

Divorced, Separated Attend Convention

By MARTIN TOOMBS
Southern Tier Editor

Binghamton—The pews were empty, but St. Patrick's Church here resounded with singing at the Mass celebrated by Bishop Francis Harrison, bishop of Syracuse, during the state convention of divorced and separated Catholics groups.

Singing were the more than 200 convention participants who had joined Bishop Harrison and several concelebrants in the sanctuary.

The Mass was planned by the Elmira Divorced and Separated Group, as the major event in the conference, April 28 through 30.

Bishop Harrison noted in his homily that he had been asked to affirm the ministry to the divorced and separated in his diocese at the Mass. There was no need for him to state his support of the work, he said, which has already been going on. "We're not carrying out the ministry of Lord Jesus as He asked us to unless such work continues, he said.

Referring to the time Christ met the Samaritan woman who had had five husbands, Bishop Harrison noted that "Christ was not judgmental" with the woman, but invited her to love. "She went on to reveal to those of her village that she had seen the Lord, the Messiah," he noted, which is an example of what all Christians should be doing.

Ministry to the divorced and separated "has for a long time been neglected," he commented, noting the importance of the ministry of divorced and separated Catholics to each other. Such ministry is "a great call that we all have," he emphasized.

The convention featured five speakers; Father James Young, CSP, chaplain to the North American Conference of Separated and Divorced Catholics; Msgr. Stephen J. Kelleher, author of "Divorce and Remarriage for Catholics?" and a member of the New York archdiocesan tribunal for 25 years; Sister Serena Branson, DC,

executive director of the Albany diocesan Catholic Charities; Sister Kathleen Kircher, SSJ, coordinator of ministry to the divorced and separated in the Rochester diocese, and Msgr. Ronald C. Bill, Broome County Catholic Charities director.

The more than 200 participants represented every diocese in the state at the first annual conference; next year's has been scheduled for Rochester.

Father Young recalled that when he first became involved in the Boston divorced and separated group, he told the organizers that he wouldn't have a great deal of time to spend counseling members. He reported that they informed him that they would take care of the counseling, and were asking him only to provide his services as a priest. After all, Father Young reported their pointing out, "what did I know about divorce?"

Experience with the divorced and separated groups has led him to the conclusion that the Church is "on to something" with divorced Catholic ministry," he said. Group members have ministered to each other, he noted, and have moved back into the mainstream of Church activity. They often continue in a ministering role, both to other divorced persons and to the larger community, he said.

"Who would have thought" he commented, "that divorced people would become a renewing element in the Church?"

Msgr. Kelleher's statements on Saturday afternoon caused considerable discussion the rest of the day. Referring to his book "Divorce and Remarriage for Catholics?" he noted that the title includes a question mark, although, he said, "I don't have any question mark."

Msgr. Kelleher said that he is pledged to "do everything I can" to change Church policy "so that divorced Catholics can have the option" of



Barbara Delaney of Rockville Centre, Sister Kathleen Kircher of Rochester and Elaine Dolan of Rockville Centre, lead discussion group.

remarriage "without Church annulment or divorce" and receive the Eucharist as a full member of the Church. "That's the aim I have in mind," he said.

He listed several theologians and authors who agree with his stand, and described instances in Church history when divorce has been granted by the Church.

He also took issue with current annulment procedure, noting that "Jesus simply forbade divorce" and did not allow for the reasons that annulments are being granted.

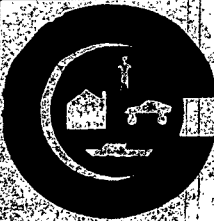
He also disputed the Church's assertion that for a marriage to be valid, both parties must be baptized. That means that two-thirds of the marriages in the world are dissoluble, he said; it is "presumptuous for the Church, without a mandate from Christ" to say that Baptism is necessary for valid marriage, he said.

Msgr. Kelleher's comments drew responses during the workshop sessions. Msgr. Marion J. Reinhardt, presiding judge of the Brooklyn diocesan tribunal, noted that he didn't expect the Church's teaching on the dissolubility of marriage to be changed. While willing to "admit that it (marriage's indissolubility) has not been solidly defined," he added that neither have other teachings. After the year 1000 AD, there is "no disagreement," he said, with the statement "marriage is indissoluble."


"I'm 100 percent committed to the doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage," he told the workshop participants. He added that the

indissolubility, he is convinced, "only pertains to valid marriages," leaving tribunals the task of determining validity.

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Everyone joined Bishop Harrison in the sanctuary for consecration. Photo by Martin Toombs

Mary's Day

Rochester Circle, International Federation of Catholic Alumnae, will have a "Mary's Day" Mass and luncheon May 13 at the Cenacle. Friends are invited.

The day before Mothers' Day is observed by the IFCA as a spiritual Mothers' Day. Helen Durbin said. Lunch reservations may be made with her at 473-7565, or with Mrs. Lewis Boyce, 223-8242. Father David Gramke will celebrate the Mass at 12:20 p.m.

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