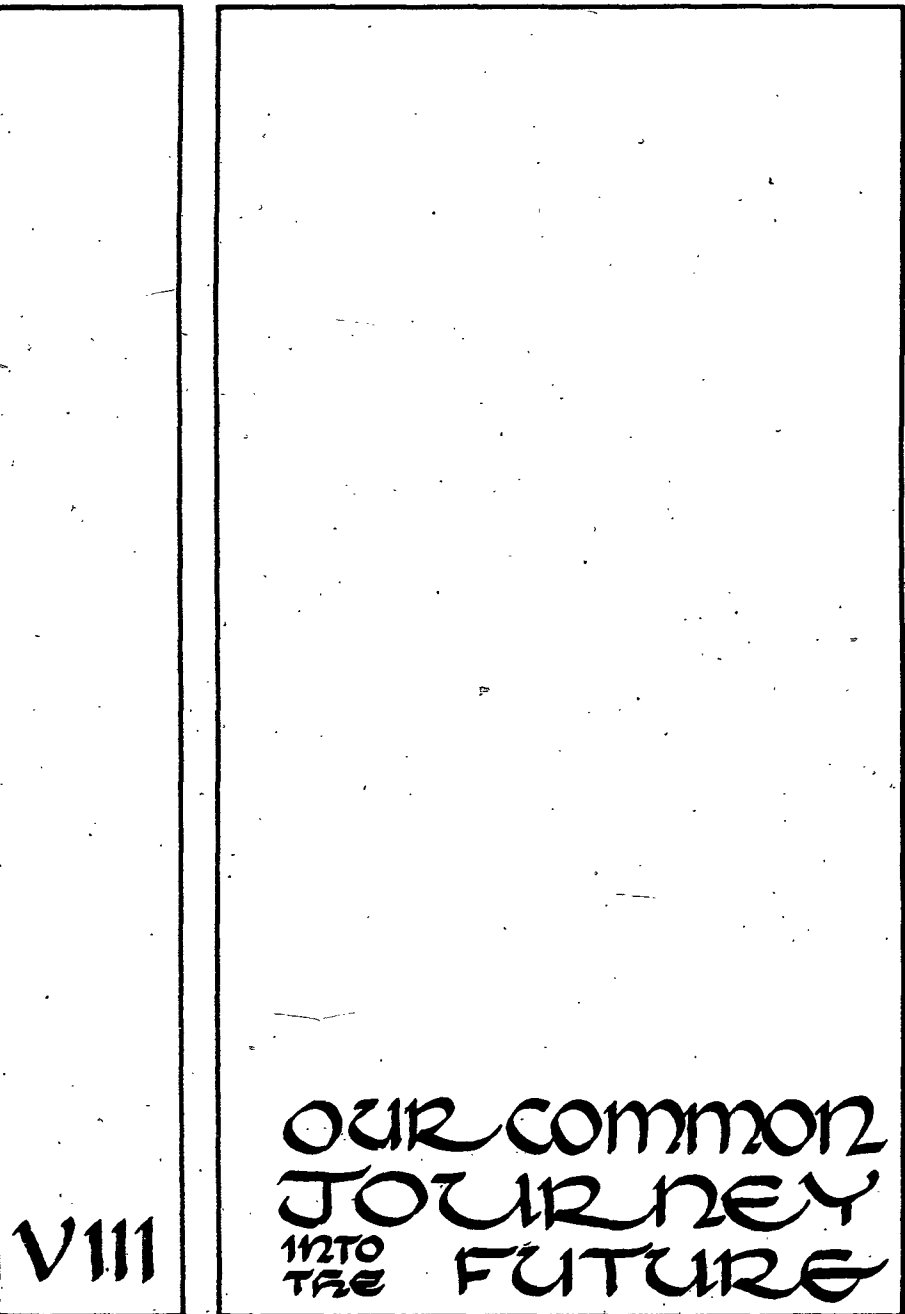


the Church by members of the community manifests in rich ways the contribution that God's People make in the life of the community. We have shared in a positive and life-giving period in the history of the Church. For all its difficulties and challenges, I am convinced that the beginning of this post-conciliar age holds for us all the promise of ever greater maturing in the Spirit of the Lord.

88. In this continuing pastoral work of shepherding and governing the Church, I think we need to make strong efforts to include the contributions of women in decision-making processes and roles. We need to examine the composition of diocesan and parish committees, councils and staffs and develop a more affirmative approach to incorporating the experience and expertise of women members. We cannot ignore their absence from advisory or decision-making bodies or positions; nor can we justify it on the grounds of their inexperience in certain kinds of Church affairs or their lack of certain skills. Such attempts at justification will create a circle of self-fulfilling prophecies which will continue to keep many qualified women at the periphery of Church affairs. If we acknowledge the baptismal call of women to contribute responsibly to the governance of Church affairs, then we must provide regular occasions and structures for such contributions. For example, in the matters of administration, finances, building, organization, and long-range planning, all of us learn by doing. It is in the best interest of the Church that the talent of all her members be developed and placed at the service of the Church's needs.



89. We are in the midst of a post-conciliar renewal in the Church. For twenty years we have been striving as an ecclesial community to be faithful to the Holy Spirit calling us to new life. This renewal has been the source of much joy and excitement; and it has also seen us facing many problems new to our generation. These have not always been easy years, or ones totally free from suffering.

90. Perhaps that will always be the case. Neither new life nor lasting values are easily achieved on this earth. The call to sacrifice and change is an inseparable part of our union in the mystery of our Lord's paschal sacrifice.

This call to suffering is present in some members of our community because they judge themselves to be held back without good reason from certain forms of service. For others the sacrifice is precisely their call to move with the Church into ways of living and worship not of their preference.

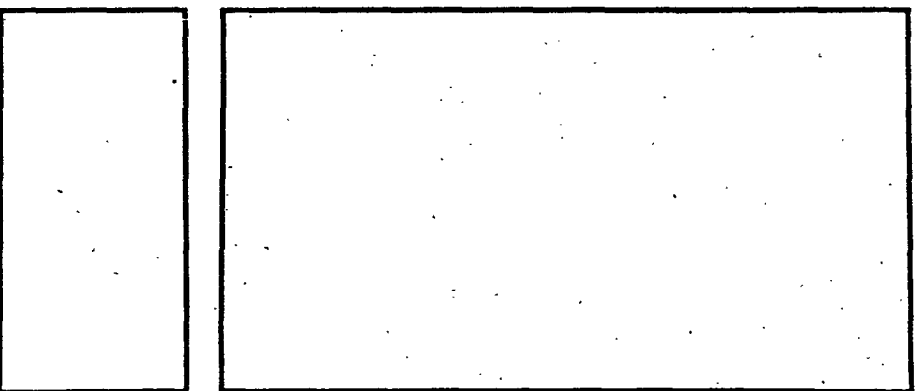
Often enough the pain comes from the tension we experience in belonging to a Church which, because of its long history and universality, tends to change slowly, especially when those changes touch the heart of her traditions. For others, the pain comes from the perception that the traditions are changing too rapidly.

91. It is precisely because of the rich variety of life in the Church, the diversity among her members and our common obligation to be faithful to the Spirit of God, that I think the Lord in his wisdom has given the

Church the service of authority. It is the role of the bishop of the local Church to be a sign of charity and unity among his people and to be the voice which calls his brother and sister pilgrims to that communion of life so important to the well-being of all.

92. In this spirit I ask all in the Diocese of Rochester to consider prayerfully and thoughtfully the following observations:

- (1) It is imperative for our present well-being and future growth that we pray about, reflect upon and discuss the participation of women in the life of the Church.
- (2) We stand in need of that kind of conversion of heart which will call us away from any attitudes or ways of thinking contrary to the Gospel. As this kind of communal attitudinal change occurs, we will enter creatively into the future and enrich and be enriched by the ministry of women in the Church.
- (3) For this reason, I believe that the most important contribution our local Church can make at the present time to the dialogue being carried on in the larger Church is as full and faithful an entry as possible into the experience of the ministries now open to all of us. Further, we need to share what these ministries mean to us, both in terms of our own sense of service and in terms of the goodness of the ministry of others.
- (4) In the meantime we must be ready to sustain, encourage and give hope to one another. Some, because of their experience, educational background, personal makeup and commitments, find this journey a very difficult one. It must be a mark of our community that we keep our minds and hearts open to those who express viewpoints different from our own, or for whom the current norms of the Church regulating our life together are a source of suffering.
- (5) I encourage those who suffer to remain closely bound to the life of the community so that the pain they experience may possibly be not only a source of purification, strength and growth for them, but also an occasion for inviting others to join them in prayer and reflection about vexing questions. If we continue to face such questions, in an open and communal manner, we will avoid the dangers of being locked in ourselves and forgetting the primary mission of the Church, which is to proclaim the Good News of God's Kingdom to those who hunger for such spiritual nourishment.
- (6) At every step of our common journey we need to let the light of the Gospel shine on our attitudes and conduct. Our life together should be characterized by the fruits of the Holy Spirit's presence, such as charity, joy, peace, patience and long-suffering. The primary statement which should always be made about us is that we love one another. This love, with the grace of God, will be evident among us even when there is lack of agreement or harmony about certain aspects of our life in the Church.
- (7) I believe it is incumbent upon all of us in the diocese to make some effort — in ways that are natural and open to us — to express sorrow for those practices of the past that were injurious to the development of the full potential of women in the Church. I ask all priests and pastoral ministers to reach out to all women who have experienced hurt in this way. In particular I ask all pastors to take every opportunity to hear women reflect on their experience of the Church and their aspirations to share more deeply in her life.
- (8) I recognize that for many women and men the tensions which exist about the role of women in the Church are intimately intertwined with the role of women in the family. We need to create opportunities in which husbands and wives can search their own attitudes with regard to sexism and dialogue constructively with one another and with other members of the community.



93. Finally, I present the following courses of action and ask appropriate parties in the Diocese of Rochester to respond to them as fully as possible:

- (1) It will be a priority of the Diocese of Rochester, all of its agencies, divisions and departments, to encourage and to invite women to participate in full measure in volunteer and paid positions within the diocese and its organizations.
- (2) There are many parishes in the diocese and many other groupings of the faithful, such as in hospitals and on college campuses, where there has been notable and steady increase in the proper participation of the laity in the life of these communities. This is to be encouraged and promoted — our ideal being that all the ministries and services in our communities which are baptismal ministries and services are to be fulfilled by lay persons.