

# The Church 1978

By Father Andrew Greeley

## Hierarchy Is Source Of Problems

The George Higgins case reveals a fundamental flaw in the structure of the American church. The hierarchy and its national staff really do not trust one another. George Higgins may not have been the staff member that most bishops would have liked to have tossed out on Massachusetts Avenue. In this respect, the offices of the Conference behaved with incredible incompetence, but cutting the staff "down to size" is an activity which makes lots of bishops feel very happy.

Tension between staff and membership is difficult at most national organizations, but it rarely reaches the guerrilla warfare level that seems to plague the Catholic hierarchy. To an outside observer who compares the battle with the 1945 World

Series (neither team could possibly win), the following observations seem in order:

1) Bishops have the right and duty to establish a competent national staff. They simply cannot respond to the problems of collective leadership in the American church without such a staff. Sometimes they have been served extremely well by the staff's professionalism — in matters of ecumenism, labor relations, technology and values. Sometimes they have been served very badly — communications (including especially the present leadership of the NC News Service), peace and justice, education and youth. Ironically, in the current "money saving" purge it is the competent people who are going.

2) The bishops do not trust their staff. One hears, off-the-record of course, nothing but complaints about the bad statements that emanate from the Peace and Justice Office, about the ludicrous national catechetical directory and about the Call to Action tent show. Doubtless it is true in many instances staff members have gone far beyond what was the intent of the conference.

Indeed, the Call to Action was an attempted coup by local and national bureaucrats in the name of the ordinary laity (who weren't represented) to impose their agenda on the bishops. Of course it didn't work; one wonders why anyone thought it would.

3) However, in most cases, the bishops have only themselves to blame when staff activity gets out of line. They could easily stop the unpopular activity but they are fearful of offending the person who happens to be the chairman of the particular committee. No one wants to junk the catechetical directory because the committee had "worked so hard on it." And nobody was prepared to oppose the Call to Action on the record because "Cardinal Dearden wanted it."

4) Turnover of presidents and general secretaries occurs so rapidly that there is neither consistent policy nor consistent leadership for recruitment of administrators. Some people who are recruited are admirably qualified; others have at least presentable credentials; and still others get major positions simply because they happen to be available. Once they become part of the national staff there is no powerful motivation to

remain because of the "guerrilla warfare" between the bishops and their bureaucrats and because you can never tell when your head is going to get lopped off like George Higgins' almost was.

According to one account, more than 100 priests have moved in and out of the USCCB offices in the last decade or so. That is no way to develop an experienced, competent corps of professionals to serve the national hierarchy and, through them, the whole church.

One could also talk about the unpredictable financial policies and the unstable leadership of the various episcopal committees which oversee the staff activities (policy can and does change every time a new chairman is elected). While I have no desire to make any case in defense of much of the Conference staff (particularly people in education and youth, and peace and justice), I am forced to conclude that the real problem does not lie with the ideologues and incompetents on Massachusetts Avenue, but with the hierarchical leadership around the country, which has yet to learn what the national staff is for and how to make professional use of professional services.

### Deadline!

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## Women's Clubs Plan Party

The Rochester Federation of Women's Clubs has scheduled its annual Christmas party for 12 noon, Thursday, Dec. 14, at the Monroe Golf Club in Pittsford. Mrs. Margaret Hood is the sponsoring member.

Mrs. Raymond A. Lander, president of the federation, has urged all clubs, boards and members to attend and bring guests.

Chairman is Mrs. Walter Sweeting of Pittsford, assisted by co-chairman Mrs. Timothy O'Keefe. Featured speaker will be Eddie Meath of Channel 10.



## Ring in the New Year

Making plans for the annual Bishop Kearney Parents Club New Year's party to be held at the school, Dec. 31 are in front row from left: Mrs. Sullivan, Mrs. Heim, Brother John F. O'Brien, moderator, Mrs. Roesch; back row: Mrs. Session, Mr. and Mrs. Killian, Mr. Roesch and Mrs. Forstbauer. The event will include a buffet beginning at 8:30 p.m. followed by dancing to Freddy Beck's music; 9:30-1:30 p.m. Tickets are \$25 per couple and can be obtained by calling Mrs. Sullivan, 342-5421.

## Concert Tonight

The annual Christmas concert at Sacred Heart School is scheduled for 8 tonight in the school hall. The chorus, directed by Carrol Frangipane, consists of 65 pupils from the intermediate and junior high departments. There is no admission charge.

The annual Offertory procession of pre-school and kindergarten children will take place at the 10 a.m. Mass Sunday, Dec. 17. The children bring toys of their own to be given to children who need toys.



## Flag Presentation

Accepting a flag which was flown over the nation's capital from Congressman Frank Horton, on behalf of St. John the Evangelist school on Humboldt Street, are from left to right, school principal Sister Barbara Bowman, John Kaltenbach and Pamela Watson. The presentation took place at St. John's on Tuesday October 24. Following the presentation, Horton stopped at Blessed Sacrament School, where a flag was also presented. Blessed Sacrament's and St. John's school are consolidated, with St. John's having grades K-6 and Blessed Sacrament 7-8.

Photo by Susan McKinney

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