

White House Conference or Not MUST PRIESTS RETIRE AT 70?

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Written in collaboration with
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One of the key provisions of the so-called agenda for the 80s adopted by the recently concluded White House Conference on Aging was a call for repeal of the federal law that permits mandatory retirement at 70.

The delegates at the conference and other advocates for senior citizens long have insisted that any mandatory retirement requirement based on age is discriminatory and falls into the category of the bias known as "ageism."

The Catholic Church, among other religious bodies, had strong input into the White House conference and its attendant meetings around the country. How then does one fit this in with the requirement of the Diocese of Rochester that its priests retire at 70?

Father Louis J. Hohman, pastor of St. Vincent's in Churchville and episcopal adviser to the Courier-Journal, explains that the diocese requires such resignations for a variety of reasons but mainly because "it doesn't want to single out or stigmatize what it perceives as an incompetent priest. The only way to avoid this is to require that all retire at 70."

Father Hohman, 60, believes that "the priesthood is different from other jobs. There are still a lot of other things to do after retirement from administrative duties. I kind of agree that at 70 it might be a good idea for a priest to put aside his administrative situations and do work that is more pastoral."

"For instance, nobody is busier than Benny Ehmman."

Approaching his 77th birthday on Jan. 3, Father Benedict Ehmman has been retired for seven years, after serving 27 years in pastorates at St. Mary's in Watkins Glen and St. Michael's in Rochester.

In retirement, he celebrates daily public Mass with homily at Holy Apostles in Rochester where he also takes his turn with Sunday homilies and helps at all Sunday Masses by leading congregational singing and helping with the choir.

He also conducts a Bible class and directs a Gregorian Choir and takes "quite a few" outside assignments, such as leading the 40 Hours at Horseheads. He also will be taking part with Joseph Kelly, head of Continuing Education at Nazareth College, in putting on a lecture series at the college. He writes occasional columns for the Liturgy Department and is working on a piece for the Catholic paper in Toronto, Canada.

He is a member of the local chapter of Amnesty International and is on the executive committee of the diocesan Ministry to Priests program.

He is quick to point out that the mandatory retirement requirement is not universal in the Church. "It's not a matter of canon law, it is a local enactment," he said, but he is in favor of it.

He feels the stipulation provides "a safe umbrella to get someone off the job who really oughtn't to be there any more. Perhaps such a person has lost competence or health and is not carrying on nearly as well as he should."

But he also sees more positive aspects to the requirement. "I know a priest who is looking forward to his retirement in a year. He is fed up with meetings. He is by no means lazy — in fact, he is extremely active but he is upset by the constant administrative intrusions."

Speaking about his own retirement, Father Ehmman said, "Since my retirement, I have been able to carry on in good health. I'm glad to be rid of the yoke of administration. I have kept very busy and I wouldn't have it any other way. I don't

consider myself a workaholic but it's nice to have some expression or some outlet."

Taking a different point of view and one more in-line with the White House conference proposal is Msgr. Richard K. Burns who recently co-sponsored a proposal to do away with the mandatory requirement which was defeated by the Priests Council.

Former vice rector of the North American College in Rome and pastor of St. Thomas the Apostle in Irondequoit since 1954, Msgr. Burns said, "It seems to me that a man should retire when he is no longer able to fulfill the duties or responsibilities of whatever position — independent of age — and the judgment of whether he can fulfill his duties would have to be made not only by himself but by others competent to do so."

Msgr. Burns, 69, and due for retirement himself in two years, said the requirement poses another problem "because of the shortage of vocations. If all who reach 70 in the next couple of years retire, then there very definitely will be difficulties in the work of supplying personnel for the salvation of souls."

"Ultimately," Msgr. Burns said, "it depends anyway on the bishop. If he says we should retire, then that's that — we should. But if he is willing to keep us on, some of us would be glad to do so."

He said that as a matter of canon law, mandatory retirement could be contested "but I would not recommend that."

Another retired diocesan priest who continues to perform pastoral duties but who wished to be unnamed said he "is in full agreement with diocesan policy that pastors relinquish their roles at age 70 . . . because you just don't have the push any more." But, he adds, the requirement should apply not only to priests but to "bishops and popes, too."

Father Thomas Hocht, chaplain at the Rochester Psychiatric Center who has been a participant at ancillary meetings of the White House conference to which he was named as an observer but couldn't attend, offered a different but not contradictory viewpoint.

"We who take part in such conferences are either elderly or advocates for the elderly. The song we sing is from that bias. There are people who feel unjustly bumped out — they say, 'If I'd been sick, it would be different. I'm fine.' They regard retirement as punishment."

He continued, "Let's look at the other side of the coin. We may have something to hear from the big companies who do this — most have mandatory retirements. Surely, they have reasons. The problem is that there is inadequate provision for retirement. Old people find themselves on fixed incomes; inflation is scary. We should be providing honorable, well-cared-for retirements."

Father Hocht, 50, is "a strong advocate for the mandatory retirement age for priests. In fact, maybe even earlier than 70. At some point, the priest, with no stigma attached, should be able to turn over administrative duties. I look forward to it myself and I have no intention of rolling up into a cocoon."

The diocesan rule does not apply to religious orders of priests working here.

Father Gerard Taylor, provincial counselor of the Order of Discalced Carmelites, explained, "It's a unique situation for us — a blend of the contemplative and active lives."

He said there are only about four members in the Eastern Province over 70 and "two are still very active and I think they would object to the role of being retired. We know we've got to deal with it



FATHER EHMANN

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FATHER HOCTOR

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(retirement) but it's not as urgent as it is in other communities. We don't say a person HAS to retire."

Because it's a relatively small order, "We haven't found it to be a problem. When we get more men up to that age, then we'll have to deal with it."

The order has about 110 members in the



FATHER HOHMAN

"(Priests have) a lot of other things to do after retirement from administrative duties."

Eastern Province and about 200 overall nationally.

Thus the whole question of mandatory retirement may once again point up the fact that often the rules that may or may not apply to society at large do not necessarily have meaning for the institution of the Church.

Sarah Child

All in the Family



Writing Can Be Fattening

Nothing brings more mail than a column featuring a recipe. The calzone column which ran in October is still getting responses.

Leo Bigelow of Corning was nice enough to write and point out that the plural of the word is not calzones but calzoni. Leo wrote that he is "a very old senior citizen who finds diversion in language study." Thanks, Leo. Those of us who should know better still flub. Your note reminds me of a stop we made at Bernasconi's, one of Rome's best pastry shops. The head of the house, who is our best linguist, requested "uno cannoli" from the pretty girl behind the counter.

"No," she corrected him gently, "uno cannolo, due cannoli." Anyway, it was the best cannoli, uh, cannolo, he ever ate, or so he

says. (I wouldn't know, concentrating as I was on some fogiatelle (puff pastry filled with sweetened ricotta.)

Back to the subject of calzone. Catherine Brach of Nichols Street and Ida Compertore of Fairport both lost their recipes and requested copies sending stamped, self-addressed envelopes. You should have them by now. Moral: Never throw away your Courier-Journal.

Still in the kitchen . . . Grace Zucchero of Auburn wanted to know if anyone

had sent in the recipe for the crusty hollow Italian rolls they serve for breakfast in Italy. She wrote that she has "visited Sicilia twice" and knows how delicious they are.

Upon reading this we made a special trip to Martusciello's Bakery and introduced ourselves to Frank Martusciello who very obligingly experimented with some dough, trying to make the panini as we described them, but with no luck.

Frank was also kind enough to call some baker friends who said perhaps we were talking about a sweet roll or brioche. We weren't. We haven't given up, but are trying another source and we'll let you know.

Thanks to everybody for writing. And now — enough about cooking. I put on five pounds just writing this column.

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