

Fr. Louis J. Hohman



The Open Window

Parish Councils

Q. What is this thing about parish councils? Are they for real or are they only spinning wheels? Is there really any difference in the Church today since they have been on the scene, from the Church before? What is a parish council anyway?

According to diocesan guidelines, the parish council is the basic leadership group within the parish. Obviously if it is treated within the framework of this idea it will be a very important part of parish life. If it is dismissed as merely consultative, or a kind of helping hand of the pastor, or simply "another" organization in parish life, then it will obviously not be effective.

The definition of a parish council as given by Sister Jean Rodman, the head of parish council development in the diocese, has these elements:

- 1. The parish council is a Christian group (that is, one which is the leadership group in the parish based on its roots in Christ).
2. It is linked to other groups both within the parish and outside.
3. It is mandated in terms

of the call to Christian mission and by the bishop.

4. It represents the parish so that all may participate in the work of the council.

5. It leads by service in the various works of ministry which include proclaiming the word, developing worship and giving witness.

6. It does this effectively through the power and grace of Jesus Christ.

There can be no separation of pastor and/or staff from parish council. If there is, the council ceases to be a parish council and becomes a lay council. The principal functions of a parish council are planning for various ministries by careful determination of the needs of people on an ever widening circle, the development of a true faith community, and the spiritual growth of all those who have been baptized in Christ while leading others to that same faith by evangelization.

Taken from this point of view a parish council can be a very exciting organization, one which can have a powerful influence on the directions of the parish and the total ministry. It will inevitably bring about a deepening and widening of that ministry in the cause of Christ and His Kingdom.



Scout Retreat

Father David Mura unrolls a sheet of paper prior to a talk he gave during a retreat for more than 150 Boy Scouts at St. Michael's Divine Word Mission Center in Conesus. Three councils and 16 units were represented at the event, some scouts from as far away as Cortland. Below, George Herbert of St. Leo's in Hilton and chairman of the retreat confers with Duane Pancoast of St. Patrick's in Victor, scouter development chairman and chairman of the Finger Lakes Council Catholic Committee.



Host Families Needed For Irish Children

The Irish Children's Program will hold an orientation meeting for prospective host families at 3 p.m., on Sunday, Oct. 17, at the Moose Club, 441 East Ave.

A slide presentation is planned and committee members and previous host families will be available to answer questions. The program includes host families

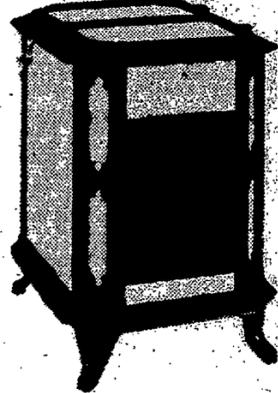
providing room and board for children of Belfast for a six-week period during the summer. The program provides transportation to and from Rochester and insurance.

Applications will be available only during this meeting. Anyone needing further information may call 223-8699, 377-5921 or 227-5761.

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Father Bruce Ritter

GOD'S PRODIGAL SONS AND YOUNG MAGDALENES

The boy looked me right in the eye. He spoke quietly and courteously: "I'm too busy to listen to you right now, Bruce. No offense, okay, but I've got to make a few bucks. Your god is okay I guess, but he's sure

not part of anything I've been into. I sure hope he can't see what I'm going to have to do tonight. I do have to, Bruce. I don't like it very much, but I'm really afraid to hate it.

"Hey, thanks anyway for running UNDER 21, Bruce, but I can't stay. I guess I don't like the street very much, but it's where I live. You've got some rules here, and I can't take the curfew. Tell you what, Bruce, I'll just go out for a little while. It's only 2:00 AM, I'll just walk around the block a couple of times. See you later."

The kid paused a moment, his hand on the door knob, the door pushed open a few inches and let in the street noise. Outside a fire truck from the 38th Street Firehouse hurtled by. Its deep bellowing klaxon drowned out his words but I could still see his lips moving. He waited until the truck had passed... "Your god has too many rules Bruce," he said, "and I'd rather have you for my Father."

I will never forget the expression on his face when he said, "Bruce, can you give me one good reason why I shouldn't jump off the Brooklyn Bridge" and I couldn't. I didn't have a reason. I couldn't say to this kid: look, don't do it because God loves you. He wouldn't believe me and you've got to give kids a reason to believe. And so, I made one up.

You see, he's 17 years old. He can't read or write. He has no job skills. He's a hustler, a male prostitute. Ever since

Father Bruce Ritter, OFM Conv., is the founder and President of Covenant House/UNDER 21, which operates crisis centers for homeless and runaway boys and girls all over the country.

he's been 13 years old, this kid has been selling himself up and down Eighth Avenue, on 42nd Street, on East 53rd Street, working the streets and bars of Greenwich Village. He's jumped in a thousand cars, slept in a thousand beds. He's an alcoholic. He's really a bright kid. If he were my son or your son, he'd be a doctor, a lawyer, a priest. But he won't be any of these things and he knows it. His major experience in life is to have been an exploited sex object, a bought and sold kid. He doesn't believe God is his Father.

He never came back. I knew he never would.

I keep wondering and thinking that maybe if I were better or smarter or holier, or worked harder, or prayed more, I wouldn't lose so many of these kids. Look, I know the Scriptures as well as the next person. I've squeezed a lot of comfort out of God's word, especially that statement by Christ about choosing the weak and inadequate of this world to do His will.

What I'm trying to say, I guess, is that I mourn for this kid. Three months on the street is a very long time. Six months is forever. A year? By then they're breathing in and out but inside they're dead. The poison works quickly. The girls' faces show it first. The boys can hide it a little longer. I have to take what little comfort I can from the fact that God loves these kids infinitely more than we do. I don't understand it very well, but I believe it.

Making these kids believe it is what preaching the gospel is all about. I've met thousands of girls and boys from all over the country who needed to know God and didn't: who needed to trust God and couldn't: who needed to believe God loved them and wouldn't.

You wonder about God's plan for these kids: His prodigal sons not yet returned to their Father; His young magdalenes not yet aware of their need for forgiveness... Many never do return; many never do become aware. And I mourn them.

Look, these kids are good kids. They're not good the way your kids are good, and they're not nice the way your kids are nice—but what happens to them should not happen. Most of them have never had the chance to be like your kids.

I'm convinced that it is only when we—all of us—become incarnations of God's love, that our kids will truly know Him, know His compassion and His mercy. It is only through your generosity that we can run our UNDER 21 crisis centers.

So, I'm begging you to care about my kids. Without your spiritual and financial support, we could never survive.

Form for donation to Covenant House/UNDER 21, including fields for name, address, city, state, zip, and a logo with the text 'Because the street is NO PLACE FOR A CHILD'.