

FAMILY



Giving the Lord a Chance to Answer

A little of this and some of that . . .

In a recent New York Times interview, Bishop Francis J. Mugavero (pronounced muh-GUH-vero) of Brooklyn said he is not afraid to ask God for a favor when he knows he has a real problem and that he has no special "pipeline" to the Lord then went on to describe prayer as "just talking to myself is all it is."

There must be as many descriptions of prayer as there are people who pray. I suppose I agree with the Bishop up to a point, but I find it sometimes helps if I stop talking long enough now and then to let the Lord get a word in edgewise.

— It's a case of Jack Sprat and his wife in regard to the large bowl of colored Easter eggs. "Don't worry, Mom," says our son who eats whites only, as he goes out the door with a half dozen. "Tammy (who lives next door) likes just the yolks."

— Just when I think I've heard everything on

Sarah Child



All in the Family

commercial TV, some new vulgarity is spewed out. The epithet "vast wasteland" coined some years ago now seems innocuous in the face of modern offerings. The medium is obviously now in its "armpit era."

On the other hand TV has its moments. There was, for example, the Easter Sunday night screening of "The Ten Commandments" which the 10-year-old found terrific, but then part of her reaction was due in part to the fact that her regular bedtime was by-passed. The next night, this viewer was charmed by a 42-year-old piece of artistry. "Pygmalion," starring Lesley Howard

as Professor Henry Higgins and Wendy Hiller as Eliza Doolittle outshone the much later version of George Bernard Shaw's charming play, "My Fair Lady," despite the fact that the former was shot in black and white and had no music. It's a commentary on something or other when TV puts its best foot forward showing old movies.

— The head of the house brought home a new reference book a couple of weeks ago entitled, "I Hear America Talking" by Stuart Berg Flexner. An illustrated history of American words and phrases it makes for fascinating and fun reading. On page 190, one learns that the most commonly used word in America is the pronoun I. Later on it is discovered that the Spanish contributed more words to the American English language than any other ethnic group, e.g. macho, padre, siesta, rodeo, etc.

Thus far the book has only been used by the adults in the family, the fact that many an unsavory word's origin is also included not yet discovered by the younger members of the household.

Helping the Alcoholic

Last fall I began "The Lord in Your Life," a daily five minute radio program aired over a local AM broadcasting station. The major part of this show is a personal testimony by someone who details how the Lord has worked in her or his life.

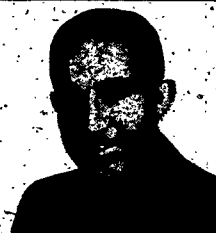
Several participants have been recovered alcoholics whose moving accounts about their conversion from a life of misery to a style of sobriety reflect the power of God's grace and the importance of loving friends.

Ken E., a highly placed executive, now looks back upon a dozen adult years and sees enormous, regrettable hurts, destruction and near total disaster. His marriage broke up, his relationship with a second woman was tumultuous, his business career deteriorated, his health suffered, his money ran out.

Two years ago he hit bottom and somehow found his way to Alcoholics Anonymous. That program helped him to recognize he had a disease and should never drink again. It started the man on a road to recovery.

He hasn't had a drop of alcohol since then. He rectified his marital relationship in the Church, participates in daily Mass, reads scripture regularly, makes occasional retreats, practices tithing, works actively in A.A., coordinates the guests for my program and does well with his job. Above all, this man enjoys a deep peace and serenity, despite regrets over past mistakes.

Fr. Joseph M. Champlin



Our Church Family

Father Jack has a similar tale to tell.

In a small paperback, "Let's Talk" (Talbot Print House, 5600 S. Ryan, Seattle, Washington 98178), he summarizes his earlier days.

"Looking back, it is difficult to realize the mess I was in during my drinking times, and the deranged mind that kept me from knowing how bad those days were."

An earlier publication contained Father Jack's narrative of his alcoholic misery and the kind of joy he found in those early days of sobriety. This present book continues the story:

"All I can say is these few years later the honeymoon is still not over. Each day and each year, life becomes more precious to me. . . . To summarize — I am a priest, back home in Seattle, the pastor of a beautiful parish with a zealous staff and 4,000 loving, cooperative parishioners. I have time to counsel, lecture, be on alcoholism committees, and even take the occasional time to 'goof off.'"

— Ken E. and Father Jack can number many associates in the United States, since experts estimate one out of every 13 persons here suffer with the disease of alcoholism. However, not all have experienced parallel recoveries. Many continue to struggle with this illness while spouses, parents, children, relatives, friends and employers suffer.

"Let's Talk" seeks to provide those suffering companions or colleagues with a tool to help that alcoholic individual. Father Jack writes:

"You can do something about another's drinking. The tragedy of the situation is that most alcoholics do not get help. Helping is what we call intervention. It is being knowledgeable about the illness, knowing the alcoholic can be treated, the disease arrested, and actually intervening in the drinking pattern of the man or woman afflicted by this illness."

His process of intervention contains nine steps and includes prayer, professional help, an actual confrontation with the alcoholic and continuing support.

The results? "I wish we could claim 100 percent success. We can't. But I will gladly go into print with the fact that of all counselors I've been able to find who use this approach, we can claim 80 percent!"

For those in the "suffering" category who wonder what they can possibly do to help their sick alcoholic friend or beloved, I highly recommend "Let's Talk."

Making a Community Out of Your Parish

Parishes are a lot like families. Some families are made up of people who share a history, live a present, hope for a future, and live; laugh, and argue together. Other families are made up of individuals who go their own way, politely deferential to others, and grow up and away without really knowing each other.

Some parishes offer a feeling of family that you sense the minute you walk in. It's not that definable — feelings rarely are — but there's a degree of relationship and comfort there that enables people to interact like a parish family with all the closeness and disharmony that implies. Other parishes — sad, sterile parishes — never generate a feeling of togetherness and family. Parishioners don't see themselves as a responsible part of the parish family. They come to Mass, pray privately, leave without relating to anyone else, and go home to complain that they aren't getting anything out of the parish.

What we're talking about here is community, that elusive underpinning that makes a parish not a place but a caring faith community. A sense of community isn't a gift but the result of lots of hard work on the part of its parish family. It constantly reflects on its relationship: how is this going to bring us closer to becoming a caring faith community? How might it separate us?

Certain traits stand out in parishes that have

Dolores Curran



Talks With Parents

become communities. Probably the most significant is that of making newcomers welcome. It's no great achievement, after all, to have a fine degree of community in a static parish. But if there has been great movement in and out, people in some parishes begin to feel like owners and treat newcomers like aliens. Hospitality is the key here, making people feel welcome by setting up parish visitor programs, specifically inviting newcomers as well as oldtimers to activities, and introducing them to the larger parish family via the newsletter.

That brings me to one of the most hopeful ways of fostering parish community: implementing a really good newsletter that goes out to each home monthly, complete with parish calendar, vignettes about parishioners, recognitions of births, deaths, and anniversaries of deaths, features of parishioners who have moved, stories of the past in the parish, hopes for the future, pictures and features of young people who have graduated and left the parish, and even a

section for frank letters from parishioners who don't feel heard around the family table on Sundays.

I know of one that offers a monthly question on some area of parish family, i.e. "Should the parish hire a professional musician to direct the choir and liturgies if it means less money for upkeep of the grounds and flowers?" It prints answers from parishioners culled from parish lists, not just the parish regulars. It's a very popular feature and engenders some mature discussion on leadership and responsibilities.

A bulletin can't serve the same purpose. It announces. The newsletter is like a family letter. It keeps us up-to-date on each other so that we care about each other. Some newsletters tend to be bulletins or pastoral propaganda vehicles and that's bad. Far better when the community invites volunteers with an interest in writing to come up with a newsy letter every month, introducing us to one another and letting us know a little more about the person next to us in the pews.

One sad phrase we hear over and over again in parishes without a sense of community is, "I don't know what's going on." We can help overcome that question by answering it. There are many ways to develop parish community. I realize, but these two — hospitality and newsletter — are evident in most parishes that seem like families today. Why not try them?