

Pastoral Perspective

Continuing Education: A Task for All

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

I chose the hottest week of the summer to go to the Center for Continuing Education at St. Bernard's Seminary. Many months before, I had gone through the list of offerings set up by the Center and decided on a workshop entitled "Pastoral Skills in Spiritual Direction."



This seemed like an important area for a Bishop who is constantly trying to be the SPIRITUAL head of the diocese. My choice proved to be a fine one. In spite of the humid weather, much learning took place. Father James Dolan, SJ, the Director of Christ the King Retreat House in Syracuse, gave us much to reflect upon in his easy-going, non-directive style.

But there were other things to learn during these three days. The Center provides an ideal setting for communication. There were 22 of us there — not to do business, not to accomplish some project. Instead, we were taking time to improve our skill. We also found that we were improving our relationships with each other. As priests, Sister Pastoral Assistants and Religious Education Coordinators, we discussed ideas on a common ground. We enjoyed each other's company at meals and at evening pizza parties. We celebrated our common unity around the table of the Lord. Each of us came away with a better realization of our common task in the Church, as well as the knowledge of the great support that we can be to one another. I found myself being very grateful for these days of blessing with my fellow ministers.

This month, our Center for Continuing Education celebrates its first birthday. You will remember that in my FOCUS ON THE YEAR 1977-78 I listed the establishment of the diocesan Center as one of the important new beginnings. While everyone is pleased that such a program has begun with great enthusiasm, we all know that there are many problems inherent in such a program, and it will take much encouragement and planning before this vital program will begin to bear fruit.

I am convinced that if we are to build a strong Continuing Education program for our ministerial persons in this diocese, all of our people must give it their attention:

1. MINISTERIAL PEOPLE. The priests, sisters and laypersons who are working in our parishes and diocesan institutions need to know that their people will call them to accountability for continuing education. All professions demand this kind of ongoing training. No one wishes to be served by a doctor, lawyer or teacher who has not kept up with current practices. The same holds true for the pastoral ministry. This is why the Priests' and Sisters' Councils have issued a call to their peers asking that each professional person take at least one continuing education experience each year. This is why nearly 160 of our priests are taking advantage of the Ministry to Priests Program being offered here in our diocese by the University of Notre Dame.

2. PARISH COUNCILS. These leadership groups in our parishes must begin to plan for appropriate continuing education for staff members. As parish planning is undertaken in the areas of liturgy, sacramental and adult education and human development, Parish Councils must also encourage their staff members to take the time necessary to improve their skills in areas which are needed in that parish. Just as the professional parish leaders encourage their people to learn and grow, so too, the people must encourage their leaders in the same growth. But in addition to encouragement, the Parish Council must begin to plan for time and financial support to allow their leaders to take advantage of the

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courses offered. The Council must assure the Staff that they have the right to regular study days and parish budgets must reflect the expense involved.

3. MEN AND WOMEN IN THE PEW. It does little good for our loyal people to simply complain about the ministerial staff of a parish. If the homily is poorly preached, if the liturgy is not well-prepared, if the youth program lacks zest, if there is no Adult Education Program, there may be a reason. Perhaps the staff members are discouraged and overwhelmed by the new demands made on them by the post-

Vatican II Church. If this is the case, a gentle and loving push from the people might encourage such leaders to seek out new skills and improve old ones with continuing education.

I take the liberty to invite all of you to stop in at the Center for Continuing Education at St. Bernard's for a visit. I am sure that Mr. Joseph Kelly, the Director, would be only too pleased to show you around. We want the entire diocese to know of this program and give it their full support. It is one more vital way in which we hope to strengthen the Church of Rochester.

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