



The Fire in the Thornbush Dialogue

The Dialog Unfolds

By Sara McLoughlin

"#92, Observation 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."

"This discussion is an invitation from the Holy Spirit. We must learn to listen with love." So began one of the dozens of programs set up around the diocese to bring people together for exploration of "The Fire in the Thornbush." In the last months, hundreds have talked — in hope, anger, inquiry, frustration — and they have also listened, mostly with love, or at least with that openness that so often precedes true understanding of differences.

Bishop Clark's letter has stimulated wide-ranging dialog in hamlets and cities, in prayer centers and colleges. Many parishes are just getting their series under way during Lent; others have been meeting for months.

The Task Force on the bishop's pastoral is receiving reports from these groups. We would like to share a small cross section of these recorded observations.

Some predicted that the letter would open a Pandora's box of either carping complaint or hostile intransigence. However, it has instead stimulated thoughtful evaluation of how the position of women in the Church affects our progress toward the oneness to which Christ calls us. Even those who find their corner of the Church quite tolerable — perhaps even to them an ideal of appropriately shared responsibilities and duties — admit that there are serious difficulties in the larger community.

Many respondents point first to the growing shortage of priests and religious and wonder how, at this of all times, the Church can fail to accept gratefully all the talented and generous persons who wish to serve. To the answer that the people, many clergy included, are not ready to accept women in non-traditional roles, they

K. of C. Lists Speakers for April 4 Meet

An information night has been scheduled by the Knights of Columbus, St. John Fisher Council 3676, at 8 p.m., Monday, April 4, at the East Rochester Community Room, 120 W. Commercial St.

Main speakers will be an attorney, a Social Security field agent and a funeral director. They will speak on wills, estate planning, bank accounts, real estate and Social Security. The meeting is free and open to the public.

suggest that the Church get busy preparing the hesitant. Specific suggestions include using the pulpit to educate and raise consciousness among the people, particularly through women speakers. Rome may have spoken out negatively on women's preaching, but that does not preclude many creative possibilities on bringing women forward for this task. Some groups advocate vigorous and persistent lobbying of the American hierarchy and of Rome in the interests of the fullest expression of the equal status into which all have been baptized. Many see the arguments that deny orders to women as rooted primarily in tradition, being therefore less than compelling.

Running as a constant thread through discussion whether they center on the loss to the Church of many young people, the need to rediscover Mary as a model for our times, the scandal of sexism, or any other relevant topic, is the realization that the Church is all of us. None is untouched by the alienation or exclusion of anyone. We must reach out in love to try to heal and try to understand. Whether this duty extends to welcoming fully inclusive language into the liturgy or the possibility, however distant, of women as deacons and priests, is open to frequent lively debate.

Another recurring theme is that the parish is where change must begin. Faults detected at higher levels need to be pointed out, of course, and appropriate action taken. But it is equally imperative — many would say more so — to begin the task at home. Prayer, study, prodding and, where necessary, demanding are among the strategies suggested to help move the parish community towards justice on this issue.

A parish staff trying to move positively needs our support; one dragging its heels needs our strong encouragement and persevering concern. Many groups expressed a deep frustration at unsuccessful efforts to bring more men and women into active involvement in Church life. Often motivating to participation must precede motivating to change. As one recorder commented wearily, "What else is new?"

Among those taking part in discussion, hope is balanced often by wariness. Will anything really change? Are these reports an exercise in futility? If change does come, will my children still be in the Church to care? On the whole, hope is hanging quite well, strengthened by prayer and good humor and a stubborn refusal to give way to cynicism.

So far, these reports make refreshing reading, full of ideas and challenges.

Sara McLoughlin is co-chairperson of the Task Force on the bishop's letter on women in the Church, and a lecturer at St. John Fisher College.

Career Center Schedules Series

The Women's Career Center will present the first in a series of brown bag lunch-hour discussions on non-traditional occupations for women from noon to 1:30 p.m., beginning Thursday, April 14.

women working in the occupation, are designed to familiarize participants with the job, skills, and personal traits required, necessary training or education, salary, and other advantages of these careers. Occupations to be highlighted are carpentry/con-

struction, electronics technology, engineering, machine/tool and die, sales, and engineering technology.

Beverage will be provided at the meetings and there will be a fee of \$5. For further information call 325-2274.

The presentations, by

Divorce to Be Topic

The Knights of Columbus, St. John Fisher Council 3676, has scheduled a talk by Kathy Kircher on the Catholic Church view of separation and divorce at 7:30 p.m., Tuesday, April 12, in St. Jerome's Church, 207 Garfield St., East Rochester.

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