of marriage as a covenant and communication of life became a core of how to prepare young people for Christian marriage.

In 1977, the bishops, at their national conference approved (283-6) a revision stating Roman Catholics who remarried without a church annulment were not automatically excommunicated.

Sister Kathleen noted that divorce and remarriage was permitted in the first 500 years of the church. The Christian community "stood apart from the rest of society in that divorces were much less common," she said. But for practical reasons divorce and remarriage was allowed. One such reason was that divorced people could not afford to live by themselves.

She referred to evidence of divorce in the bible. St. Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, said that if

marriage to the unbaptized with values so different caused fighting, then it would be better that the couple separate and be free to marry if they cannot live in peace.

Matthew (19) portrays the Jesus who allows for the divorce of the unfaithful wife and remarriage.

Mark (10) portrays Jesus allowing divorce and remarriage.

Sister Kathleen restated the need for reconciliation and healing and for the church's message to be repeated as it reaches out to clarify and encompass its message in the modern world.

She expressed her gratitude to the members of the Finger Lakes Association for having the meeting and the diocesan department of General Education for its help in setting the meeting up. Sister Kathleen said that "to my knowledge, no other diocese in the country has ever held a teacher's conference dealing with the impact of divorce and separation and all the problems associated with it."

## '... We Are Single Parents'

By MARY ANN GINNERTY

The hurt, the pain, the struggles, the growth and courage came through as a panel of three divorced women addressed the Finger Lakes Assn. Teachers Conference in Seneca Falls.



Panelist Ann Marie Kapral (right) gives her presentation at the Finger Lakes Teacher's Conference. Other panel members are Beverly Aleo (left) and Gretchen Williams (center).

Sister Kathleen Kircher, SSJ, director of the Ministry for Divorced, Separated and Remarried Catholics, indicated that this program dealing with the impact of divorce and separation on the student in school is thought to be a first. She said the sociological implications of divorce and separations in increasing numbers are reflected in some school areas reporting as high as 40% of its students living in single parent households.

The first panelist, Ms. Beverly Aleo, began by sharing a bit of what it can mean to be a divorced person and a Catholic. Referring to the panel Ms. Aleo said that "We are single parents."

"Suddenly, the divorced or separated person doesn't have a place to live or if she does, she has got to figure out a way to stay there. A third or half of the family income is gone. Now a parent must do a job twice as well as before. All this can happen overnight. I had thought about being a single person. I had not thought about being a single parent."

"As teachers," she continued, "in your daily encounter with my child you can be helpful by accepting my child as my child and not the child of Joe and Mary who just got divorced."

"The first years of rebuilding one's life after a divorce make it hard to be objective. A child often assumes guilt for the parent's divorce. The teacher can help the child accept that it is not the

child's divorce and to help build the child's self-confidence.

The second panelist, Gretchen Williams, the mother of four teens, said that it is sad when a family situation falls apart under the circumstances of a divorce or separation.

"My survival was based on my religion and the recognition of the importance of family unit. However, the church can make one feel that the only 'family' is the conventional two parents and children.

"When one member of the unit leaves, we have to help the children understand that the love and caring of 'family' can still be there.

Ann Marie Kapral, the third panelist, said it sometimes surprises people when they learn she is a religious education coordinator.

"When I needed the church it stood by me. It realized that because I was

going through a divorce, I wasn't less of a person," she said.

However, she pointed out that not all Catholics are this caring. She pleaded for schools and parishes to help all family units feel they are an integral part of the church whether it be a single parent household, the nuclear family, grandparents, foster parents, the single person or the parish family itself.

Practical suggestions included confirmation projects in which students babysat so that a divorced parent could run errands or discussing varied family styles in religion class.

"A separation or a divorce in a family doesn't need to be a horrible experience. Sometimes one person can do a more effective job of parenting than two people pulling at opposite ends," she said.

Ms. Kapral feels that schools need to consider the needs of the parent even if the child is doing fine in school as many of the parent's problems can become the child's problem. She suggested that advising parents about community resources available doesn't mean responsibility for getting the parent there. It does say you cared enough to reach out

After the meeting Sister Kathleen remarked that the "feedback" she received from the teachers who attended the unique panel discussion was very good. She felt it had been a tremendous help to everyone involved.

### EFFECTIVE LIVING

An "effective living" seminar will be given this weekend at the Cenacle by Sister Muriel Brennan of Chicago. It is described as "an opportunity to review the process by which we develop our self-concept and to learn new techniques for raising that self-concept in order to become more effective." The seminar is open to men, women and older teenagers. It will begin Friday evening, Feb. 10, and end Sunday afternoon. For reservations: 716-271-8755.

## Time for Gallo Wine, Lettuce, Grapes, Too

LaPaz, Calif. (RNS) — The boycott of table grapes, iceberg lettuce and Gallo Wine, supported for more than four years by many Protestant, Catholic and Jewish groups, has been called off by Cesar Chavez, president of the United Farm Workers Union.

Chavez said that the boycott was ended because its desired effect has been achieved; the union has contracts with 117 growers and is negotiating with more than 100 more.

The Rev. John R. Moyer, an executive of the United Church of Christ Board for Homeland Ministries and immediate past president of the National Farm Workers Ministries, said that he would toast the news with "a bottle of Gallo wine that someone gave me two years ago."

States Catholic Conference spokesman, said, the halt to the boycott is an "encouraging sign" and "a testimony to a bravely fought battle. It was a difficult task, and a few years ago a few said an impossible one, but California agricultural workers have successfully fought and won the right to hold elections."

The UFW staff which has been promoting the boycotts for several years in larger cities around the country, including Rochester, has been assigned to help organize a boycott against the products of the J.P. Stevens Co., according to Rev. Moyer. J.P. Stevens has been cited for violations of the National Labor Relations Act and the American Clothing and Textile Workers Union is seeking an injunction against what it calls the company's "anti-union" actions.

## Capitol Letters

Last summer the Supreme Court ruled that states are not mandated to pay for abortions under Medicaid. In the absence of an executive directive, or a directive by the Commissioner of Social Services, or in the absence of implementation of the order of the former Commissioner of Social Services, legislation is necessary to end these payments and the unnecessary taking of human life.

Sen. James Donovan has filed Senate Bill 6722 which would bar Medicaid payments for abortions on females except in those cases where it was deemed necessary to save the female's life. Sen. Fred Eckert is a co-sponsor of this bill which is now in the Senate Social Services Committee chaired by Sen. W. T. Smith.

Assemblywoman Elizabeth A. Connelly has filed a like bill, Assembly Bill 9091, in the Assembly, and it is now in the Assembly Health Committee, chaired by Assemblyman Alan Hevesi.

The elevators of the Legislative Office Building in Albany have been crowded with A.C.L.U., Planned Parenthood, Z.P.C. and other lobbyists encouraging Medicaid payments of abortions. If you do not want your tax dollars to be used to pay the costs of abortion services, you must inform your elected representatives.

1. Write to your respective Assemblyman and Senator and request that they co-sponsor Assembly Bill 9091 or Senate Bill 6722.

2. Write to Sen. W. T. Smith, Chairman, Senate Social Services Committee, regarding Senate Bill 6722 and Assemblyman Alan Hevesi, Chairman, Assembly Health Committee, regarding Assembly Bill 9091, requesting that each

bring the specified bill before his committee for a vote.

Address: Legislative Office Building, Albany, New York 12224.

3. Personal discussions with your elected representatives are effective. If you would like to join a group traveling to Albany to discuss this issue, please write to me at 135 Nob Hill, Rochester, N.Y. 14617.

Compiled by Jeanne D. Sweeney

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### SOME THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER

By Ed Sulewski

**CHILDREN AT THE FUNERAL.** If you are wondering whether your children or those of other members of the family should be involved in the funeral, authorities agree that even as early as age 3, children have awareness of and respond to death. They must know the truth the funeral tells and should be allowed to attend the services if they desire. They should not be denied the experience of this significant part of their life. If they are, it might have future troublesome emotional implications because they could develop a sense of abandonment instead of belonging. However, no unwilling child should be made to participate.

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