

# Family Conference

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family life, which doesn't include homosexual couples or unmarried people living together."

One commonly used definition by the so-called "pro-family" groups is that "a family consists of persons who are related by blood, marriage or adoption." Jo Ann Gasper of McLean, Va., who wrote the definition, said a single woman with several children could be considered a family, "but two unmarried, unrelated people are not a family."

Roman Catholic and National Council of Churches (NCC) officials testifying at hearings generally supported the White House conference format which was open for discussions on all types of families. They also agreed that the government had the responsibility to help relieve societal problems such as poverty, unemployment, inadequate health care and inflation — which erode family underpinnings.

A spokesman for the Catholic Coordinating Committee for the WHCF said "we feel very positive about the conference and are encouraging Catholics to participate. We have a lot of things to say about family life. We feel the White House Conference is an important step toward looking at the family today."

The Rev. G. William Sheek, director of the Office of Family Ministries and Human Sexuality of the NCC, said that the governing board of the NCC has expressed the importance of "supporting a variety of family units by redirecting needed services in such a way that family integrity is preserved and to further

seriously consider that... the greatest single harm to children is poverty."

Sheek said a hopeful outcome of the White House conference is to "increase awareness of the impact of external economic forces on families and a debunking of the myth that all family malfunctions are internal and interpersonal in origin." He said the NCC supports such moves as guaranteed income, equal opportunities for people and family allowances.

Msgr. Francis J. Lally, chairman of the Catholic Coordinating Committee for the WHCF, said the White House Conference should concentrate on correcting public policy that now undermines family life. He said federal policies and legislation should be viewed for its "family impact" and that the voices of parents should be heard above those of special interest groups.

Father Donald Conroy, USCC Family Life representative, testified that "families simply cannot fulfill their proper role when their members lack jobs, income, food, housing, health care, or education, and too frequently this is the case in our society."

Those opposing increased government roles in family life hold that more government programs would lead to increased taxation and inflation, resulting in more problems for families including forcing more mothers to go out and work. Phyllis Schlafly, leader of Stop ERA, said, "Pro-life family groups don't think the federal government has the competence to deal with the family; it aggravates problems rather than solves them."

The WHCF, a campaign promise of President Carter, was originally scheduled for 1979. Personnel problems delayed that conference, however.

Some 2,000 official delegates will attend the national WHCF. About 1,000 will be chosen from the

50 states and seven territories, in proportion to population. California will have the largest number, 135; followed by New York with 123. Any interested person may attend the conferences to observe.

States have received general, flexible guidelines for developing recommendations they will send for WHCF consideration. Some states, including New York, are working out their recommendations at state convention workshops. (Rochester diocesans are attending these state conferences in Buffalo on Feb. 2, and in Ithaca on Feb. 9.)

People testifying at the regional hearings spoke on an enormous range of topics and viewpoints related to family life. Many expressed concern with the adverse effects of inflation, joblessness, racial discrimination, and poverty on family life. They spoke of religious values, marriage preparation, abortion, teenage pregnancy, effects of the mass media, family violence, day care for children, alcoholism, health insurance, morality in American society today, and governmental influences on people's lives.

Many voiced concern about morality in society and secular influences undermining family life.

WHCF advisory committee members said they were especially impressed by the repeated testimony on the impact of the economy on families. One, Ronald Pitzer of the University of Minnesota, said the most pressing concern appeared to be the upward spiral in the cost of living.

Committee member Harry Hollis said the testimony emphasized the diversity of structure of families in society, and the need of churches to minister to them.

President Carter said the main purpose for the WHCF conference is "to examine the strengths of American families, the difficulties they face, and the ways in which family life is affected by public policies."



## George Meany Dead at 85

George Meany, the gruff, cigar-smoking pioneer of the American labor movement, died in Washington on Jan. 10. He was 85. In a statement Bishop Thomas C. Kelly, secretary of the United States Catholic Conference (USCC), noted of Meany: "His service to the nation reached beyond the labor movement itself and positively touched many sectors of national life." Services for the labor leader were held at St. Matthew's Cathedral in Washington.

## Black Heritage

The Black Cultural Heritage Program sponsored by Monroe Community College and the Marcus Garvey Memorial Black Solidarity Committee will conduct the second in its series of six community conferences from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Friday, Jan. 25, at the Mt. Vernon Baptist Church, 351 Joseph Ave.

Subject will be "Systems of Belief in Black Cultural Heritage" and will focus on African roots of black people's religious beliefs and practices and philosophical attitudes toward life.

## Insights in Liturgy

By Father Robert J. Kennedy

### Preparing Lent And Easter

The ornaments are barely put away, a discarded Christmas tree or two is to be found by the edge of the road, and a lone house is still illuminated by bright colored lights. But the time is already well upon us for planning the Lenten-Easter season.

Since this season is the most important for the Church in its yearly cycle of celebrations, the planning should be very carefully and thoughtfully done. Some reflections might be helpful.

**1. Drop the Lenten Slogan Syndrome!** It is a most disturbing development to approach Lent with the question: "What shall our theme be this year?" This presupposes that Lent is a kind of blank to be filled in every year (The year of this or the year of that), with the task becoming more wearisome each time. Lent is not what we want it to be, not a thing to be studied, mastered, taught or dissected. The heart of Lent is not captured in a catchy jingle or phrase like a MacDonald's commercial.

The heart of Lent is us, the way of naming ourselves and coming to terms with our identity, individually and communally. We do not explain Lent; it explains us.

**2. Lent is Baptism!** That is why Lent explains us, because baptism describes who we are. It is the flesh and blood of Lent itself. The season originated because catechumens were preparing

for baptism at the Easter Vigil; the time before this celebration of the sacraments of initiation was a period of intense spiritual purification so as to be ready for this great event in their lives. Those already baptized were so moved by the witness in faith of the catechumens that they joined them in the renewal of baptismal promises at the Easter Vigil. Lent touches the whole mystery of life: the dying and rising in Christ of each person and the whole Church. As the catechumens are plunged into the water and rise from it anointed with the spirit, so the whole Church renews itself — in its baptismal commitment in Christ.

**3. Lent is not business as usual!** Special seasons makes special demands on the words we speak, the songs we sing, the prayers we raise, what we feel and see and do. If Lent deals with the serious business of Baptism, it is not a program to attend, but a prayer to be prayed.

Therefore, we must take to heart the scriptures presented to us and come to terms with their challenge and comfort. We must plunge ourselves into the rituals of the season and allow them to speak to our hearts: the acceptance of ashes, the election of candidates for baptism, the scrutinies of the catechumens, the reconciling imposition of hands, the blessings of fire and water, the breaking of bread.

**4. Lent is only part of the whole season!** It is not a season all by itself. It prepares for baptism and its renewal at the Easter Vigil and opens out onto the wide celebration of the Easter Triduum that is continued in Eastertide so that the central and overwhelming

mystery of risen life might be contemplated in its depths. Thus, Lent and Easter are not primarily in the programs or themes we plan, but in the heart of the Church and the hearts of all its members; a prayer of the Body of Christ of commitment, of repentance, and above all, of joyous praise for the wonderful works of God's mercy and power.

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