



### Heroic Chaplain

Father Peter Rogers, OMI, of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in New Orleans, rescues an elderly woman from a blazing apartment house. Such duties are routine for Father Rogers, who serves as chaplain for the city's police and fire departments. In addition to his work as parish priest, he has been answering emergency calls for 14 years. (RNS Photo)

### The Church 1979

By Father Andrew Greeley

#### Coping With Lunatic Legalism

Am I the only one who sees the conflict between the two most fashionable current crazes in the American church — "evangelization" and "guidelines"?

On the one hand we have a bunch of manic and ill-informed enthusiasts running around the country trying to convert the "unchurched" and reconvert the "fallen away." On the other hand, we have another bunch of lunatics running around the country, formulating elaborate, detailed and moronic rules to regulate the administration of the sacraments. Bizarrely enough, some of the evangelization enthusiasts are also guideline enthusiasts.

I doubt that the evangelizers are going to attract that many people to the church, or back to the church. But if they have any success at all, the evangelized are going to promptly encounter a system of "rule morality," more rigid, more demanding and more inflexible than anything that has ever been devised in the previous history of the church. You attract people to the church on the one hand, and then you frighten them away with inquisitorial rigorism on the other. "Dumb" is the only adjective I can think of to describe such wildly contradictory behavior. It convinces me that contemporary Catholic clerics are even more poorly educated than I thought they were.

One guideline enthusiast explained it to me this way: "If we are going to grant annulments on the grounds of psychological instability, then we simply have to screen people before

marriage to determine that they are psychologically capable of getting married."

The idea that it is the role of the church or of the parish priest to "psychologically screen" people who wish to marry is uncharitable, un-Christian and a violation of Canon Law. But the guideline enthusiasts have imposed regulations that make both the old Canon Law and Cardinal Pericle Felici's grotesque revised code look like exercises in liberal permissiveness. The guideline nuts around the country have, with a single stroke of their pens (or a single resolution of their priest senate), revoked the code of Canon Law and, as far as I can see, revoked the Sermon on the Mount, too. They have turned, almost without anyone noticing it, American Catholicism into the kind of detailed Pharisaic oppression that both Jesus and St. Paul condemned. And they seemed to have gotten away with it in the complete absence of any resistance or even argument.

The recent issue of Aim had an article which purports to present a "moderate" view of the guidelines. The perspective of the author, who has in his own personal ministry driven away many potential returnees, is about as moderate as the Talmud, and yet as far as I can see no one is complaining.

Ironically, the new hyper-legalism has seized control of the American church precisely at a time when a lot of sometime-Catholics in their middle-30s are getting ready to drift back into the church. They are discovering a more authoritarian, more unsympathetic, more insensitive and more oppressive church than the one they left when they were in their 20s.

The guidelines are, for the most part, unenforceable. A lot of Catholic laity will not accept them and will simply not receive the sacraments. Others will shop around

until they find priests who refuse to apply the guidelines. Still, we are going to suffer enormous losses because this new lunatic legalism does not convince priests, insecure about their own masculinity and unable to be gentle and sensitive with those seeking to return, that they are indeed acting like real American males — administrators applying rules. With the guidelines mania, American Catholicism has deliberately and consciously embarked on the path, crushing the bruised reed. It is melancholy to think that many of the guidelines nuts will not even understand what that last sentence means.

### Charities Sets Annual Meeting

Bishop Matthew H. Clark will address the 62nd annual meeting of Catholic Charities Friday evening at Genesee Settlement House, 10 Dake St. Before the 6:30 p.m. dinner at the house, he will tour the neighborhood.

Catholic Charities was incorporated in 1917 and has been a member of the United Community Chest since 1919. Its affiliates are: Camp Stella Maris, Catholic Family Center, Catholic Youth Organization, Charles Settlement House, DePaul Clinic, Genesee Settlement House, Kinship Group Homes, Office of Family Life, St. Ann's Home and Heritage, St. Elizabeth's Guild and St. Joseph's Villa.

### DCG Plans Participation

Elmira — The Elmira Divorced, Separated and Widowed Catholics will meet Sunday, Sept. 16, for a trip to the Mount Saviour Monastery Fall Festival. The group will assemble at the north end of Sears parking lot at 9 a.m., and travel to Mount Saviour. The day will begin with Mass at 10 a.m.

Anyone desiring further information may contact Georgia Botcher, 743 W. Clinton St.

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