



Family Planning of Funerals

When an emergency plea for help comes to the volunteer fire department headquarters in the small, beautiful, lake-side village of Cazenovia, two things immediately happen: a siren sounds, and phones ring.

Through a special telephone hook-up, the message about a fire or some type of accident requiring rescue service instantly gets communicated to the homes of 50 residents affiliated with the department. The brief word states what happened, where it occurred and who is involved.

One of those houses is St. James rectory, where either the pastor, Msgr. A. Robert Casey, or his youthful partner, Father Louis Aiello, monitors the call. About ten times a week they will then quickly jump in the car and drive to the scene, always responding to accidents and even traveling to fires, if they judge their presence would be supportive.

This is small town, rural America in which Catholics tend to be a minority; but in that environment those many who are Protestant, Jewish or unchurched often will welcome the concerned presence of a priest in the midst of such a tragedy.

Because of that telephone arrangement with the fire department, the shepherds at St. James have close contact with families who have suffered a death. They either expect a parishioner's imminent demise or within moments receive notification of the

Fr. Joseph M. Champlin



Our Church Family

person's expiration. To their great credit, one or both without delay then visit the home, offer condolences, lead the family in prayer, and in a delicate way discuss preparations for the funeral liturgy.

They carry with them two items: first, a book by this writer which contains the readings and prayers for the Mass of Christian Burial together with an explanation of the funeral service itself ("Through Death to Life," Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Ind. 46556); second, a selection form upon which the family can note its choices of texts and other suggestions for the ceremony.

These Cazenovia priests celebrate about 15-20 funerals each year and in 80 per cent of these the family becomes actively involved with the planning of the liturgy itself.

At the very least they will select the scripture readings; in many instances they ask a family relative or friend to proclaim the biblical text; on other occasions, they have chosen appropriate music

for the Mass; at a particularly touching liturgy, one daughter, following the request of her sisters, sang their deceased mother's favorite hymn, "Let There Be Peace on Earth."

Each person is a unique creation of the Lord; so, too, every family represents a blend of many unique persons. The Christian burial of such an individual thus should reflect the specialness of both the deceased and her or his family. The approach at Cazenovia does just that. Moreover, this respect for their individuality also makes the funeral Mass much more personal and greatly enhances its spiritual effectiveness.

Furthermore, the priests at St. James are through this process perfectly fulfilling the mind of the Church as expressed in the introductory guidelines for the "Rite of Funerals."

"The priest should consider the various circumstances, and in particular the wishes of the family and the community. He should make full use of the choices afforded in the rite.

"In general, all the texts are interchangeable and may be chosen, with the help of the community or family, to reflect the individual situation.

"The priest should show loving concern for the family of the deceased person, support them in time of sorrow, and as much as possible involve them in planning the funeral celebration and the choice of the options made available in the rite."

Neighbors in Need

Neither a lender nor a borrower be wrote the Bard who for all his brilliance tended toward stuffiness:

Obviously he never knew what it was to be a suburban housewife, certainly knew nothing about the price of a tank of gas and most definitely hadn't the slightest idea of how to make do with what your neighbor has on hand.

For the past seven years — or is it eight? — Yvonne who lives next door and I have been carrying on a lending program that has served us well in the direst of times.

As any housewife can attest, there is no sorrier individual than a woman whose husband is due home expecting a hot meal and who has forgotten to pull anything out of the freezer.

If she can't get to the supermarket and has no leftovers on hand her situation worsens.

When that happens here, as it does frequently in spite of excellent intentions, I head for the phone and the negotiations begin.

"If you have a pound of elbows with which I could whip up some macaroni and cheese," I begin,

Sarah Child



All in the Family

"I'll see that you get it back tomorrow, or, if you like, I can send over a pound of spaghetti in exchange."

"Let me see," she counters and puts down the phone to examine the contents of her cupboards. She returns, says she has the elbows, tells me to forget about paying her back, that she still owes me a can of tomatoes. "We'll call it even."

"Terrific" I answer, thankful that still another domestic crisis has been averted.

In the time we have lived next to each other, we have traded just about everything in each other's house not excepting our children — the latter on a temporary basis, of course.

The most commonly exchanged items are flour,

shortening, and brown sugar. (Any one of our four daughters can frequently be found to be mixing up a batch of chocolate chip cookies.)

"Enough milk to hush up the cereal eaters" or "just a couple of scoops of coffee" are other much traded items, both usually sought by a bleary-eyed child standing on the other's doorstep at 7:30 a.m. holding out a container that mother has stuck in his hand.

Foodstuffs are, of course, only one category of bartered articles. Over the years, charcoal grills, charcoal, picnic table and benches, lawn equipment, snow shovels, extra seedlings, even fertilizer, have made their way across the great divide.

Often several transactions are taken care of in one phone call. "Just worked my rubber gloves to death" she will say and I promise to send mine over (little used) along with a bottle of ammonia if she will look up the dress pattern she offered along with the spool of teal blue thread.

In addition to tangible items we also trade complaints, (snowplow hit the mailbox again), solace (tomorrow is another day) and advice (you can get it cheaper downtown).

All in all a most satisfactory arrangement.

The Marriage That Isn't

I want to write today about the unspoken marriage — the Catholic marriage of long duration which has stopped being a marriage. In this marriage, partners long ago gave up any hope of recapturing a love there once was or discovering one there never was.

For reasons of family or church, divorce is out of the question for them. Most of these individuals live the life described by Thoreau as one of "quiet desperation."

Why write about these marriages? Because we tend to presume that marriages are either happy, dissolved or in need of enrichment. We haven't acknowledged those in which the partners live a life of misery and which no marriage enrichment weekend is going to help.

I've been aware of many of these sad marriages through reader mail for a long time, but the idea to write about them came from my friend, Father John Bluett of Orlando, Fla. diocese, who told me that when he announced in late December that there would be renewal of wedding vows at Mass the following Sunday, several parishioners confided to him that they couldn't be put in a position of

Dolores Curran



Talks With Parents

renewing their vows to one another. After listening to them, he decided to preach on the subject. We are indebted to him for these words:

"I have always felt our divorced persons were the most hurting group I had ever worked with. I am now inclined to believe that those who are living in marriage situations where there is no love have a more difficult cross to bear. What we so often see on the outside surface is not what is going on inside. It never occurs to us that they feel like they are living a lie, struggling beyond belief with their relationship. And they keep it well hidden from each other, their friends, and the world at large. For many, their kind of situation is a living hell.

"While there is much rightful understanding and support of those who are divorced, staying in a painful and often futile relationship can be a much

greater struggle than being divorced. Yet, all too often we do not even give token support to these people. In fact, for the most part, I don't think we are even aware of their existence, and there are so many of them . . .

"In closing, I'd like to share with you what the words of today's gospel might be saying to us in a modern paraphrase:

"Blessed are those who are dying in relationships, they can have life.

Blessed are those who feel alone in marriage; they need not be lonely.

Blessed are those who are divorced/separated; they can still be part of community.

And

"Woe to us who admit no imperfection; sadness is ours.

"Woe to us who are church and have no compassion; sadness is ours.

"Woe to us who think ourselves better; how sad we are.

"But when you reach out to the hurting, I will reach out, through you, to give life."