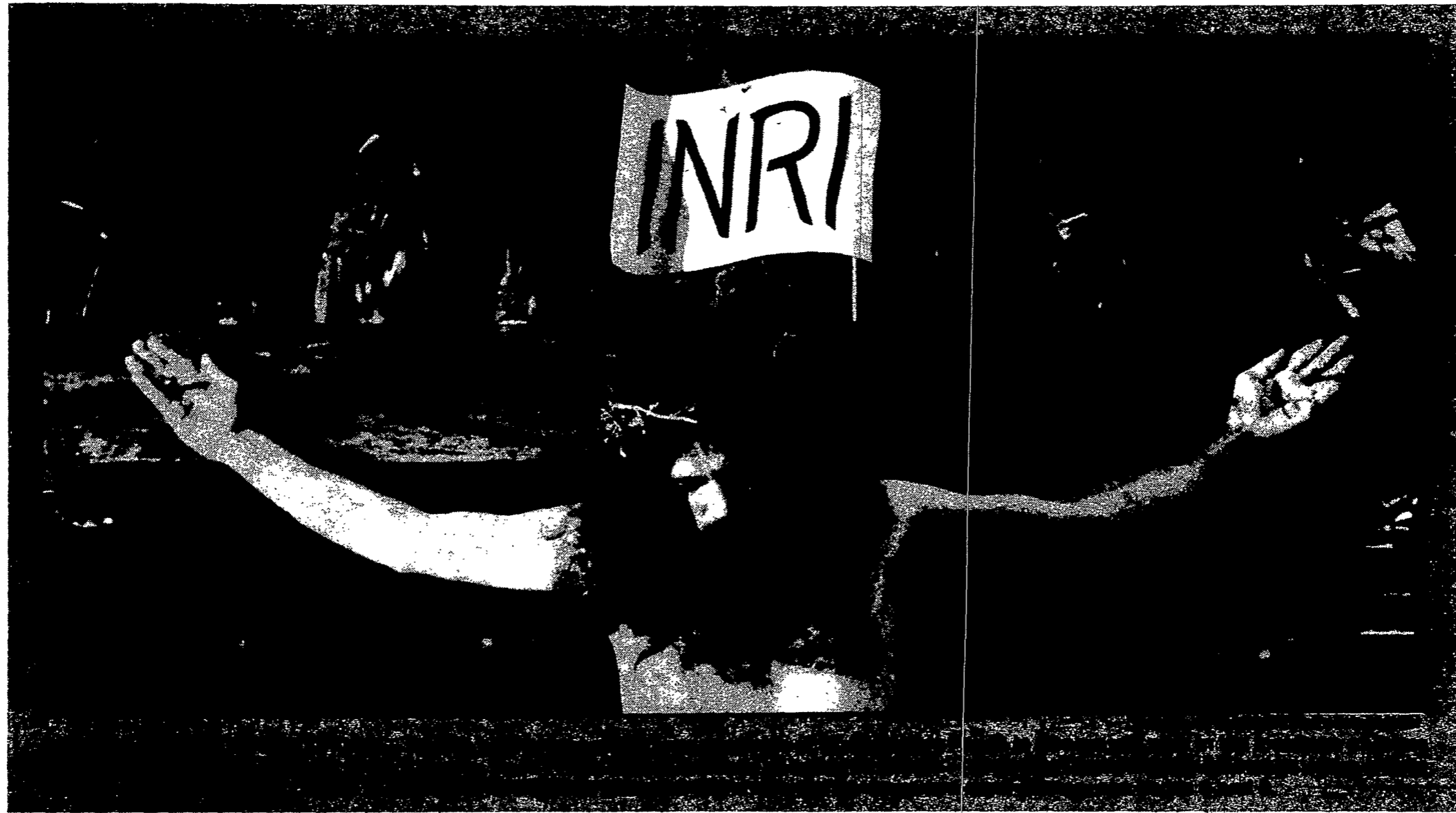




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Orthodox claim short shrift from diocese

By Teresa A. Parsons
Associate editor

ROCHESTER — As Janet Schwenkler traveled to each meeting of the Diocesan Pastoral Council, she used to pray that she'd have the nerve to speak her convictions to a sea of hostile faces.

Told by her pastor that she had been chosen because no one else wanted the job, Schwenkler represented the Steuben Region on the DPC for five years, although her knees invariably shook during meetings, and she was convinced that her orthodox views were neither accepted nor appreciated.

"No, they aren't heard and they aren't valued. At least that's been my experience," Schwenkler said. "(Diocesan officials) will bend over backwards to accommodate other minority groups — the divorced and separated, the AIDS people, the wounded women who want to be priests... but if you're orthodox, you get the cold shoulder."

"(Liberal Catholics) will listen to what you say with their ears, but not their hearts," Schwenkler added. "You may be tolerated, but you are not accepted."

"Orthodox," "conservative," "traditional" — it's difficult even to agree upon an adjective that describes Catholics who long for the Tridentine Mass; whose conversation is often sprinkled liberally with such terms as "our Holy Father," "the Blessed Mother," and "the magisterium;" who don't concede gray areas of sexual morality or doctrinal authority; who list among their heroes Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and Bishop Austin Vaughan.

Yet most of them would agree to describe the ideological climate in the Diocese of Rochester as falling between "liberal" and "heretical." And many, like Schwenkler, feel they have been written off by diocesan officials, as well as by leaders in their parishes.

"I do not believe (orthodox voices) are heard, and I don't believe any attention is paid to them," said Father James P. Collins, pastor of St. Anthony's Parish, Elmira. "I try to observe to the best of my ability the laws of the diocese and the laws of Rome, but when those two conflict, I follow the laws of Rome."

Perhaps the most prominent spokesman for the conservative point of view in the diocese is Father Paul J. Cuddy, whose weekly column in the *Catholic Courier*



Bette G. Augustin/Staff photographer
Orthodox Catholics defy stereotypes.

wields pointed criticisms cloaked with homespun humor.

Despite legions of faithful readers, even Father Cuddy doubts his ability to influence diocesan officials. "I think they've got a mindset; they've made up their minds that Cuddy's just a mossback," he said. "The way things are now, the conservatives just don't have a look-in."

Rochester's reputation for liberalism is relatively recent, emerging only during the tenures of its last two bishops, Matthew H. Clark and Joseph L. Hogan. Yet it is Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, whose top priority was implementing the directives of the Second Vatican Council, who is credited with establishing the pace of reform in the diocese. "This has resulted in Rochester's being known as a progressive diocese because of the pace of the renewal," explained Auxiliary Bishop Dennis W. Hickey, diocesan vicar general.

Vatican II not only transformed the liturgy, but the whole vision of the church from an orderly, hierarchically dominated institution to one that emphasized ac-

tive participation by the whole "people of God," and brought the church into the midst of modern society.

As has every other general council in the church's history, Vatican II also produced the tumult that continues to divide elements of the church more than 20 years later. Bishop Hickey credits Pope Paul VI for largely avoiding a major schism, "keeping the bark of Peter afloat as he adroitly introduced one reform after another."

In the Diocese of Rochester, Bishop Hickey pointed out, "it should not be surprising that the enthusiasm engendered after Vatican II should have in some instances overflowed into what some might term excesses."

"These are being addressed, although it is possible some still need attention," Bishop Hickey added.

Those who continue to challenge the diocese about such "excesses" have often been stereotyped as elderly people unable to accept Vatican II's liturgical changes, and almost superstitiously attached to the rosary and other traditional devotions.

In actuality, they encompass a wide range of ages, social and economic backgrounds, and levels of religious education. No reliable estimates exist of their numbers, but many concede they are a minority.

"There's a small group who try to make sure that the discipline of the universal church is kept," explained Dominic Aquila, a member of Catholics United for the Faith and parishioner at Our Lady of Victory Church in Rochester. "At the other extreme are people wanting to make the church into something else."

Between the two extremes, Aquila said, is a "vast middle (group) that will go anywhere they're led. The issue of orthodoxy just doesn't matter to most people."

And even those who do focus on orthodoxy frequently disagree with each other. Some focus their attention on such liturgical "abuses" as female altar servers and general absolution; others are most concerned about the local church's treatment of such social/moral issues as abortion and sexual morality. Still others confront what might be termed political issues, such as U.S. policy in Central America, the hierarchical handling of dissenting views or, locally, school reorganization.

While their concerns differ, conservative Catholics tend to direct their complaints toward the same target —

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