

Just a place to refuel?

By Joe Michael Feist
NC News Service

The wide expanse of sky and land that makes up the great southwestern United States was a favorite for Air Force test pilots in the mid-1950s. High above the farms and small towns like the one where I grew up, man and machine pushed each other to the limits of endurance.

Some of my earliest memories are of sonic booms, thundering explosions of sound that shook houses, put birds to flight and caused little children to gaze anxiously heavenward.

With the breaking of the sound barrier came talk of space travel, satellites and breakthroughs in computer technology. There was even a new interest in robots.

I didn't like it. Just as I was becoming accustomed to my world, it was changing.

Fortunately I grew out of my early rejection of change. Fortunately, that is, because the era of change shows no sign of fading.

Families and individuals must cope with a great deal of change. But how?

"Change in itself is ambiguous. It's good and bad," believes Father Donald B. Conroy, director of the National Institute for the Family in Washington, D.C. The institute sponsors research and training in ministry involving families.

"Undue amounts of change in a family's development can upset the equilibrium," the priest added.

In an interview, Father Conroy talked about threads of change affecting families and society. Computers are making an impact, as is mobility — the movement of families from one geographical region to another. Changing roles of women and families with two parents working outside the home are also signs of change.

There are benefits in all these areas, but possible pitfalls too, Father Conroy indicated.

Computers, for example, are finding a larger place in homes. "Almost total saturation is expected by the end of the century," said Father Conroy. The information explosion linked to computer technology is "only paralleled by the invention of the alphabet and the book," he added. "Those also were times of upheaval for the family."

Computer networks could enable more and more people to work at home and this may benefit the family, Father Conroy suggested. But if people work at home, lack of contact with colleagues may have harmful effects.

Obviously, the full impact of changes the computer age will

usher in have yet to be felt.

The changing role of women in society, represented most notably by the number of women working outside the home, also has pronounced effects on family life, Father Conroy noted. One benefit, he said, is that some women report a greater sense of self-worth as a result of their careers. In their cases, this may translate to improved relationships among family members, he added.

But as more and more outside activities take members away from the home there is a danger that the home will become little more than "a place for refueling," said Father Conroy.

"We have to learn how to make our houses homes again," Father Conroy said. "There are ways to spend time together. The key is planning. Families have to make a positive decision to work on being family."

Father Conroy suggested that an evening regularly be set aside for the family to spend time together discussing a theme, an event or even the family's future. "Quality time" is needed, he feels, for the health and welfare of the family as a whole and for each member individually. The family can be a stabilizing force in a world of change, Father Conroy said.

"Families should be attentive to change, but not afraid of it," said Father Conroy. "If change is recognized for what it is, and if we know our values, we'll be able to cope with it in a constructive way."

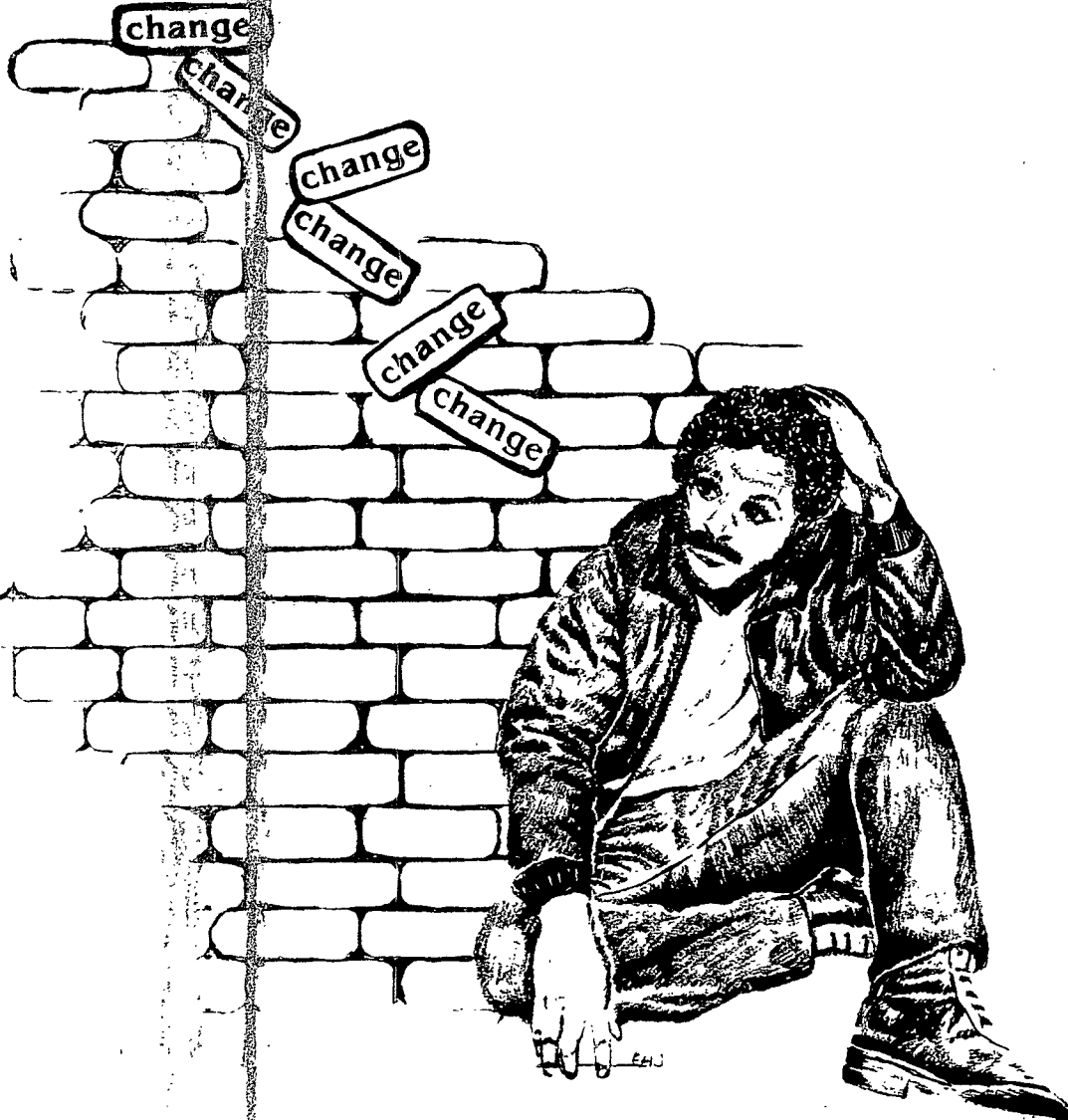
(Feist is associate editor of Faith Today.)

By Father John Castelot
NC News Service

"What is happening to the church?" "This is not the same church I used to know!" These remarks have a modern ring. But they are almost as old as the church itself, as the following account illustrates.

Matthew was a leading member of a community which was the product of a stormy development. Christianity was brought to Antioch in Syria in the 30s by Greek-speaking Jews who believed their new faith, also should be shared with people who did not practice the Jewish religion.

When the mother church at Jerusalem heard about this, Barnabas was sent to Antioch to check out the situation. In Jerusalem the Christians did not



Some people feel as if they're being bombarded by change. No doubt change can introduce the element of struggle into one's life. But it also can make life more interesting.

Blending the old and the new

like the idea of gentiles entering the church without embracing Judaism first. After all, they argued, Jesus had been a devout Jew; the law of Moses was the law of God — there was just no justification for accepting gentiles any other way.

This division of opinion, with several shades of opinion in between, made the situation at Antioch an uneasy one.

Matters really came to a head after the fall of Jerusalem. The staunch Jewish Christians had maintained close ties with the mother church. But with Jerusalem leveled to the ground by the Romans, church members in Antioch were frantic, cut off from all support, rootless.

Meanwhile, gentiles were entering the community at Antioch in increasing numbers, people who didn't know or cherish the Law of

Moses, dietary laws, and all the other cherished customs of the Jewish-Christians.

The situation was complicated all the more because Jews traditionally had regarded gentiles as sinners. The Jewish-Christians were afraid that morality would be destroyed, with their assemblies turning into orgies.

This was the situation Matthew faced about 85 A.D. He had to ease the church through a painful period of transition. If he could have simply insisted on holding on to the old ways or if he could have told them to forget the old and accept the new, his task would have been relatively easy. But Matthew respected tradition too much for that. He had to blend the old and the new into a fresh synthesis.

Some biblical scholars suggest that he left us a sort of self-

By David C.
NC News Service

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