

# Committee member offers inside perspective on pastoral

By Karen M. Franz

As the bishops of the United States voted in Washington last Wednesday on the final draft of their pastoral letter on the U.S. economy and Catholic social teaching, Rochester-area participants in the Downtown Community Forum of St. Mary's Church got an insider's view of the pastoral's process and contents.

Monsignor George G. Higgins, adjunct lecturer at the Catholic University of America and a member of the bishops' committee on the pastoral, addressed nearly 100 people gathered for a luncheon/lecture at the Rochester Plaza Hotel.

With a list of credentials as long as an unemployment line, Monsignor Higgins was well-armed to discuss the U.S. economic scene and the bishops' concerns about it.

For more than 40 years, he has served as a consultant to the United States Catholic Conference and has held such posts as director of the Social Action Department of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, USCC secretary for research and USCC secretary for special concerns.

In addition, the monsignor was a member of the Preparatory Commission on the Lay Apostolate for the Second Vatican Council and served as a consultant to the council. He has also been intimately involved with the U.S. labor movement and currently serves as chairman of the Public Review Board of the United Auto Workers Union.

In writing the pastoral, Monsignor Higgins said, the bishops felt a need to contribute to the societal conversation on the economy. "The theology of the pastoral flows directly from Church teaching," he said, noting that the Vatican II document *The Church in the Modern World* has been most influential in this arena.

"The vision of the Catholic Church is a social vision," he asserted. "The Church emphasizes social morality as well as individual morality," added Monsignor Higgins, who also writes a weekly column, "The Yardstick," for National Catholic News Service.

"The bishops are trying to be a public voice on these issues... and to relate the moral values of our faith to social conditions."

The U.S. bishops speak as members of the Catholic hierarchy and as American citizens, "steeped in the democratic tradition, pluralistic philosophy, and political and cultural dynamism" of our nation," he said.

According to Monsignor Higgins, the pastoral is designed to instruct Catholics on the social teaching of the Church—which he called the "least-known" Church teaching among Catholics—and to influence the public debate on economic affairs.

"I do not think at the present time there is any other institution more equipped to do this" than the U.S. bishops, he said. "It is not being done by others."

Furthermore, he noted, "many people who have used the drafts of the pastoral have never stepped inside a Catholic church and wouldn't recognize a bishop if they saw one."

"Many times purely secularist observers are more interested in the process than are our own people," he continued.

Calling Archbishop Rembert Weakland, the chairman of the bishops' pastoral committee, "one of the truly great bishops of my time," Monsignor Higgins emphasized that the consultative process employed by the committee has been exhaustive. As an example, he noted that more than 20,000 pages of comments were submitted to the committee after the first draft of the letter was released.

"The process has been lengthy, very tiring, very tedious," he said. In hearings, "Archbishop Weakland has the patience of Job, and often drove me out of my mind by listening to people I would have cut off in 10 minutes."

But, the monsignor continued, "even if the bishops never issued a final pastoral, the process itself was infinitely worthwhile."

Though the bishops make no claim to expertise in economic matters, Monsignor Higgins said, their pastoral offers three norms or moral guidelines for society to consider with respect to economic affairs.



Monsignor George Higgins

First among them is an emphasis on the social nature of the human person. This emphasis, he said, is "countercultural in our society" because of the extreme importance U.S. society has placed on individualism.

Secondly, the bishops suggest that society must create a "preferential option for the poor," a concept the U.S. bishops expound in concert with, but not in deference to, the bishops of Central and South America.

Finally, the bishops express a determination that society must protect the human and economic rights of the individual.

Noting that on this final point the bishops face the highest degree of disagreement from critics, Monsignor Higgins said, "We have a long way to go, but ours is a communitarian ethic... The ultimate injustice is for a person or group to be treated as a non-member of society."

"Poverty is evil," he continued, not only in that it leaves people with unmet material needs, "but also because it cuts people off from participation in society."

Though the notion of "economic rights" is a controversial one, Monsignor Higgins said the bishops have made a commitment to the belief that "people have the right to the bare minimum necessary to human dignity"—to a "baseline" of economic ownership that will ensure economic justice.

Yet, the monsignor added, "the pastoral is not intended to close the debate but to open it." He noted as well that Catholic social teaching is not static but constantly evolving.

The bishops are calling for a "new American experiment," he said. "The fundamental issue to be addressed... is how the U.S. economy can balance human values with the need of our industries to remain competitive in an increasingly complex world economy."

He called for a new partnership between labor and management, but said this partnership will not be possible until the two factions can cooperate on an equal basis.

"Workers have rightly rejected calls for less-adversarial relations when these calls are just smoke screens for new management demands," he said.

Asserting that U.S. trade unions face a continually precarious future and that unionism "has never been fully internalized into American society," he noted that union membership has fallen from 30 percent of the labor force in the 1950s to only 18 percent today.

Management, he said, is becoming increasingly less willing to negotiate freely with unions. "Only in a handful of workplaces has management agreed to accept unions."

Calling for a "Vatican II of the labor movement," Monsignor Higgins said labor unions must take stock of their current situation, confront their past mistakes and plan for the future.

"I am encouraged by the fact that there is a tendency and willingness for labor to look critically at its own structures," he said.

But, he continued, "If the labor movement continues to decline... most of the things in the pastoral will become academic; they will not come about."

## Aquinas tabs individual awards for fall boys, girls teams

Tom Gigliotti, athletic director at Aquinas Institute, and the coaches of the school's fall sports programs have announced team awards.

Donna Enright and Ann Frederick were tabbed most valuable players for girls' varsity soccer coach Mary Beth Moore. Coco O'Donnell was named most outstanding player, and Jennifer Querney was honored as most improved player for the Little Irish.

Amy Zampi was the most outstanding player for Lynn Ross' girls' swimming team

this season and Kathy Heid and Joanna Zampi were named most valuable player and most improved player respectively.

Boys' varsity cross country coach Pat Connelly named Chris Marion as his most outstanding runner, and tabbed Rick Serwan as most valuable runner. Eric Kershner was honored as the most improved runner.

Donna Renaldi captured both the most outstanding runner award and the most valuable for Andrew Paling's girls' varsity

cross country squad. Melissa Reid was named most improved by her coach.

For boys' varsity soccer coach Emilio Monti, whose team captured the Class 5 Section B-2 crown, Gary Barsell was named most outstanding player and sophomore goalie Mike Compisi was honored as most valuable player. Rich Thies was tabbed most improved player for the Little Irish, who finished the season at 13-8-1.

## Weekend for Christian women

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester have scheduled a discernment weekend for Christian women from Friday, November 21, at 8 p.m. to Sunday, November 23, at 2 p.m. at Silver Lake.

Call Sister Clare Ehmman at (716)586-1000, ext. 28, days or evenings at 328-0116 for information or reservations.

## Renowned evangelist leader to visit church in Canisteo

Father Matthew Swizdor, O.F.M. Conv., evangelist and healer, will be at St. Joachim's Church, 32 W. Main St., Canisteo for a series of healing Masses on November 23, 24 and 25,

at 7:30 p.m. each night. Father Swizdor will celebrate the Eucharist, preach the homily and give his blessing to all on hand. All are welcome to attend.



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