

Voter Registration Drive Launched across Diocese

By John Dash

A massive campaign for voter registration will start in parishes throughout the diocese this weekend.

Sponsored by the diocesan Department of Justice and Peace, the campaign includes advertising in parish bulletins, pulpit announcements and a coordinated effort to register voters after weekend Masses, Sept. 11 and 12.

In addition, parish human development committees have been asked to exert a special

effort to register persons with low incomes.

In the Southern Tier, Kathy Dubel of the Elmira-based Office of Social Ministry suggested that volunteers canvass low-income housing complexes, and set up registration booths outside local offices of the departments of Social Services and Employment, supermarkets with high food stamp use, food pantries, and soup kitchens. "Part of this outreach might include an attempt to take people to their voting place on election day,

Nov. 2," she said.

She also said that the office is surveying candidates across the five counties in the region on issues of economic and distributive justice. She said the survey results "can be used to inform low-income persons about a candidate's sensitivity to their needs as well as serving as a source of information for parishioners who are called by Jesus to speak for the poor."

In Rochester, Tim McGowan, political affairs coordinator for the department, encouraged diocesans to volunteer for work with the Spanish Action Coalition and the local chapter of the National Coalition for Black Voter Participation in their registration drives. Persons wishing to so volunteer have been asked to contact either McGowan or Father Larry Tracy, 328-6400.

Father, William Spilly, coordinator of justice and peace for the new Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry, said:

"Those of us who previously might have regarded voting and the electoral process as of little worth or significance have certainly learned a great lesson.

"The changes, for better or worse, generated by our elected officials in recent years have set in motion a process that will have significant consequences for our neighborhood, community, nation and world for years to come.

"Yet it's a fact that in 1980, only a little more than half of the nation's eligible voters actually pulled a lever. Perhaps all of us should have listened more closely to the bishops of the United States when they said in 1976:

In a letter to parish priests,

Fr. Albert Shamon



Word for Sunday

How Catholic Are You?

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mk. 8/27-35. (R1) Is. 50/40-9 (R2) Jas. 2/14-18.

In Father Gallagher's Parish Renewal Weekend, one of the talks is on Sunday's Gospel, on the question, "Who do people say I am?"

This moment in the life of Jesus was a key one. He had been gathering His future Church about Himself; He had spent a great part of his public life with them — his disciples and the holy women. It wasn't that He had no concern for others — Gentiles, Samaritans and Jews. No, he was establishing His Church.

He treated those who were to be His Church differently. To the crowds, for instance, He gave parables; to His Church, He explained them. To the crowds, He said, "Love your neighbor as yourself," to His Church, "Love one another as I have loved you."

The answer to His question was crucial to Jesus. He was nervous, concerned, even worried what they thought about Him. What they thought was vital. Gingerly, almost hesitatingly, He started out in a general way, "Who do people say that I am?" His heart sank with their answers. They probably thought they were flattering Him by comparing Him to their greatest prophets of the Old Testament.

Still, he took the risk — He had been rejected before — "Who do you say that I am?" "You — my Church?" Peter! Beautiful Peter! We don't give him enough credit. We think he was just a guy made by circumstances. All the while he had fantastic qualities: great loyalty, love, daring, desire. Jesus called him a rock: a rock who always changed positions when he found out what Jesus wanted. This great Peter confessed, "You are the Messiah!"

Can you imagine Jesus' relief! Jesus' elation! You Know Me! You've seen beyond appearances. Thanks to the Holy Spirit.

The fundamental question each of us has to face today is, "Who do

people say that a Catholic is?" Some people say Catholics are no different from anybody else — some are bad, some are good. Or Catholics are sheep — dumb and easily led. Or they're conservatives, middle-of-the-roaders, always trying to impose their morality on others. Or Catholics are hypocrites who don't live up to the good things they do.

And the tragedy is that some Catholics, to avoid the accusation of hypocrisy, instead of dropping the bad things, drop the good ones. If I don't go to Church I can continue doing bad things and not be accused of hypocrisy.

So maybe people say these things about Catholics.

Now, the pivotal question is not what do people say, but "Who do you say a Catholic is?" You! Ah, there's the question! Do we take our judgment and opinion about what being a Catholic is from the world around us? That's like somebody getting an opinion of his family from what his neighbors think.

"Who do you say a Catholic is?" No different from anyone else? That's denying Jesus Christ, baptism and Eucharist. That's like saying a Catholic is not a member of the body of Jesus. Of course others may be members of the body of Christ — but the fact is that Catholics are, and we have to face that fact. Paul said, "You are the body of Christ." We have to face that fact: we are called to be a community of loving persons; Catholics are one family in love with each other and with Christ their Head.

How do you accept Catholics in your life? How do you accept yourself as Catholics? Do you prefer being called "Christian" instead of "Catholic?" That's to deny your family and diminish your faith. Every good Christian is not a Catholic, but every good Catholic has to be a good Christian. A Catholic is a Christian and then some: he belongs to a family, the body of Christ.

So the question boils down to this: "Do you love, not the Church, but Catholics?" Catholics are the Church, the body of Christ on earth.

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