

Reform Criminal Justice System, Bishops Urge

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From the State Catholic Conference

Albany — A truly reformed criminal justice system can be developed within the framework of the Christian concept of justice, the state's Catholic bishops declare in a major Pastoral Statement on Criminal Justice.

It was issued by Cardinal Terence Cooke of the Archdiocese of New York on behalf of the State Bishops Conference, of which he is president. All of the state's bishops approved the statement.

The statement considers many of the problems in the state's criminal justice system as they relate to adults accused and guilty of crimes and the victims of the crimes.

Christians, the bishops state, must make a "just and charitable response" to the criminal offender. It may not be easy, they said, but it is possible within the framework of Christian compassion.

The system must not be founded on revenge, the statement declares, but must contain both mercy and forgiveness, justice for the victim and the possibility of rehabilitation.

For many years, the principal presence of the Church in prisons has been through the dedicated ministry of the chaplains who have given years of "selfless dedication," the bishops state. But there are problems even beyond the "healing power of the chaplains," they continue, and quite often beyond the skills and services of other committed professionals on prison staffs.

Noting that the state has the highest rate of persons behind bars in the East, the bishops recommend changing the criminal justice system before trial, after conviction and within the system itself.

Programs such as conditional release, temporary release, reduction of time for good behavior are ways of reducing overcrowding. But even those guilty of crimes need training and education as well as adequate medical and psychiatric care and humane living conditions together with opportunities to visit with family and friends, the bishops say.

More than a year in development, the statement is a careful examination of the present criminal justice in the state and a detailed, specific, point-by-point program for reform.

Saying that the state's prisons are "substantially overcrowded" with large numbers behind bars for non-violent offenses, the statement points out that 60 percent are young (between 16 and 30), more than 70 percent are minorities (53 percent are black and 20 percent Hispanic) and more than half of both male and female prisoners are drug abusers.

Citing the needs of victims as well as of criminals, the bishops note that new "programs and policies" must also address the needs and rights of the victims of crime. "If we wish victims to be forgiving and compassionate, we must demonstrate to them our attention to the harm that has been done to them."

They see no simple solutions but "reject an attitude of vengeance in dealing with criminal offenders."

In a three-part analysis, the statement recommends alternative approaches both before trial (when many accused are as innocent as the victims), after conviction and for those already imprisoned. Changes recommended for before trial include:

More reasonable bail or release on recognizance or pre-trial release or supervised release in custody of churches, community organizations, etc.

Recommended changes for after conviction include proposals for the executive, judicial and legislative, such as increased efficiency in processing the release of prisoners eligible for parole; greater use of sentence commutation; expansion of temporary release; more probation for nonviolent first offenders; special community care for alcoholic and mentally retarded offenders; greater use of restitution and community service penalties and greater use of fines as opposed to imprisonment for crimes of a minor nature, etc.

Conscious of the exceptionally difficult tasks of correctional administrators and staff, the bishops endorse recognition of spiritual and material needs.

Within the system, the bishops urge an atmosphere of restraint together with self-improvement programs aiming at personal development, adequate medical and psychiatric care, human living conditions and location of prisoners near family and friends.

The statement encourages a "human approach to crime and its victims" from the total Christian community and pledges the efforts of the Church in the state to meet those responsibilities both at the state and local levels.



The Fire in the Thornbush Dialogue

The Feminine In God

"Part of the call of women today is ... to share their spirituality ... which reflects the life of God who is like a mother who cannot and will not forget the child of her womb." (54)

By Jeanne Gehret

In the two decades since Vatican II, changes have occurred in both the Church and society which have given us new ways to envision God. Our theology has shifted from a focus on God as stern judge and majestic warrior-king toward a more recent emphasis on the intimate, nurturing side of God. Many of the godly qualities we now emphasize have been called strictly "feminine," although society has begun to realize that both sexes have these attributes. In this article I will discuss how women are God-like in their life-giving capacity.

Our creativity can lead us to knowledge of God. How many women and men have sweated and struggled to "give birth" to artistic works, to coax order out of chaos, to bring into the world something — or someone — that never was before? Jesus labored to give birth to the Church, giving us His body and blood for nourishment. In pregnancy, does not the expectant mother know the cost of giving her body as home and food to the life within her? Sometimes she does so at the expense of her own health and the risk of her very life. Yet she gives of her strength willingly for her child, as Jesus did for His Church.

Giving birth can be a profound religious experience pointing to God the life-giver. One woman

reflected, after the birth of her child, "I held her and looked at her and simply was — the most wordless prayer of my life, the most perfect act of adoration of the God who made this beautiful, beautiful baby. I shall never forget that supreme moment."

Scripture gives us a God who is intimately involved in our lives, a parent invested in the daily activities of each child. The sacred writer portrays God as teaching the child to walk, holding him in the arms, bending down to give him food, and lifting him close to the cheek. (Hosea 11:3-4)

Meditating deeply on their own motherhood, some women have come to a new awareness of the God who is like a mother. Though Jesus was male, few people would say that God the Creator has gender, even though we traditionally refer to God as Father. After all, Genesis 1:27 says, "God created man in the image of himself; in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them."

How many times have you heard someone say he or she doesn't pray very often so as not to "bother" God with the little things? Many people think of God as remote and uninterested, except in times of crisis. Perhaps that is because when we call God Father we apply some of the old stereotypes of paternal behavior — someone who is concerned with our general welfare but uninvolved and absent much of the time. How much richer our relationship with God could be if we would remember that God is the perfect parent — both mother and father.

Jeanne Gehret is a former high school theology teacher and director of religious education.

U of R Launches Medical Center 'In Vitro' Fertilization Program

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DR. THIEDE

The University of Rochester Medical Center announced last week that it was launching a program of human "in vitro" (in glass) fertilization.

The program, according to a medical center release, is designed for "couples who wish to have their own natural child but have been unsuccessful and cannot be helped by other means."

The program, called CARE (Childbearing by Alternative Reproduction), has been under study for the past year according to Dr. Henry A. Thiede, professor and chairman of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the medical center.

A brochure advertising the program detailed a five-step procedure which will be followed:

"1. Counseling and education. Minimum of two office visits for consultation as an outpatient with CARE team members.

"2. Controlled ovulation. Beginning on day 3-5 of the menstrual cycle, a drug, Pergonal, is administered daily by injection until clinical laboratory parameters indicate discontinuation. Tests are performed daily for up to 10 days on blood obtained from the forearm. Near the anticipated time of ovulation, pelvic ultrasound examinations are performed daily for 5-8 days to measure the size of the developing follicle with the ripening egg.

Pilgrimage

A pilgrimage to the headquarters of the Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima is being organized for May 12-14, the anniversary dates for the Fatima apparitions. Persons wishing to join the journey to Washington, N.J., have been asked to contact Mary Kelly, 586-1664.

ovulation has not been satisfactorily controlled.

"3. Egg Retrieval. (More than one egg may be retrieved. All fertilized eggs will be transferred back into the patient). The patient is admitted to hospital as a short-term patient. Laparoscopy is performed. The ovary is visualized and the mature egg is harvested by aspiration of the follicle through a fine-gauge needle inserted adjacent to the laparoscope. This procedure is done in the operating room under anesthesia. The egg(s) are placed in a petri dish in a nutrient solution.

"4. In-vitro Fertilization. Sperm obtained from the husband 4-6 hours after the laparoscopy is placed with each egg. The fertilized egg(s) are allowed to incubate and develop.

"5. Embryo Transfer. Approximately 2 days following the egg capture, all fertilized egg(s) are aspirated from the culture dish into a fine-gauge catheter and deposited into the wife's womb through the

cervical canal. This is performed on an outpatient basis.

Because, worldwide, the success rate for the procedure is only at 10-20 percent, "a major thrust of the effort at the University of Rochester will be to increase the success rate of in vitro fertilization," a release stated.

Dr. Thiede said that practice and observation will increase the success rate.

The cost of the program will run between \$3,500 and \$5,800 per cycle, it is estimated.

Only legally married couples will be admitted to the program, and the age of the wife should not exceed 39 at the time of application, the center brochure said. In addition, a number of medical tests must have been done before admittance.

The first child born after documented in vitro fertilization is Louise Brown, who was born in July 1978 in England.



First in Diocese

The parishioners at St. James Church in Waverly have decided to launch a Fair Share Tuition program, the first parish in the diocese to do so, according to Harold Lambert of the school board. He described it as "an individual family plan whereby the parents determine what they can honestly pay toward the actual cost of educating their children." Speakers at a recent meeting on the subject are (left to right) Bill Wallace, school board; Father Edward J. Foy, pastor; Dr. Mark DeSantis, superintendent of Syracuse diocesan schools (where the program has been successfully in place for several years); Mary Ann Gorman and Lambert, both of the school board; and Loretta Hayton, school principal. According to Sister Edwardine Weaver, diocesan superintendent of schools, the program is being introduced at St. James on an experimental basis.

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