

Columnists

Planting seeds of self-sufficiency

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

Q: Who is the Sister of Mercy who wants \$100?" a young priest asked.

A: Oh, that would be Sister Pat Flynn of St. Michael's Wood Shop. I first met her 22 years ago when she was teaching the second grade at St. Ann's School, Hornell. She was a good friend to my classmate, Father Lane, and of Sister Irma Lynch, the principal who was tragically killed in an auto crash on Route 21, along with a brilliant Sister Kieran Byrne.

Q: What is she doing in Rochester?
A: In the late 60s, several sisters got caught up with the idea of helping the poor. To read about Mother Teresa can bring a kind of fantasy of benevolence. Actually working with the poor, with the illiterate, the shiftless as well as those caught up in helpless poverty can be trying. Many sisters decided that God had other work for them and left for other vocations, which did not include teaching.

A few sisters did remain with the poor. I remember Sister Grace Miller of the House of Mercy, Sister Barbara Moore who embraced jail ministry, Sister Regis Straughn and Sister Margaret Brennan of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. There are others who are working in our own Appalachia in the Southern Tier of the diocese. But Sister Pat Flynn is unique.

Q: Unique? In what way?
A: "To give a youth a fish is a kindness. To teach him to fish is greater." Sister Pat has worked with the poor for 22 years and has built up an admirable project, St. Michael's Wood Shop. It teaches youths how to work with wood and, more importantly, how to work in the world; to be on time; to cooperate with fellow workers; to be reliable and honest.

Q: How are the students selected?
A: Sister told me: "The course is from September to June, for high school students 16 years and older. Like the Gospel parable of the seed on the hard soil, some dropped out, especially since no stipend is given until the end of October. Some are dropped for misbehaving. We end up with 17 students, which is all I can afford."

Q: "Do you pay them?"
A: "Not exactly. But these students, most-

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ly black or Puerto Rican, are poor. So I give them a stipend of \$20 a week, and if they produce well, a bonus of \$5. If they goof off or get into a fight, I dock them for the day." Sister is like a tough first sergeant. The shop produces book cases, stands, picture frames, children's toys and the like. These are sold and the money is put back for the Wood Shop's projects. St. Michael's Church gives the shop its center — once part of St. Michael's School — rent-free.

Q: Where does Sister Pat get the money for her project?

A: The diocese will not give her any because she refuses to go to meetings or keep meticulous accounts. She says: "Going to meetings and great bookkeeping consumes time needed for the work." In this she is like Mother Teresa who has the same philosophy and practice.

Sister Pat sends a letter once a year in September to all priests of the diocese, asking for \$100. There is a generous response. Some of the laity contribute generously. General Railway Signal gives \$1000. Hoselton Motors sends an annual \$1000. For years, Eastman Kodak has been generous with lumber and has even supplied two men to teach the students. Hadlock Paint Company and several wholesalers have been open-hearted. And several parish human development committees contribute generously.

Q: Anything special?
A: Yes. Each week Sister Pat goes to the Rochester Psychiatric Hospital's section for the criminally insane and teaches wood-working. The patients sell their products. The cash is put into a pot for their use. People interested can write Sister at: St. Andrew Center, 81 Barberry Terrace, Rochester, N.Y. 14621.

Tribute to a late, great leader

By Father Richard P. McBrien

Cardinal John Dearden died on August 1. He was by any reasonable standard of measurement one of the greatest pastoral leaders the Catholic Church in the United States has ever produced.

Great leaders are people of confidence who inspire confidence in others. John Dearden was no hand-wringer. He was of a totally different breed from the "prophets of gloom and doom" to whom Pope John XXIII referred to in his speech at the opening of Vatican II.

In his retirement Mass homily eight years ago, Cardinal Dearden defied the conventional wisdom when he declared that, "we are on the threshold of a period of great growth in the Church!"

"We stand at what I believe to be one of the crossroads of history," he said in 1972, on the occasion of his 40th anniversary of ordination, "and I am thankful to be part of it. It is a golden opportunity!"

Great leaders also put people ahead of institutions, and persons ahead of systems. In his homily at a 1978 Chrism Mass, Cardinal Dearden said: "The problem is as old as the Church, and it will always be with us — the temptation to be 'correct' without being compassionate."

Great leaders have a sense of history. They do not simply react to events as they occur.

And so Cardinal Dearden told the *Detroit Free Press* in a 1986 interview on the Second Vatican Council: "Judge it also in its historical perspective. In past centuries, periods of dissension, discord, misunderstanding and confusion have followed other ecumenical councils.

"Only after the storm and turbulence had run their course did peace and tranquility return. The historical experience speaks to us, bidding us to be trustful, patient and hopeful. History does repeat itself!"

"The Church," he continued, "is more alive and dynamic and meaningful in people's lives than it has been for years. The Church has a message to bring to the people of today's world in all the conditions in which they are found. It is a message of hope and trust and peace."

Great leaders call their people to effective social action. They know that the mere enunciation of moral principles is not enough. Institutions and policies have to be confronted

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and changed if peace and justice are to be served.

And so in a Day of Peace homily in Baltimore's cathedral in 1977, Cardinal Dearden declared: "Responsibility rests upon us to express our moral convictions through political action. Through the development of a heightened moral sense in our people, we can make our concerns known. We can and must speak for peace in Christ's name!"

Great leaders know that we are all part of a larger community, whether it be larger community of nations or the larger community of churches.

To his brother bishops meeting in Collegeville, Minn., in 1982, he said: "Whatever (the bishop's) other duties, he may not be deaf to the needs of other churches nor may he fail to offer that 'collegial collaboration' which must mark ministry in our time!"

Great leaders, therefore, call people out of themselves, summoning them to transcend their own private interests in order to devote themselves to the interests of all.

In his homily at a Mass for lawyers in 1986, Cardinal Dearden challenged the view that "religion is a private, personal matter — concerned with future rewards, not present stubborn realities."

"Nothing," he said, "could be further from the truth. This world in which we live is very much our concern ... it is God's creation!"

Finally, great leaders recognize their own weaknesses. They do not lord it over those whom they serve.

"We are wounded healers," he said in 1974. "We do not stand above our people, looking down with distant pity. If anything, we stand below, looking up. How else can you look at someone when you are washing their feet?"

May God send us pastoral leaders eager to take John Dearden's place at the wash basin. Foot-washers, not foot-stompers.

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A Letter In Support of Life


Each August I think of a woman I have never met and what she must be feeling at this time of year.

It was in August, twenty-six years ago that my wife and I adopted a baby, a girl who became the light of our lives.

If I could speak to that woman, the biological mother of our adopted child, I would tell her what a wonderful human being that child has become. She is a professional woman, a lady in every sense of the word, beautiful, with great warmth, personality and character. She is an individual who will make a great contribution to her profession and society.

My heartfelt thanks go to that unknown woman for having that baby. We should all thank her. Certainly an abortion would have been an easy way out; but it would have deprived the world of a truly magnificent person. What a terrible tragedy that would have been.

Her dad.



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