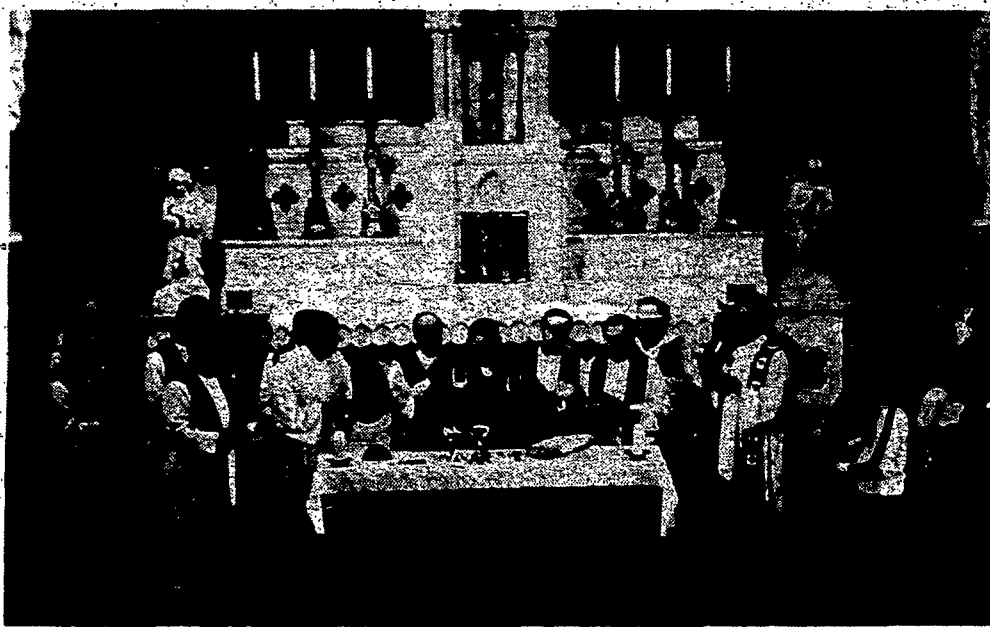




On Monday, March 31, several priests joined Bishop Matthew H. Clark in celebrating a Mass observing Lent in the Chemung-Schuyler Region at St. Patrick's Church, Elmira. The congregation filled the church for the event which occurred the day following Palm Sunday. Shown above are Bishop Clark and the concelebrants during the Consecration.

Sacraments Discussed At Steuben Hearing

By Martin Toombs
Southern Tier Editor

Bath — The first regional hearing studying the diocese's sacramental guidelines raised suggestions on sacramental preparation, especially for First Penance and First Eucharist, at St. Mary's April 9.

The hearing, conducted by Father Robert Kennedy, diocesan Liturgy director, is part of the first phase of the study, dealing with the sacramental practices on which the diocese has previously issued guidelines: First Communion, First Penance, Confirmation, Marriage Preparation and the Rite of Penance. Father Kennedy was assisted by Sister Mary Lynch and Father Lewis Brown of the diocesan Religious Education Office.

The hearings will continue through May 1. Father Kennedy noted that he expected his committee's work to be sent to Bishop Clark by the end of May. In addition to the hearings, two surveys also are being distributed. The first will go to each parish, asking the parish staff to describe that parish's practice in the five areas mentioned. The second will be distributed widely, and Father Kennedy invited those present to make copies of the forms they will be sent, and ask others working in religious education to complete them. That survey will quote sections of the existing sacramental guidelines, he said, and ask for comments.

Father Kennedy reported that 21 persons had attended the afternoon session at St. Mary's which was designed for parish staff members, representing nearly every parish in the Steuben Region.

The staff discussions were "lively exchanges," he said, with persons reporting on what they found effective and where they saw problems with current practice. Father Kennedy noted that they also expressed the need for uniformity of adherence to the guidelines.

Twenty persons representing several parishes attended the evening public session, and their discussion

dealt most directly with current practice and ideas for improvement. The group was especially interested in First Eucharist and First Penance.

Hildreth Smith, St. Ann's, Hornell, religious education administrator, stated that she felt conducting classes for First Communion was a mistake. If the child is attending class, she said, the parents won't get involved in the training, something which she said is valuable.

Other speakers agreed that the position of the parents as the prime teachers should be stressed. But when Father Richard Tormey, St. Mary's pastor, asked if the faith of the parents should be considered before allowing a child to receive Communion, the negative effect that would have on the child was pointed out. The child's preparation should be the determining factor, some suggested.

One participant spoke in favor of a formal Communion class which would receive First Eucharist together, noting its inspirational value to the parish.

Sister Ann Miller, Corning Catholic schools principal, expressed her feeling that it is good pastoral practice for a child's First Eucharist to occur in his or her own home. Others suggested a compromise; the first reception could occur in a family setting, and, at the end of the year, all those who had received their First Eucharist would participate in a class reception.

Concerning First Penance, none of those attending the evening session reported that their parish required it to precede First Communion, with most reporting that it came in the fourth grade. Several noted that their parish allows parents to train children for the sacrament earlier if they wish.

A religious educator from St. Joachim's, Canisteo, noted that parents seem to want First Penance to come before First Eucharist, but her experience with a group of fifth and sixth graders making their First Penance was excellent.

Mrs. Smith noted her

experience that second and third graders know when they do wrong and would benefit from the rite of Penance, and questioned their being excluded from it. She suggested that children could make their First Penance before receiving Communion, but their participation would come in Penance services which would include private confession. Growth in the sacrament could then continue until the fourth grade, she proposed, when private confession without the penance service would be introduced.

There also is a great need for better understanding of Penance among parents, Mrs. Smith said, and several other hearing participants registered their agreement.

The best age for Confirmation was the largest question concerning that sacrament. Suggestions included junior high, high school, and those over 30 years of age. Also mentioned was the position that it should be conferred at the time of Baptism, although none of the speakers supported that use of the sacrament.

Discussion of marriage preparation raised concerns about adherence to whatever guidelines are implemented, and an interest in making pre-Cana programs valuable to the couples.

At the end of the two-hour meeting, Father Kennedy invited written comments to be directed to him, asking that they be brief, specific and received by May 1 so they can be included in the committee's deliberations.

More hearings are scheduled during the coming week. Unless otherwise stated, the staff session is from 2 to 4 p.m., and the public session from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m.

Spanish Apostolate Field Office, Wednesday, April 16; staff meeting from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

Seneca-Cayuga Region, Monday, April 21 at Holy Family, Auburn; staff meeting from 3 to 5 p.m.

Chemung-Schuyler Region, Monday, April 21, St. Patrick's, Elmira.

North Region, Wednesday, April 23, Annunciation Parish.

Southwest Region, Wednesday, April 23, St. Mary's, Scottsville.

Bishop Clark To Speak In Brooklyn

Bishop Matthew H. Clark will be one of seven American bishops speaking in a series scheduled at St. James Cathedral in Brooklyn.

Bishop Clark will have the topic "Pastoral Crises and the Response of the American Hierarchy in the '80s." He will speak Friday, May 16.

The series is titled "Shepherds Speak: Seven American Bishops Confront Social and Moral Issues — A Major Symposium of Christian Leadership."

Other speakers are Bishop Carroll T. Dozier of Memphis, "The Church as a Community of Conscience," Bishop Rene

H. Gracida of Pensacola, Tallahassee, "Capital Punishment and the Sacredness of Life," Bishop Joseph A. Francis of Newark, "Institutionalized Racism," Bishop Maurice J. Dingman of Des Moines, "The Plight of

the Landless American," Bishop P. Francis Murphy of Baltimore, "Women in Society and the Church," and Bishop Thomas J. Gumbleton of Detroit, "Nuclear Disarmament: A Christian Imperative."

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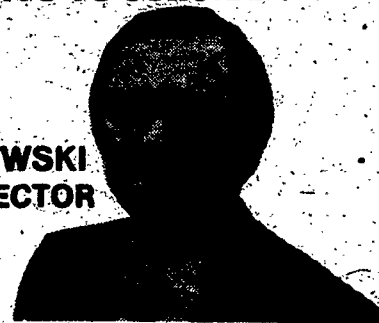
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