

Cardinal O'Fiaich: Not All that Bad In Northern Ireland

By Patricia Hillyer
NC News Service

Denver — "Americans think that there's nothing going on in Northern Ireland but fighting and killing," said Cardinal Tomas O'Fiaich of Armagh, Northern Ireland.

"They never hear about the positive action taking place," he said in an interview published by the Denver Catholic Register.

"If there's anything I want to emphasize it's that good things are going on in Northern Ireland," said the 59-year-old Cardinal, who has been archbishop of Armagh since 1977.

"There are many affirmative steps being taken toward reconciliation," the cardinal said. During the week of prayer for Christian unity in January he invited leaders of the Church of Ireland

(Anglican), the Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church to speak at the Cathedral in Armagh. "And that's not an isolated incident," he said. "That's a common occurrence."

The cardinal said he meets with the leaders of other Christian churches one day each month at the home of one of the churchmen to spend the day in prayer, meditation and discussion.

"We discuss the events of the past month, assessing them for positive or negative value," he said, "but, more importantly, we look over the upcoming events to discern whether or not we need to take any preventive action to diffuse a troublesome situation. I would say that this is happening in no other country."

Cardinal O'Fiaich said an ecumenical community of reconciliation is being considered in Northern Ireland. Jesuit

Father Michael Hurley, former director of the Irish School of Ecumenics, said last Fall that he envisioned a small community of both sexes and mixed denominations which would devote itself to prayer and work for unity among Christian churches, justice in society and peace.

"We would like to see young people of all faiths live in community, praying together, learning from each other," the cardinal said. "We all have so much to give."

Although there is a small minority in Northern Ireland who are not interested in "coming together," Cardinal O'Fiaich said, "the great majority are searching for new links to fellowship."

"I have always condemned the violent activities of the IRA," the Provisional Irish Republican Army, an outlawed guerrilla organization, he said, "but I also condemn the violence of the British. They provoked much of the IRA violence along the way."

He recalled the civil rights demonstrations in 1968 and 1969 when an effort was made to achieve social justice in Northern Ireland without violence. But he noted that members of the majority community in Northern Ireland, who consider themselves British, attacked the civil rights demonstrators, most of whom belonged to the minority community and considered themselves Irish.

Cardinal O'Fiaich said the hunger strikes

by prisoners in Northern Ireland in 1981 "when so many young men died" could have been prevented "if only the English would have compromised on small things."

During the hunger strike at the Maze Prison near Belfast, 10 men, most of them members of the IRA, starved themselves to death. The British Government said the prisoners' demands amounted to a demand for political prisoner status.

"The youths who were in prison," the cardinal said, "had asked for a couple of minor changes in jail routine, one of which was to be allowed to wear their own clothing, instead of the drab look-alike prison uniforms which stripped them of their self-respect, but the British refused."

The young men who refused to wear prison clothing were thrown naked into the cells, he said, and "all they had to wear was the blanket from their bed. That's what they wore for many months even when it was severely cold," he said. "Then, as will often happen with oppressed young people, one of them became outspoken and escalated the protest by proposing a hunger strike ... and others followed."

The cardinal spoke personally with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher about the hunger strikes, "but she would not give an inch," he said. "It was all so needless ... if they could have just worn their own clothes, it would never have happened," he said.

Pio's Beatification Cause Moves Ahead

By Nancy Frazier
NC News Service

Vatican City — Pope John Paul II has approved the establishment of archdiocesan tribunals to investigate the beatification cause of Padre Pio of Pietralcina, an Italian

Capuchin priest who bore the stigmata — the marks of Christ's crucifixion — on his hands, feet and side.

Renowned for decades as a confessor and ascetic, Padre Pio has been the subject of several books. Italians flocked

to him by the thousands during his life, and his grave has been a pilgrimage site since his death in 1968.

Father Robert Sarno, an American official of the Vatican Congregation for Saints' Causes, told NC News Feb. 14 that the pope signed a decree Nov. 28 giving permission for the tribunal to be set up in the Archdiocese of Manfredonia in southern Italy.

Archbishop Valentino Vailati of Manfredonia and several other Italian bishops were scheduled to celebrate a Mass March 20 at Our Lady of Grace Monastery Basilica in San Giovanni Rotondo, which is in the Manfredonia archdiocese.

Padre Pio, who died at the monastery on Sept. 23, 1968, is buried in a crypt behind the basilica's main altar.

Lutheran

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Lutheran parish and asked if he might pay an ecumenical visit to the Lutheran church.

"Today it is not possible," the pope is said to have answered. "But perhaps in the year of Luther."

Martin Luther was born Nov. 15, 1483, and celebrations are planned in many countries this year to mark the 500th anniversary.

Pastor Mayer subsequently sent a formal invitation to the pontiff.

Pope

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15,000 miles in some 200 hours.

According to the English language newspaper the Daily American, the pope last week warned the governments of El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala that he may cancel his stops in those countries if certain actions which would constitute "an unbecomingly welcome" were not stopped.

Bishop

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unafraid for them to be with us as we really are.

Of course, that is a Christ-gift to anyone. To be who we are, nothing more, nothing less, before our brothers and sisters is to offer an invitation to them to be themselves before us. When that process occurs, given all human limitations, we begin to see one another as we really are and to love one another for who we are. When that happens we begin to understand something more of the profound mystery of God's gift to us in Christ. "One day we shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He really is."

There is a freedom in being ourselves in prayer with the beautiful people we serve. It is in that freedom that we develop the suppleness and peace of heart which allows us to offer ourselves to them in daily life as we have offered ourselves to them in prayer.

That, I believe, is what God's people want from us, that we should care for them as they really are and be willing to be with them and encourage them as pilgrims ourselves. They want to know us as seekers-of-His-will and as persons anxious to offer loving service in His name. If they know us in that manner, they will be ready to share with us their own searching and the wisdom they have acquired along the way.

All of this happens at a level deeper than the one at which the rush occurs, the demands are made, the questions are asked and the positions are taken.

This understanding of ourselves and their understanding of us is what allows us to take that first painful step to ask for reconciliation with a brother or sister or with part or all of a parish community.

It's what helps us to remember that, whatever awkwardness, shyness or impotence we experience in the face of demanding ministries, these cannot conceal from our good-hearted people the loving spirit of the priest who cares for them with the care of Christ Himself.

That, I believe, is what the people want when they say

they want us to be men of prayer.

And so I urge you, dear brothers, as your bishop, your friend and as fellow pilgrim, to keep prayer at the center of your life. If it is not at the center, I encourage you to rush to it as a thirsty person rushes to water. I guarantee that it will give you refreshment. The Holy Spirit is never present in action but that we are being formed more nearly to the image of Christ. I also wish to thank you personally for the many times in which your prayer life has been an inspiration to me. I have seen it and shared it myself and find it very beautiful. And our people speak joyfully of the strength and encouragement your prayer gives them.

Please let me offer the following suggestions for your encouragement in prayer:

If you have not already done this, please invite someone to serve you as spiritual director/friend/guide. By this I mean someone with whom you can speak of your own heart on a regular, committed basis, sharing your experience of God, ministry, the people you serve and yourself. To such a person I recommend that you speak of the realities of your spirit, the interior experiences and external circumstances which clamor for your attention and influence your directions; and of the decisions which you finally make.

From such an individual you can rightly ask for that kind of honesty, compassion and love which would affirm, challenge and question you in appropriate ways. You can also expect some assistance in exploring ways of prayer with which you may not be familiar but which you might find helpful. Centering prayer and prayer with a journal of life and ministry are two ways of prayer which seem to attract many people these days.

There is a growing number of priests and religious women and lay persons who are gifted in this regard. I am sure they would welcome the opportunity to serve you.

I think of two religious women just now with whom I

can speak my heart with all the openness of which I am presently capable. There is no doubt in my mind that they are very much a part of my current growth.

My own spiritual director is a priest of our diocese and from him I receive great gifts. I mention both — the former being relationship of friendship/prayer and sharing; the latter being the same but under the mutually agreed upon relationship of director/directee.

Secondly, I encourage you wherever and whenever possible to provide for and join occasions when you can pray with the priests with whom you live, with your parish staffs and with groups of lay persons with whom you collaborate or whom you serve. I know this is not the training or the inclination of everyone, but I encourage you to do it because in prayer there is an awareness of and bonding with others which is strength-giving for all who share in it.

Thirdly, I encourage every priest to consider his prayer life with a generous heart. Our gifts, dispositions and needs differ and so do our ways of prayer common to us all: Do I prepare well for the prayer of the Eucharistic Liturgy? Are the daily readings food for my spirit? Do I pray daily with and for the whole Church in the Liturgy of the Hours? Do I take to my heart each day all of the people and events with which God fills my ministry and life? Do I know my need ever to be reconciled so that in me Christ's disposition to be reconciler will be manifest to His people? Do I pray each day for my Bishop and my brother priests so that our communion in the priesthood of Jesus Christ and the loving fraternity and selfless service which flow from that will be a strength and consolation to God's people?

Fourthly, I ask you to consider making a monthly day of prayer. We are blessed to have several places in our diocese for such days of peaceful and prayerful silence. Many of you have told me how much such days mean to you. I have enjoyed praying with you on such occasions and will try whenever possible to accept invitations to join you again. For me it is always a joy.

U.S. Abortions Continue to Rise

Atlanta (NC) — The number of legal abortions in the U.S. has risen steadily since the 1973 Supreme Court decision striking down most restrictions on abortion, but the rate of increase seems to have leveled off, The National Center for Disease Control said Feb. 10.

The center is a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Nearly 1.3 million legal abortions were performed in the U.S. in 1980, the latest year for which figures are available. That number amounted to slightly more than one abortion for every three live births, the center said, but there was only a 3.6 percent increase in the number of legal abortions from 1979 to 1980.

The annual percentage increase in the number of legal abortions has declined every year but one since 1976, and the 1980 increase was the lowest since the center began keeping records on legal abortions in 1969, the center said in its Morbidity and Mortality weekly report.

"I think we've reached a plateau," said Dr. Pamela Lane of the center's Division of Reproductive Health. "We don't think it will increase that much next year ... the leveling off in the percentage increase is very, very significant."

In 1979, the 1.25 million legal abortions in the U.S. represented an 8.1 percent increase over the previous year, and in 1976, the number of legal abortions increased by 15.6 percent over the 1975 total.

The center's total count of abortions is probably lower than the actual number, Ms. Lane said, because it is derived from the cooperative health statistics system of the National Center for Health Statistics, and from hospitals and local health agencies, rather than directly from providers of abortions.

Women obtaining abortions in 1979 and 1980 tended to be young, white and unmarried with no previous live births, the center said. About 30 percent were 19 years old or under, 35 percent were between 20 and 24, and 35 percent were 25 years of age or older.

About 70 percent of the women who had legal abortions in 1979 and 1980 were white, 75 percent were unmarried at the time of the abortion, and 58 percent had had no previous live births, the center said. Only three percent of the women had had four or more live births.

The center report also said that the number of deaths associated with abortions, both legal and illegal, has declined steadily since 1972, and reached a low of 16 deaths in 1980.