

# Diocesan Leadership Conference depicts parish life of today, future

By Teresa A. Parsons

"What do we Catholics look like nowadays?" was the central question posed by Father Eugene Hemrick, keynote speaker at last Saturday's diocesan Leadership Conference in Geneva. Describing the concept of shared responsibility for an overflow crowd of 450, Father Hemrick, the director of research for the U.S. Catholic Conference in Washington, drew on the past to develop a portrait of the Catholic Church in the U.S., present and future.

Quoting Notre Dame University's Report on the American Parish, he said: "We are white, urban, educated, middle-class, participatory, powerful, pragmatic ... while at the same time, we are tan, black, yellow, often not urban, working at necessary but demeaning tasks, on the outside, still looking for a window to look in, with a sentiment for the past."

"Just at a time in history when the dominant body of Catholics is white, well-educated, and middle-class, we become aware that large parts of America are not. We really have two Churches and maybe others."

"But there is an oft-ignored underbelly to the educated, successful, powerful, American Catholic," he added, describing three of its specific manifestations — the 30 percent of Catholics who live outside urban centers "where culture and public agenda are shaped," the new Hispanic and Asian immigrants, and those who have held to the traditional immigrant church experience.

"In the rush of change, we sometimes forget the persistence of memory," he noted, describing a sizeable portion of the Church as rooted in the immigrant experience, including silent and traditional devotions as opposed to congregational worship. "Old traditions die slowly, if ever," he said.

Although 300 people registered, an extra 150 turned up at the day-long conference which included 18 hour-long workshops offered in three rounds. Parishes from all areas of the diocese sent up to four delegates, from parish council members and committee members to pastors, pastoral assistants and youth representatives. Diocesan personnel, and religious and lay persons active in specific ministries presented the workshops.

Most workshop topics were reflected in the keynote address as Father Hemrick described the outline and direction of ministry in the Catholic Church using the results of recent studies.

As lay persons become on the average more skilled and highly educated people, they have more to offer their parishes. "Lay Catholics today have all the potential for reacting to the economic teachings of the popes and the bishops," Father Hemrick said. But they have also come to expect more of parish ministries and programs. For instance, not only would parishioners like their parishes to offer them more effective services when their marriages are in trouble, but many would also like help with problems that lead marriages toward the rocks, whether drug abuse, alcoholism or economic struggles.

Studies have shown that even though parishioners' expectations are not always enunciated or developed into specific roles, "the reason most cited for attending a parish is not liturgy or adaptation of Vatican II changes, but the quality of pastoral care."

Meanwhile the average age of marriage is being pushed back and growing numbers of single young adults are found in parishes which have traditionally responded to families. "How can we make them feel more welcome in our parishes which are generally geared to family life?" Father Hemrick asked, noting his own discomfort at needing to reevaluate to whom he gears his homilies after 22 years of priesthood.

Studies also reveal what to many religious educators is merely a confirmation — that traditional religious education isn't reaching teenagers. "We do not get the feeling, especially today, that our youth are antireligion," Father Hemrick said. They are not avoiding religious education because of a distast for it according to a study done at Stanford University. Rather they have either not been personally asked or they are looking for forms that are more relevant to their lives. What has reached them are weekend retreats, the study said.

Nor he asserted, do we know the results of adult education offered. "How activist do we want people to be? It's one thing to come together to study the Bible ... and to be self-enriched. But in our adult ed courses are we looking at activism, which says that there are certain types of behavior that should come out of this — a revolution? Where is it to go after we put it into ourselves?" he asked.

As Catholics, we just don't ask enough, whether it be for lay involvement at the

parish level, for vocations, or evangelization, according to parish studies.

"Surprisingly it was found that 52 percent of parishioners participate in no parish activity," Father Hemrick said of a recent study of parish leadership. Among those who do, only 29 percent came forward of their own volition while 68 percent were asked by either the pastor or another staff member. But once asked, the study noted that those leaders accepted responsibility after responsibility.

Likewise, Father Hemrick pointed out, studies show that simple encouragement may be the key to increased vocations. "We're just not asking them," he said of young people, adding that the strongest, most consistent influence on those who consider a vocation is the example of another priest or religious.

The same is at least partially true of evangelization according to a study by Father Alvin Illig, director of the Paulist National Catholic Evangelizational Association. Twenty-five years ago, there were 4.1 "converts" for every 1,000 active Catholics in the U.S., compared to 1.8 at present, Father Hemrick reported. "He (Father Illig) attributes the drop to fewer Catholics sharing their faith, a misunderstanding of ecumenism, fewer clergy and religious who traditionally worked with religious, controversies within the Catholic community which are sapping enthusiasm to evangelize, and an instruction process ... which is too long."

While workshops were held throughout DeSales High School and nearby St. Stephen's School, the Diocesan Pastoral Council met for a question-and-answer session with Bishop Matthew H. Clark and Father Hemrick. Nearly 20 young people also gathered with diocesan Department of Youth Ministry Director Pat Fox, Assistant Director Anne Wegman and Father Dave Gramke of St. Cecilia's Church in Elmira for an all-day youth convocation.

Another of the day's highlights was a special two-hour workshop on "Urban Church: Reality and Vision" offered by staff members from the Division of Urban Services and Father Joe Hart of St. Bernard's Institute. The combination of presentations and small group discussions was described by one participant as "good — no, excellent."

The day began with a morning prayer in the gym of DeSales High School. Bishop Matthew H. Clark, who was celebrating his own feast day, thanked all those present for sharing their time and gifts as parish leaders. The bishop also asked that those who'd been generous with their time in the past be remembered, especially in light of the 10th anniversary of the Diocesan Pastoral Council, which was marked by Mass the preceding evening.

The conference was sponsored by the Office of Parish Services and coordinated by Deacon Claude Lester. For the closing prayer, Lester presented a multi-screen slide show which he described as "the sights and sounds of the Rochester Diocese."

The reaction of one woman as she wearily walked toward her car summarized the day aptly. "I never realized how big this diocese is," she said.

**Official Announcement**

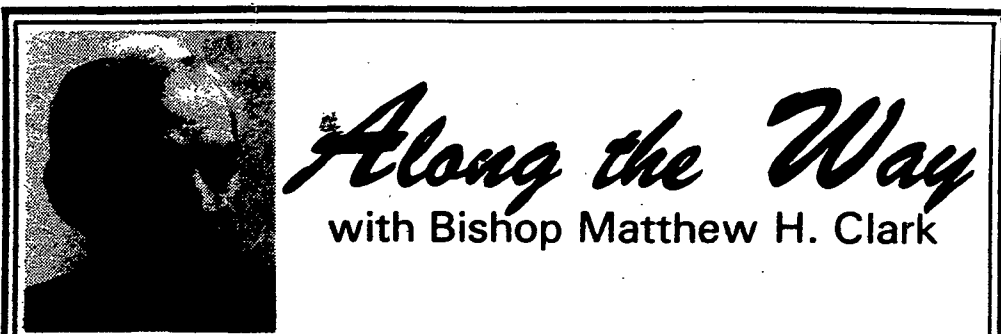
Bishop Matthew H. Clark has announced that Father Robert Mulnickel has been granted a leave of absence from active priestly ministry.

**Circulation Day**

Christ Church Unity will hold a "Circulation Day" Sept. 28, 10 a.m.-6 p.m., at 55 Prince St. Neither a sale nor a barter, Circulation Day offers participants an opportunity to give away usable items they no longer need. For information, call (716) 473-0910, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

**Chocolate Drive**

Nazareth Academy's annual Chocolate Drive will begin with a special assembly on Friday, Sept. 20. This year's theme is "Over the Rainbow and classes personifying the major characters from "The Wizard of Oz" will compete and cooperate to sell the \$1-chocolate bars to benefit the school.



Sunday Evening. Some notes of this past week:

Today we held the third and last reflection forum on the concerns of women in the church. This completes one phase of our contribution to the National Conference's pastoral letter on that theme. I hope our work will also encourage each parish community to review "Fire in the Thornbush" as together we work to meet its recommendations and hopes.

I am deeply grateful to chairperson Judith O'Brien, to all members of our Commission on Women and their spouses, to all who participated in any part of this series and to all of you who daily support our common life in your prayer.

On Saturday some 400 (my estimate!) women and men from all parts of our diocese gathered at De Sales High School in Geneva for two purposes: 1) to celebrate the 10th anniversary of our Diocesan Pastoral Council and 2) to enjoy a series of leadership-training workshops offered by some wonderfully gifted people the Lord has placed among us.

I try as often as I can to tell you and all of our friends that there is a large measure of vitality in our faith community. Days such as the one we experienced in Geneva confirm that conviction and spare me from mentioning it again here.

On Friday evening our new Diocesan Pastoral Council and Regional Coordinators began this year of service at a beautiful Eucharistic Liturgy. I thank all of them and ask you to please support them in their efforts throughout the year.

Of special joy to me that evening was the presence of Bishops Hogan and Hickey. To the former we owe thanks for many things, among

them the foundation of our Diocesan Pastoral Council. To the latter gratitude is due for more than can be mentioned here. For scheduling reasons we don't often gather together. For me the weekend was made doubly enjoyable because we did.

At the youth gathering on Saturday, a young man posed this question: "Bishop, what can we do if our pastor won't let us have a youth group?"

There is no simple answer one can give to that without knowing the circumstances and history of the community, and something of the personalities involved. We talked about patience and persuasion; face-to-face dialogue and parental support; about such elements as commitment, responsibility and the like.

I tried to say — and my young friends listened and responded with insight — that all of us have limitations and faults. These should not constrict or dampen the gifts and enthusiasm of the community; the community at the same time often can be helped by the understanding that a "no" from a pastor may signal not so much a lack of confidence in the petitioner as in himself.

It's moments like this that we need one another — bishops, pastors, young and old, etc. Who among us does not experience fear, a shortage of hope, lack of confidence? Probably none of us. At times like that there is no more effective help than a friend who tries to understand us and is willing to walk with us for awhile.

We agreed at the end of the discussion that when they had done all that they could do then I would help them as I can.

Peace to all.

A new feature this year is a videotape documenting the Chocolate Bar Run, a marathon in which the first bar sold is carried from Sacred Heart Cathedral to the Nazareth auditorium. The live arrival of that first bar will signal the beginning of the drive. The sale continues until Oct. 4.

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