

Changes rocked church in tumultuous '70s

By Carmen Viglucci
Guest contributor

The 1970s constituted a decade of momentous comings and goings not only on the church scene, but also nationally and internationally.

Two popes died; so did two presidents. A third president was forced into retirement.

Locally, Bishop Joseph L. Hogan, who had assumed his episcopacy in 1969, retired before the '70s were out. Former ordinaries Bishop James E. Kearney and Fulton J. Sheen died.

These personal events were rivaled in impact by the disastrous flood of 1972 which ravaged the Southern Tier.

In addition, Americans squirmed through the malaise of the post-Vietnam era and were shocked by the Watergate scandal.

But the decade brought more than transitions. The church agonized through what some saw as growing pains and others as modernism. Communion in the hand, altar girls, communal penance, the advent of the Diocesan Pastoral Council, the restructuring of diocesan offices, the permanent diaconate — all were innovated in the 70s.

The Supreme Court in 1973 liberalized abortion and the confrontation between "life" and "choice" still rages. Catholic school closings because of economic reasons began and continue. Women's struggle to expand their roles in the church began and continues. The church was further fractured as leaders engaged in issues they saw as philosophically religious, but which many Catholics regarded as secular. Then as now, religious vocations were a problem.

Abortion, then as now, was a burning issue as the decade began. Under Gov. Nelson Rockefeller, New York State had the most liberal abortion law in the land. This held true until 1973 when the Supreme Court made abortion easily accessible across the land.

Preparing for the 1970 elections, the *Courier-Journal* conducted a public poll on abortion and aid to parochial schools. Many candidates answered the poll, including Gov. Rockefeller, whose lunch-stained reply and return address of Pocantico indicated he personally filled in the survey.

The governor for the first time hinted he might favor some changes in the law he signed. The Democratic candidate, Arthur Goldberg, didn't reply to the poll but told Father Richard Tormey, *Courier* executive editor, that although he personally opposed

abortion, he thought it should be left to choice. Goldberg was neither the first nor last to waffle on the issue.

The poll was a first among Catholic newspapers, establishing a trend which other religious papers across the land followed.

The other great story of the early '70s was the flood which tore apart the Southern Tier.

The most graphic detail was provided in Ss. Peter and Paul Church in Elmira, which was filled with eight feet of water at the height of the flood. The diocese, through the Office of Human Development, mobilized quickly, and priests and nuns were shifted to the area to spell fatigued staffs. A team of five priests, two seminarians, four nuns and two laywomen stayed on the scene to determine the best way the diocese could help.

Special flood collections quickly raised \$4,000. Bishop John E. McCafferty, at the time Southern Tier vicar, toured the parishes before the rain had halted, getting a personal view of the extent of the damage. If memory serves, Bishop Hogan and several other diocesan officials stayed in the Elmira area for several days — including over the July 4 holiday — to personally oversee relief efforts.

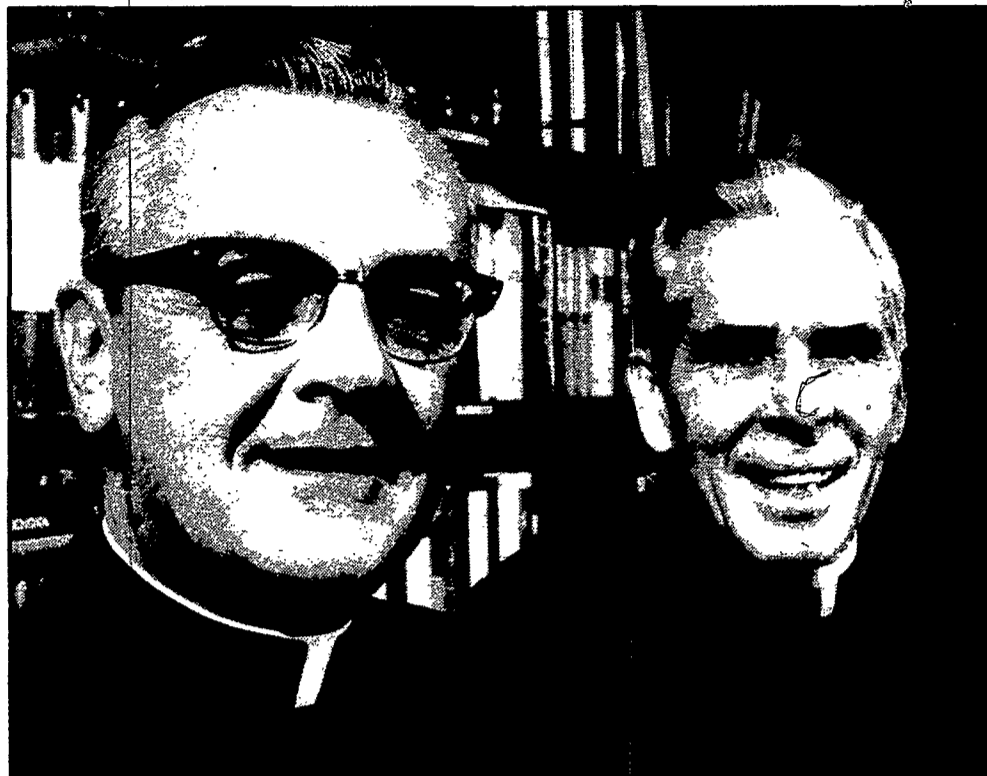
Headlines from the 70s proclaimed the deaths of Presidents Truman and Johnson; Sisters' Council protests Vietnam War; 2 Inner city schools close; Office of Human Development formed; Bishop Sheen Housing Foundation organized; Pontiff Hopeful but Grim over State of World; Sen. Buckley to introduce constitutional amendment to overturn Supreme Court abortion decision.

Those were tumultuous times. *Immense Caritatis* in 1973 allowed laymen to distribute Holy Communion. In the same year, the Vatican reiterated: "No Communion before Confession."

In August, 1973, the *Courier* ran a modest picture-story about St. Monica's Parish installing altar girls. One pastor tried to cancel his parish subscription list, accusing the newspaper of promoting the idea. Of course, altar girls were not permissible. Later pronouncements by the Vatican made this rule even more explicit.

If you worked for the diocese during the '70s, Bishop Hogan was the overriding figure. An imposing 6-foot-5, he also drew attention by confronting a host of matters from boycotts to reorganization of diocesan administration.

These were not the times for popular de-



Upon resigning in 1969, Bishop Fulton J. Sheen chose then-Monsignor Joseph L. Hogan to head the Diocese of Rochester. Bishop Hogan dominated the decade, but resigned at its close.

isions. Schools had to be closed; old ways had to be changed and new ways accommodated.

Bishop Hogan confided that his hardest decision lay in the closing of schools. When inner-city educational beacons such as Mt. Carmel and St. Bridget's schools were dimmed, he said in a pastoral letter, it "makes us all a bit more poor."

But the ordinary had his successes, perhaps most notably the Diocesan Pastoral Council — the realization of his "fondest hope." In 1973, a constitution was drafted for formation of the DPC.

In the so-called secular world, meanwhile, a sleazy political break-in at a building called Watergate in Washington, D.C., eventually brought the near-collapse of the

American government.

Back on the "home front," we were blessed in 1977 with permission to receive Communion in the hand. Though the change was optional and unquestionably popular, it stuck in the craw of church conservatives, perhaps to this day.

Earlier in 1977 — January 12 to be precise — the beloved Bishop James E. Kearney died. Rites were conducted in bitter-cold, blizzard conditions at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery.

In the closing years of the decade, news erupted at a rapid-fire clip.

August 6, 1978: Pope Paul VI dies, Interregnum. Then on August 26, headlines blared: WE HAVE A POPE!

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