

The Church 1979

By Father Andrew Greeley

Catholics Returning To Church

For the Catholic church in America, which desperately needs some good news, there at last seems to be a break in the clouds. Not only has the decline in church attendance definitely stopped, but there seems to be an upswing going on, an upswing which is particularly noticeable for people between 30 and 45 and for Catholics of Irish ethnic background.



Fr. Greeley

Each year the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) studies some 1500

American families in its "General Social Survey." These families are typical of the American population, selected by the best sampling techniques currently available. I have been monitoring Catholic church attendance at two-year intervals because the combination of two studies smooths out the fluctuations which may be due to sampling error and also provides more than 700 Catholic respondents on which to base one's estimates.

In 1972 when the General Social Survey was begun some three-fifths of the Catholics in the country were going to church every week (or "nearly" every week). In the '73-'74 combination, the rate declined to 49 percent. In the 1975-1976 combination, the attendance level declined sharply again to 44 percent, a combined decline in the

early '70s of 17 percentage points.

However in the '77-'78 studies the trend was reversed, climbing back to 49 percent. There are more than 1500 respondents in the combined samples, so that the chances are less than one in a hundred that the increase does not reflect a change which has occurred in the general population.

The increase seems to be concentrated at the age level between 30 and 45. At both time "2" ('75 and '76) and time "3" ('77 and '78) attendance rates for those under 30 and those over 45 were virtually the same — 31 percent for those under 30 and 60 percent for those over 45. However, for the in-between group, the rate at time "1" was 54 percent, at time "2" 34 percent and at time "3" back up to 50 percent.

The increase is more likely to have occurred among college attenders, up seven points between time "2" and time "3," than among non-college attenders, who have

increased four points. It is most striking among those of Irish background, whose increase in weekly (or "nearly weekly") church attendance is from 51 percent to 61 percent. The non-Irish increase was only five points, from 43 percent to 48 percent.

Is the "return" for real? I am inclined to think it is for two reasons. First of all, those in the middle years do not undertake a return to church lightly. If it was a major decision to drift away, then it is an equally major one to drift back. One does not want to have to go through such agonizing again. Secondly, much of the return is probably attributable to a mellowing of old anger. After a certain age in life one does not want to go through the anger experience again.

I would not want to suggest a celebration. The church has survived a major crisis; it is picking up some of the people who had walked away. But there are a lot more who have not returned.

Deadline!

In order to handle copy and by the Courier-Journal by photographs properly, all noon Thursday for the news releases must be received following week's edition.

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All in the Family

Easters Past

What do chocolate rabbits have to do with Easter? One of the children in fourth grade religion class wanted to know.

We talked about it for a while — about rabbits distributing colored eggs and eggs being the symbol of life and eventually we got to the Resurrection.

And then, as such a discussion frequently does, it sent me back years ago to the time I was as young as these children. Not yet 10. And what the Easter celebration meant to me.

In my mind's eye, it is a montage of varied delights — of grass beginning to turn green, purple crocuses peeking up around the base of the sugar maple, bright sunny days when the air still had a crisp edge to it.

It was Grandma B. rolling out homemade noodle dough, cutting it in long, floury strips and leaving the huge batch to dry on the kitchen table.

It was Grandma C. turning out traditional Easter bread rich in eggs, fragrant with anise and lemon, twisted to resemble a baby bunting draped with ribbons of pale, tinted icing and delicate features drawn on the egg which formed the face.

It was my mother putting together the dessert for the cake, lemon filling between the layers, white boiled icing and coconut on top.

It was the brown paper packages from Sears Roebuck or Montgomery Ward delivered by the mailman the week before and containing patent leather shoes and pastel dresses.

It was going to St. Augustine's, a typical small

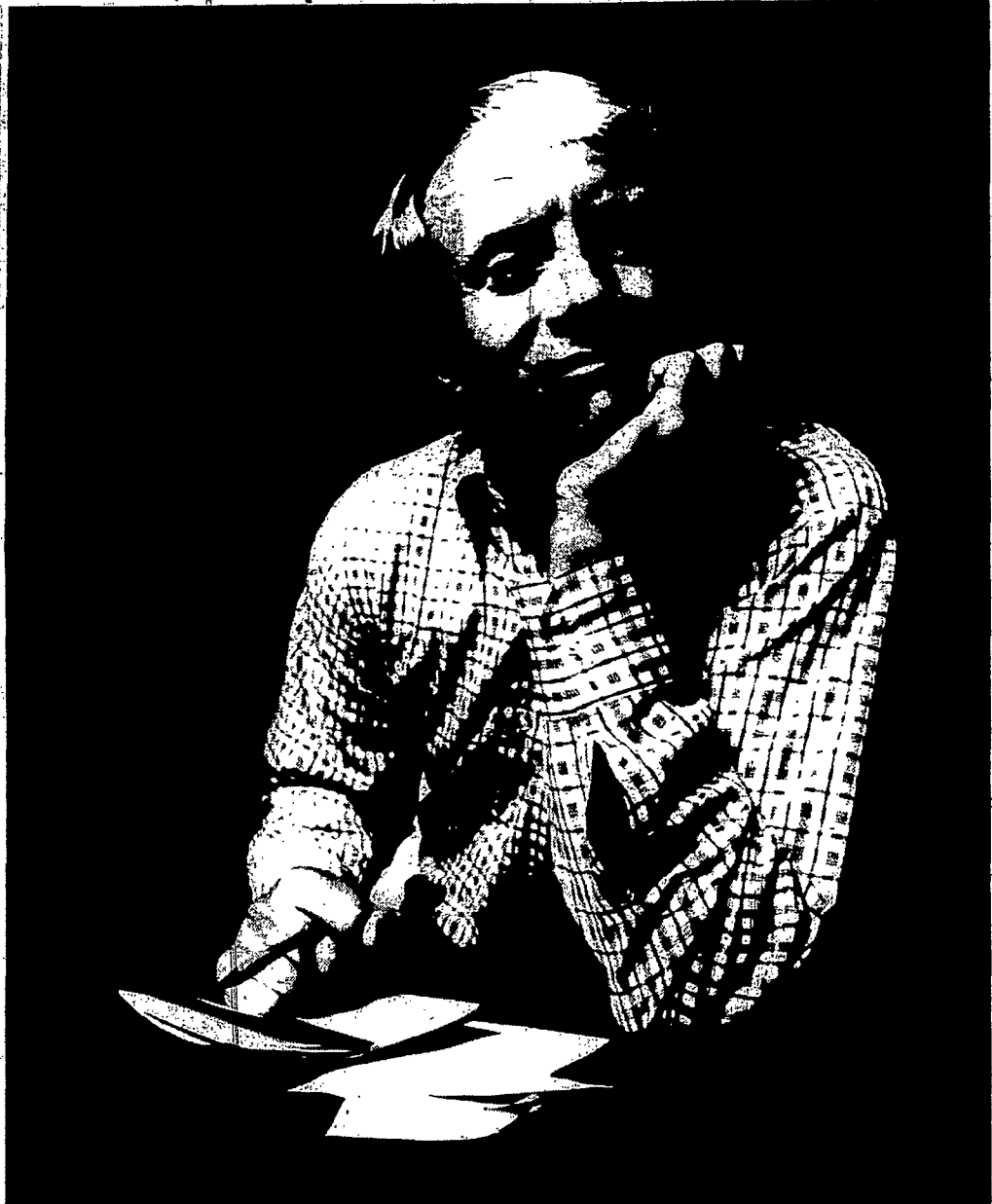
town church, our feet making noise on the linoleum, our knees ridged after five minutes on the hard wooden kneelers, of glorious sunlight streaming from the stained glass high over the altar catching the chalice and forming a cross as sunlight sometimes does when it hits a metallic object.

Easter lilies, pristine and beautiful, relief that the purple shrouds had been removed from the statues.

Eating the first dinner (we had two grandmas — two dinners) in shifts around the table with Pope Pius and FDR staring down at us.

Of great aunts and uncles, and grandparents' friends from the old country dropping in after dinner and Grandpa bringing homemade wine from the basement and pouring it into cut glass tumblers.

And finally going home, Easter baskets which we had carried with us nearly empty, but loaded down with memories, enough to last a lifetime.



Business in the Diocese

William Spelman, a member of the Newman Community at the University of Rochester and director of Wilson Commons and student activities at the school, will officially take over as the president of the Association of College Unions-International (ACUI) today at the organization's annual meeting in Cincinnati. Spelman has been acting president since last fall.

Judith M. Overacker, a member of the board of directors of the Catholic Women's Club, has been elected an assistant trust officer at Security Trust Co. She joined the bank in 1969, and since 1976 has been assigned to the employee benefits trust department in the administration of the bank's collective investment funds and pension and profit-sharing trust accounts.



MS. OVERACKER



SPELMAN

William H. Walker, Jr., has joined the law firm of Odorisi, Fracassi and Bergin of East Rochester. Walker is a

graduate of Albany Law School of Union University and LeMoyné College in Syracuse.

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