

RSMs Urge 'No' on Prison Bond

By John Dash
The Central Administration of the Rochester Sisters of Mercy has joined a

number of Catholic groups in the area urging voters to say "no" to Proposition One on the Nov. 3 ballot.

Through that proposition, the state is seeking authority of voters to issue \$500 million in bonds to build additional prison cells.

Earlier this year, diocesan Catholic Charities and the Diocesan Sisters Council and such ecumenical groups as the Judicial Process Commission of Genesee Ecumenical Ministries also urged a "no" vote on the question.

The Mercy administration's statement said: "The Judeo-Christian Scriptures carry a very strong message about our responsibility to care for and be compassionate toward men and women who are incarcerated.

"We express our concern over the proposed New York State \$500 Million Prison Bond Issue that will appear on the November ballot. After study and discussion we voted to vote 'No' on the issue and to urge our Sisters and others to study the Bond Issue and vote with care. Our concerns were diverse and at times sections of the proposed bond caused us to delve even more deeply into the question. The proposal does contain some allocations for juvenile facilities and psychiatric care for offenders. While these are needed, the greatest portion of the bond, \$350 million, is earmarked for the construction of 4,068 maximum security cells. Our belief is that more cells of this nature will not solve the crime problem but will only offer a temporary solution to the problem. The criminal justice system in this state is in need of radical changes. Even with the construction of these cells, projections show that by 1986, we shall be at a 99.8 per cent capacity.

"Our hope is that a 'No' vote on this issue will send a strong message to the Legislature which will effect change. The time has come for the wider use and development of creative alternative sentences for non-violent offenders. We as a state need to explore solutions other states have used to reduce overcrowding. At a time when millions of dollars are being cut from social programs, we find it hard to justify such an expense when other alternatives are available and possible.

"For all of the above reasons, we felt obliged to recommend a 'No' vote on the Prison Bond Issue."

Fr. Louis J. Hohman



The Open Window

Visiting The Sick Church's Job

Dear Father,

A friend of mine is very upset with her parish priest because he did not visit her while she was in the hospital. What would you say to my friend?

(Signed) S.J.

Dear S.J.

If there is one time more than another when people get upset with their parish priest it is when he fails to visit a sick member of their family. The possible reasons for his failure are numerous.

But, for too long a time we've thought of ministry to the sick as the exclusive preserve of priests. While the Sacrament of the Sick is the proper function of the priest, other forms of ministry to the sick belong to the faith community as a whole.

It is evident from the Gospels that this ministry is very central to the mission of Jesus; and that it is vital to us, too, is evident from Matthew 25, where our inclusion in the kingdom is based upon, "When I was sick, you visited me."

Sick people are needy not only in terms of their lacking physical health and being in a weakened condition, but are needy by reason of feeling cut off from the flow of life, no matter how minor

the illness may be. I think all of us have experienced that sense of depression and isolation that comes even when we have to stay in bed one or two days with the flu. It is an integral part of the Church's mission to constantly remind the sick person that he or she is not left out of the life and love of the faith community. We can bring a kind of healing of the psyche which aids in the healing of the body.

Therefore there should be an involvement of the community. The heart of any sacramental grace must be the loving concern of the community of faith and the community of faith is called to be present to people at the critical moments of their lives. Therefore many individuals in the faith community will be called to minister to the sick by their services and visitation.

We are in the process of instituting such a ministry which will not only supplement the visits that I try more or less successfully to make, but will extend that ministry on a much broader and deeper base. We will reach out to people who are ill, visit them, pray with them, meet whatever needs we can, bring them Communion and refer them to the pastor for the sacraments of Reconciliation and/or Anointing of the Sick.

I hope more and more people will become actively involved in this beautiful bringing of Christ to our hurting world.

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