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Father Ruef:

People Must Distinguish Between Faith, Practice

By Martin Toombs
Southern Tier Editor

Elmira — A problem for Churches today is that "people tend to confuse faith with the articulation of faith," Father John S. Ruef told the 300 persons who attended the Lenten Preaching Mission at the First Presbyterian Church March 8.

Poor religious education has led many to believe that their Church's practices are central to faith itself, said the Episcopal priest who is dean of the Episcopal seminary Nashotah House, near Milwaukee, Wis. His talk was the first of four he gave as part of the annual mission. Serving as liturgist was Bishop Matthew H. Clark.

In his Church, Father Ruef said, people were brought up largely by a well-meaning but unsophisticated clergy. As a result, many Episcopalians didn't know of the many revisions of the Book of Common Prayer, and they assumed the familiar version "had

something of divine authority attached to it."

So the proposal for a new revision caused a great outcry from people who had been "misled by a clergy who should have known better."

The articulation of faith through liturgy or a book such as the Book of Common Prayer is necessary because that is how people work, he said; the problem occurs when the expression of faith "takes on more importance that what is being expressed."

Speaking in an interview the following day, Father Ruef pointed out that many Christians are unable to distinguish between theology and tradition. For example, he proposed that the tradition of celibacy is so firmly established in the Catholic Church that the faithful would more readily accept women priests if they, too, were celibate. He reasons that way because people tend to separate their secular and religious lives, and want their priests to be separate as well.

Religious educators must teach that there is "nothing particularly sacred about a certain set" of practices, and that all sacramental and para-liturgical services are attempts by the community "to act out who we are in faith."

As the culture changes, the forms that will best accomplish that aim also change, he said. The language of the Book of Common Prayer was only heard in two places: in church, and in a Shakespeare play. While it carried an impressiveness many connected with Church, it reflected a culture which no longer exists.

And while education of the faithful is important, he stated that "we have a lot of clergy who are theologically illiterate" themselves.

Father Ruef commented on the relationships between Christians in and out of the renewal movement.

Renewal is "not an un-mixed blessing," he said, supporting the value of what those involved in the

movement believe. There is no substitute for awareness of the experiential side of Christianity, he noted, for without that the Church becomes a museum of tradition. Renewal is important and necessary, but not new; and he commented that it also is an "inescapable and for the most part welcome reality."

But some renewal groups become elitist, he said, and "write off those who still linger in the before-time." Church members must avoid letting the vocabulary of the renewal movement divide the two groups; the experiences the movement describes can occur without knowledge of the movement's vocabulary, he explained.

He offered a guide for renewal movement members: if you can tell who is or is not a "real Christian," you're "in trouble."

Not everyone needs renewal, he said, and attempts to talk someone into joining the movement "ignores the work of the Holy Spirit." Movement



Bishop Matthew H. Clark, left, and Father John S. Ruef share a hymnal during the opening night of the Lenten Preaching Mission at the First Presbyterian Church, Elmira.

members shouldn't assume that everyone needs the renewal experience.

The two groups is a "creative conflict," he said, that only becomes damaging when they fail to respect each other.

The relationship between



Brother Ed O'Donnell makes a point during the panel on various vocations which was part of the program at St. Mary Our Mother, Horseheads, March 8. The other panelists are, from left, Father John Firpo, John J. Stevens, Donna Stevens, Sister Barbara Scornia and Giovina Caroscio. Not visible is Sister Marie Catherine.

Panel Discusses Vocations

Horseheads — About 100 teenagers from several parishes in the Southern Tier participated in a program on vocations at St. Mary Our Mother Church Sunday March 8.

The five-hour program included a panel discussion on vocations. The panelists each spoke from their perspective: they were Father John Firpo, associate pastor at St. Mary Our Mother; Donna and John J. Stevens, a married couple from Big Flats; Sister Barbara Scornia, who talked of a vocation to the religious life; Giovina Caroscio, a Southern

Tier Office of Social Ministry staff member, who spoke on the single state; Brother Ed O'Donnell, a Carmelite brother and a teacher at Notre Dame High School, and Sister Marie Catherine, also from Notre Dame, who spoke on the contemplative life.

The program was coordinated by Jim Willsey, a student at St. Bernard's Seminary who is doing his field work with the diocesan vocations team. Father Thomas Valenti, diocesan Vocations director, also participated.

Willsey explained that the program was designed to help young people see vocations in a broader context by giving them the opportunity to hear persons involved in the various vocations discuss the process which led them to their state in life.

The teenagers wrote questions for the panel to answer, and Willsey reported that they were excellent questions on making such an important choice, and what it means to a person's life.

The day's program included Mass, and ended with a pizza party.

Welcomes Corning Youth

Corning — Passersby of St. Patrick's Church may have noticed a new addition to its parking lot: an old school bus, brightly decorated with the words "Celebrate Life." The bus serves as transportation for Celebrate Life, a singing group composed of high-school-aged people.

Celebrate Life began in 1968 as a youth project of St. Mary Our Mother Church in Horseheads. The group sang at a weekly folk Mass in the parish until recently, but from the beginning considered frequent shows at hospitals, nursing homes, prisons, and schools for the retarded an essential part of its program. More than 750 young people have been members of the group, which has performed almost 1,000 concerts.

Recently, the group's director, Ray Defendorf, moved with his family to Corning. Since then he has returned to Horseheads for twice-weekly practices and performances. "It's difficult to just close the door on such a successful youth project," Defendorf states. "Celebrate Life has been such an important part of my family's life that we just couldn't let it fold. We have bookings well into the future, and many of our 50 or so members have either been part of Celebrate Life for many years, or have just turned 14 and have been looking forward to joining us."

Unwilling to dissolve the group, Defendorf has decided

to expand it to include more Corning teenagers. Celebrate Life's official link with St. Mary Our Mother Parish ended in September, but the parish still allows the group to use its facilities for practices. Celebrate Life supports itself with donations and the sale of its record albums.

"We did need some legal entity to help us register and insure the bus," adds Defendorf. When the relationship with St. Mary Our Mother ended, the group was forced to take the bus off the road until St. Patrick's Church, Corning, volunteered to help, registering and insuring the bus in its name. Celebrate Life paid the registration cost and the insurance premium. The parish now will have the use of the bus and Defendorf, its driver, for its various youth activities.

"I am hopeful that because the bus is parked here in Corning, more young people from this area will decide to join Celebrate Life," Defendorf said. "I'll be driving the bus to all practices and shows."

The three Catholic parishes in Corning have recently formed a tri-parish youth council which coordinates and plans youth activities. Defendorf hopes to become increasingly involved with the teens of the three parishes during the next year and following his ordination as a permanent deacon. He is a member of the diocese's initial class of permanent deacons, scheduled for ordination in the spring of 1982.

Young people aged 14 and up are invited to join the group. Membership is open to teens of all faiths, regardless of musical talent or experience. Practices occur on Wednesday evenings from 7 to 10 p.m., and on many Saturdays from 7:30 to 10:30 p.m. The Celebrate Life bus leaves St. Patrick's parking lot at 6:30 p.m. for Horseheads. Further information on the group may be obtained by telephoning Defendorf at his Third Street home, 927-5858, or at the Corning Hospital's Community Relations Department, 962-5051, ext. 517.

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