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Slip-slidin' away

Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

John Pallani of Cardinal Mooney slips on the wet playing field as he tries to block a kick from Gates-Chili player Darren Robinson.

Community members comment on draft of economy pastoral

By Karen M. Franz

When Bishops Matthew H. Clark and Dennis W. Hickey left last Sunday for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops meeting in Washington, they took with them the commentary of a number of groups on the second draft of the bishops' Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy.

At a public hearing Wednesday, Nov. 6, at Fairport's St. John of Rochester Church, Bishops Clark and Hickey heard the testimony of 15 speakers representing groups from various geographic areas and social segments of the diocese.

Dr. Kenneth Weare of the Bishop Clark's Consultative Panel on the Economics Pastoral said that the second draft is more readable and specific than the first draft, and

gives more attention to the moral and ethical concerns of economic policy while de-emphasizing national policy.

He said, however, that the pastoral aspect of the letter is not strong enough, and remarked that implementation of the moral principles enunciated by the pastoral is essential. Weare said that a time limit should be imposed by which every bishop in the United States would have to develop a program for implementing the letter in his diocese. He said that the tone of the document is "prophetic" and noted, "We have to convince the American public that we mean it."

John Shields of the Newman Community at SUNY College at Brockport said that the pastoral "does an excellent job of tracing the history of the (poverty) problem ... but it tends to be somewhat muted and lackluster in tone." He noted that such religious groups as Moral Majority do not shy away from taking specific stands, but that the bishops seem wary of doing so.

"Lacking the moral force of an outraged tone, the pastoral is becoming little more than a social studies document," Shields said.

Tom Vallie, representing the two-year old Pittsford Church of the Transfiguration, said that the predominantly white-collar parishioners represented the "conservative point of view" with respect to economic policy. He praised the pastoral for explaining moral and ethical principles to live by, but asserted that "only when it goes into policy matters does it stray from solid ground."

Vallie said that the pastoral should be taken as a call from the bishops to themselves to renew evangelization. "If all Catholics were good Christians, we wouldn't need the pastoral," he said, adding that the Church really should not be a policy maker in the business world.

The pastoral's repeated references to governmental action were criticized by Robert Walters, a finance council representative of St. Patrick's, Seneca Falls. Walters said that the letter speaks of government funding for social programs but never addresses the

means by which the government should raise the money needed. He added that the pastoral fails to address the moral implications of our nation's huge debt.

Walters also asserted that the pastoral's discussion of the "uneven distribution of wealth" in society gives the implication that the middle-class and the wealthy have earned their status unfairly. "What level of wealth is acceptable without being admonished by the Church?" he asked.

Dairy farmer Richard Redmond, a member of the Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry's ad hoc committee on the pastoral, presented commentary on the pastoral's section on food and agriculture. He said that the pastoral assumes a relationship between farm size and productivity and that this relationship should be more clearly defined in the third draft. He noted that "policy tinkering" to aid those operating small farms could have serious consequences on midsize farms. He also asserted that the pastoral's emphasis on family farms "may tend to underplay the need for just wages for farm workers," and that a stronger policy statement should be made on farm wages, especially for migrants.

Thomas Dermody, a farmer and member of St. Vincent de Paul, Churchville, commended the bishops on their "excellent chapter" on agriculture. He agreed with the pastoral's stand that "tax policies must not favor superfarms at the expense of the small farmers." Dermody said that the bishops should further address whether U.S. national security is the reason agricultural aid goes to our political allies, but not necessarily to those nations most in need of aid.

Tom O'Leary of Blessed Sacrament parish said that the pastoral should reemphasize the spiritual corporal works of mercy, which he said have been lost from Catholic tradition. He asserted that for the pastoral letter to be effective, priests must be directed to carry out its message.

The pastoral is deficient, according to Thomas Miller of St. Salome's, Irondequoit,

in failing to give appropriate recognition to effective programs now aiding the poor. He also said that the pastoral should be made more specific in explaining individuals' obligations and should be shortened so that it will be accepted by a larger audience.

Dr. Marvin Mich, yet another member of the bishop's consultative panel, offered several recommendations for the development of the third draft of the pastoral. He suggested that a two-page "executive summary" of the pastoral be developed. The pastoral as a whole, he said, should provide a deeper analysis of the root causes of our economic problems — the profit-motive system vs. the needs-based system. Mich also stressed the need to formulate concrete plans of action so that the pastoral letter won't be shelved.

The final speaker, Gary Tyman of Good Shepherd Parish, Henrietta, is scheduled for ordination to the priesthood in April. He spoke of the need for the Church to set an example in its own employment policies. "The letter will not have authority unless the Church lives the message the letter teaches," he said, referring to the low salaries of Church employees. These employees, Tyman said, are "pushed to the edge of poverty by their low wages" and are often forced to take "second jobs that exhaust them and their ministries."

He further asserted that underpayment indicates that work in the Church is not really important and that — because parish staffs are increasingly composed of female employees — underpayment of Church employees promotes the feminization of poverty. Unless a solution to this concern is found, Tyman said, "the Church's witness is negative."

At the close of the hearing, Bishop Clark thanked the speakers for their input into the pastoral process. He noted that although many speakers had expressed a desire for more specifics in the letter, the bishops have purposely taken a generalized approach, to provide flexibility toward rapid changes in economic circumstances.

Inside:

Waiting for Godot

Nazareth Arts Center offers an Irish cast's interpretation of Samuel Beckett's timeless play — Page 5.

Bishop Corrada Del Rio

The first Puerto Rican bishop in the continental United States will visit Rochester this Friday to participate in Santa Mision — Page 6.

Heart-to-heart

Biplane digital subtraction angiography — a new technology at St. Mary's Hospital that will simplify the diagnosis of cardiac ailments — Page 7.

Migrant Minister

Jean Despeines, a Haitian seminarian, tells of travail in the lives of migrants who are also his fellow countrymen — Page 9.