

Fr. Louis J. Hohman



The Open Window

Sharing Leadership, Part II

Dear Readers,

We continue our series on shared leadership in parishes and parish councils in particular, using questions of my own devising.

For more than six years, I have worked with Sister Jean Rodman in Parish Council Development, covering at one time or another almost two thirds of the diocese. I think some of the insights of that experience are worth sharing.

One sets forth the responsibilities of parish councils as (1) planning, (2) development of community, (3) spiritual growth in the community. In regards to the first one, when it comes to planning for a parish, isn't the pastor and the staff much more competent than a parish council? They, after all are professionals while the council is mostly made up of people who have other skills and vocations. Wouldn't it be better if the parish council merely gathered information from the parishioners for use by the parish staff, letting the staff make the necessary plans and decisions? This would seem to be a more practical and effective way to run parish business.

In some ways this suggestion is more practical in the same sense a benign autocracy is more practical and efficient. It gets things done more quickly and more directly.

There are, however, considerations which make shared leadership better if not quicker. The first of these is that the Holy Spirit is not given only to professional religious and the ordained. The Holy Spirit is "poured forth in the hearts of all the baptized" and therefore each and every person can be channel of the Holy Spirit speaking to us. Scripture, in fact, seems to indicate that God has a kind of preference to showing himself through the "little ones." Besides, we are not factoring out the expertise when the ordained and professionals bring to decision-making. We are simply factoring in a new element of faith-experience and listening to God which would not otherwise be available in the discernment of his will.

What is the nature of this planning which the parish council does as a leadership team (i.e.

elected members + staff + pastor)?

The council, and for this purpose we are including all standing and ad hoc committees, must have a vision of what could be in the parish for the building up of the Kingdom of God. For example, one might have a vision of a joyous, vibrant worshipping community; a vision of a community in which the elderly are all respected and cared for; a vision of justice for the disenfranchised. Out of this vision, whatever it may be, comes a sense of need: liturgy needs better music; the elderly need regular visitations; those on welfare need greater support. The list could go on interminably.

The bottom line is the moment the parish council says: "This is our vision; these are its needs; now, what are we going to do about it? That means starting with a specific statement describing a specific action or actions to be taken. The plan defines who is accountable, what is the specific timeline, what it will cost in terms of money, time and personnel, as well as other resources. It will be so definite that one could easily tell when to have the party celebrating its completion.

It will probably be a very small portion of what needs to be done, but the saying still goes, "Rome wasn't built in a day."

Next, I would like to take up the matter of the annual Parish Ministry Workshop as a viable instrument for initiating the process of planning.

Mother Teresa Asks Bishops: Help Religious to Be 'Faithful'

Chicago (NC) --- Mother Teresa of Calcutta has asked U.S. bishops to help Religious "love, obey and remain faithful to the church and the Vicar of Christ," in a letter released through the Institute on Religious Life.

The letter was "more or less" timed for release with similar letters by members of the institute urging U.S. bishops to share Pope John Paul II's concern for religious communities in the United States, said Benedictine Father James Downey, coordinator of the institute's national office.

The reaction of Religious and the public to the pope's letter to the bishops caused Mother Teresa "great concern," Father Downey said. Last June the pope named Archbishop John R. Quinn of San Francisco to head a special commission to help bishops work with Religious. Some Religious complained that the action seemed to be a "witch hunt" and would mean a new Vatican effort to impose stricter more uniform rules on them.

The institute said the pope's call for the U.S. bishops to work with religious communities was "enormously comforting," and it promised to support the bishops.

In an Oct. 21 open letter to U.S. bishops signed by 121 major superiors of religious orders, the institute expressed gratitude to Pope John Paul for his letter and for the document on the essential elements of religious life which accompanied it.

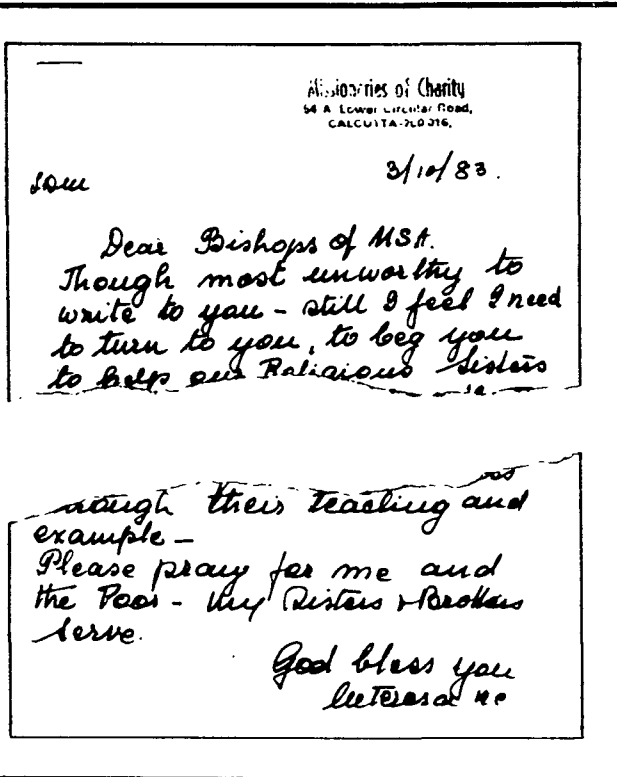
In the letter dated Oct. 3, Mother Teresa asked the bishops "to help our religious sisters in the United States of America to turn to our Holy Father with childlike confidence and love."

Father Downey said, "When we heard she was going to write the letter we offered to publicize it for her."

Mother Teresa's Congregation of the Missionaries of Charity has 14 houses in the United States. Worldwide over 2,000 Missionaries of Charity live in 254 houses and work among the destitute and dying.

"There has been much disturbance in the religious life of sisters, all due to misguided advice and zeal," Mother Teresa wrote.

"Like in many lay women," she said, "so also in our Religious, the ambition to be equal to men in all things, even in the priesthood, has taken away that peace and joy of being one with Jesus and his church."



Mother Teresa also asked the bishops to "give us holy priests to teach us how to be and grow in holiness" and for their prayers.

The Chicago-based Institute on Religious Life is a national organization of 25,000 priests, Religious and lay people established in 1974. Its stated goal is to "find solutions to the problems confronting religious communities in accordance with the authentic teaching of the church," to promote religious life and encourage vocations. The beginning and end of Mother Teresa's handwritten letter to the U.S. bishops.

'Day After' Program Raises Church Concern

The forthcoming television program "The Day After" has generated some concerns among diocesan staffers working in justice and peace areas.

The show, slated for broadcast Nov. 20 over ABC channels, depicts the aftermath of nuclear holocaust.

Advance publicity on the show has prompted psychologists to air some cautions, Lourdes Perez-Albuerne, head of the diocesan International Justice and Peace Commission, said last

week. She listed those cautions as:

"It would be best not to watch it alone; children under 12 should not watch it; those between 12 and 18 should watch it with parents or adults."

"There will probably be a need by most people to talk about it," Ms. Perez-Albuerne said. To that end, "I will be asking pastors if they will consider inviting people to view it at the parish and discuss it after."

Meanwhile, Physicians for

Raphael

Social Responsibility will have three forums, all 7:30 p.m., Monday, Nov. 21 at Temple Brith Kodesh, Third Presbyterian (downtown) and United Church of Christ in Greece.

The forums will give people the opportunity to discuss the movie, and to air their feelings.

An illustrated lecture, "The Art and Times of Raphael," will be given by Dr. Roger Adams, chairman of the art department at Nazareth College, 8 p.m., Thursday, Nov. 10, at the Nazareth College Arts Center, A-13. The free event is sponsored by the Casa Italiana. A reception will follow at the Casa Italiana.

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