

Columnists

An exemplary parish bulletin

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

The most ambitious parish Sunday bulletin I am familiar with is from El Paso, Texas. About five years ago, Mrs. Paul Frommert, a zealous Marianist in our parish, stopped at our office to give me a copy of this bulletin. She explained that she and her husband had just returned from Texas and thought I might be interested in the bulletin.

For many years I have studied parish bulletins. They surely vary in content and readability, indicating the interests of the pastors who usually compose them. Some just give announcements of coming events, and some expand on parish activities and projects. Some are newsy and strengthen community, while others give valuable instruction. The Liguorian Press publishes a bulletin cover with a weekly instruction on the back. The center is blank for parish information, and the back-page instruction — "Dear Padre" or the like — is readable and informing. For those parishes that want to use the back page for advertising to pay the cost of the bulletins, Liguorian Press also offers the instruction alone in a format that is ready for the printer. It costs about \$3 a week, a good investment.

Why is the El Paso bulletin so impressive? It has 12 pages, formed by folding legal length paper, and is neatly printed. It has the usual announcements — Mass schedules and requests, listings of baptisms, marriages and coming events. It also contains some jokes to relieve the heaviness of some of the instruction. It offers four pages explaining the scriptural readings of the particular Sunday. These readings are well-researched and scholarly, and may not be read by the superficial reader. However, for those who really want to understand the readings, they are a gold mine. Whoever does these studies really works!

The rest of the bulletin, usually six or seven pages, gives an exposition of Catholic doctrine and practices, episcopal and papal directives, attacks on the Church from within and without. It is conservative in spirit, with a strong loyalty to the magisterium and the Holy Father.

After reading one El Paso bulletin, I wrote to Father Tom O'Mahoney, the pastor and editor, expressing my admiration at so thorough a bulletin, and sent a check of \$25 to be put on the mailing list.

Father O'Mahoney replied: "I am concerned that our people greatly need instruction. Some years ago, I started a study group to instruct

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the people. Only seven people showed up. So I decided to publish a bulletin that would instruct as well as carry the usual announcements. I am pleased that so many of our parishioners do read it, with different degrees of interest, of course. But it is widely read. "What has surprised me is that we mail out 320 copies weekly (in 1982) to people like yourself, whom I have never met but who came across the bulletin through people visiting here."

Here are a few excerpts from a section called "News and Views:"

1) "Maria Shriver, a member of the Kennedy family, co-wrote and presented a TV program on NBC, entitled 'God Is Not Elected.' It was particularly offensive, as it focused on dissent in the Church and interviewed those who oppose one or other Catholic moral doctrine."

2) "William J. Bennett, U.S. Secretary of Education and a Catholic, has revealed that 70 percent of all high school seniors had taken sex education courses in 1985, up from 60 percent in 1976. Yet when we look at what is happening in the sexual lives of American students, we can only conclude that it is doubtful that much sex education is doing any good at all."

3) "The Brooklyn diocese will close next year the Cathedral College of the Immaculate Conception Seminary. Declining enrollment is the cause. The college, founded in 1924, has only 53 students for the current year, down from a peak of 350 in 1969. This year's freshman class has only eight students. Pray for vocations."

4) "Boss to employee: 'In a way I hate to let you go. You've become sort of a son to me — sullen, disrespectful and uncooperative.'"

Should you wish to be added to the bulletin's mailing list, write to: Holy Trinity Church, 10,000 Pheasant Road, El, Paso, Texas 79924.

Save synods for collegiality's sake

By Father Richard McBrien

Fifteen weeks ago, I did an advance column on the recently concluded World Synod of Bishops.

At the time, I noted a lack of interest in the forthcoming synod among rank-and-file Catholics in the parishes, even though the synod would focus on the laity.

I offered three reasons for the general apathy. First, Catholics have learned to expect little or nothing from synods because they are too much under the control of the incumbent pope.

Since the synodal process was resumed after Vatican II, the Church has not had innovative popes. Pope Paul VI's agenda seemed to have been consolidationist, while Pope John Paul II's tends toward restorationism.

Bishops who wanted to continue the forward movement of the council learned that these international synods were not to function as vehicles of ongoing renewal and reform. Last month's synod on the laity followed the pattern.

While it was clear, especially in the first several days of speech-making, that many of the bishops from Asia, Latin America, and Europe, as well as North America, wanted to open non-ordained ministries to women, the final synodal document dropped the idea in deference to the Vatican's more conservative outlook.

A second reason for the general lack of interest in synods is the uneven manner in which Catholics around the world are prepared for them.

For the most part, the rank-and-file at the diocesan level are not consulted in any meaningful way. Even when they are, they feel their ideas get lost in the complex process of transmission.

Thirdly, by imposing a lid of secrecy on the preliminary reports submitted by various national episcopal conferences, the Vatican suppressed the very material that could have stimulated general discussion and debate.

The observations above raise an ethical question. In these times of grave human need and of limited resources, can the Church justify the enormous cost of elaborate preparations and

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a month-long international meeting that seems to accomplish so little?

Peter Hebblethwaite, one of the best religious journalists in the business, wrote: "It was difficult to find anyone connected with the event — among the 230 bishops and 60 lay observers — who was not glad it was all over."

This situation should be a matter of profound concern to those who understand and accept Vatican II's teaching on collegiality. World Synods offer an opportunity for bishops from every region of the world to come together at regular intervals to discuss and even debate matters that affect the universal Church.

Without such synods, the governance of the universal Church is left entirely to the pope and the Curia. Thus far, however, the synodal process isn't working. Apart from the "Justice in the World" document of the 1971 synod, and the papal document on evangelization following the 1974 gathering, synods have almost nothing to show for their efforts.

Catholics who reject Vatican II's doctrine of collegiality would be happy to see the synodal process abandoned. Catholics who accept the doctrine of collegiality might be tempted to follow suit.

But even if the synodal process isn't working very well, the process itself is too important to scuttle. Moreover, as time goes on, there will be other kinds of popes and other kinds of curial officials.

The synods of the 21st century may very well develop into deliberative, policy-making bodies. And the people in the pews may even begin to recognize some of their recommendations in the final reports.

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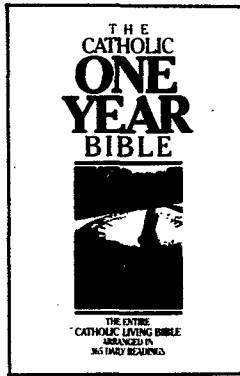


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