

Parish Council Milestone Recalled

By John Dash

Ten years ago tomorrow, Bishop Joseph L. Hogan issued a directive that each parish in the diocese establish a parish council or update an already existing council.

On Nov. 19, 1971, he told pastors that by Pentecost the following year he expected either the establishment of parish councils or the formation of committees which would establish them.

Last week Sister Jean Rodman said that 11 parishes do not have councils, either because of the structure of the parishes themselves or because the pastors will not permit them.

Nevertheless, she said of the 160-odd councils which do exist, "There is no group where the future of the Church rests more hopefully."

The past five years the Sister of St. Joseph has been the "little part-time nun" in the diocesan program of helping councils achieve their potential, a potential she describes as taking responsibility for shaping the entire ministry, spiritual and temporal, of the parish.

She is aided in her work by her volunteer partner, Father Louis J. Hohman, pastor of St. Vincent De Paul in Churchville, where Sister Jean is also pastoral assistant.

Last week she cited Father Hohman's simile of all parishioners being leaven and parish councils being loaf pans as especially apt to describe the mission of councils.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark, she said, describes the mission as a "partnership of service with Jesus the Good Shepherd."

Both descriptions, she said, designate responsibilities beyond what ten years ago was the dominant function of councils: to take care of parish maintenance and financial matters.

She said last week that the growth of spiritual renewal groups such as charismatic renewal and Marriage Encounter, have encouraged the laity to see the spiritual side of the council's role.

That point of shared

responsibility for ministry was promulgated in the documents of the Second Vatican Council and stressed by Bishop Hogan in the 1971 letter.

For about five years, parishes had been establishing councils, so that by the time of the bishop's letter there were about 50 in operation. That figure was to double within the year.

And also by the time of the bishop's letter, the question of investing councils with real power to make decisions on parish life had become an issue among the presbyterate.

The past decade of council development, she said, has not been without its problems.

There remains a need in some places for a mechanism whereby newly seated council members can gain a sense of what the council has done in its history, and of the responsibility that the diocese invests in them.

Sister Jean lays some of the blame for that problem on "ministerials," her word for parish staffers, both ordained and not, who, she said, "could take more seriously their responsibility to see to it that new members of the parish council are acquainted with what the diocese invests in them."

The second problem is that councils occasionally lack a sense of direction and therefore spirit. "The first thing that could spark councils would be for clerics to preach in season and out of season that responsibility for



SISTER JEAN RODMAN

the ministry of the parish is everyone's."

In a progress report issued Feb. 28, 1975, Father Douglas Hoffman, then director of the Office of Pastoral Ministry, said:

"At the present time, parish councils are emerging as the basic leadership grouping by which directions are set for the parish community as it seeks to carry out the mission of Christ in the local community."

Sister Jean, his successor, said at the decade:

"There is no group more committed and more frustrated than the parish council. There is no group where the future of the Church rests more hopefully."

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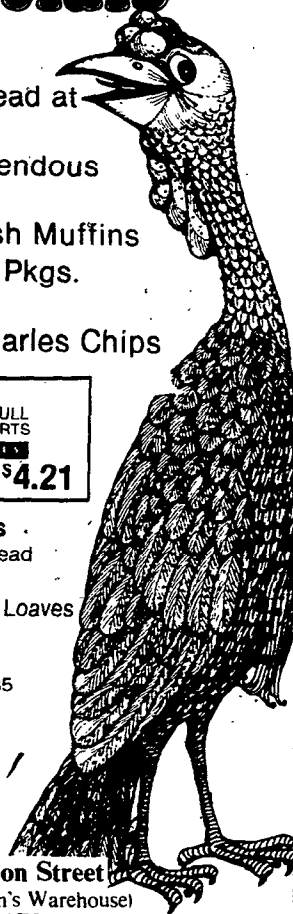
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