



# CATHOLIC COURIER

## FESTIVE FUNCTION

Members of the youth group at St. Christopher's Church shared Christmas cheer with the boys at the Industry School. Page 12.

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## Vatican II still shaping diocese

*Attempting to discuss the Second Vatican Council in one article is like trying to hold the ocean in a water glass. You can't hope to catch all the water, but you might be able to get an idea of how the water tastes by drinking a bit of the glass' contents.*

*What follows is how Vatican II "tasted" to those who navigated its changes as they rolled like waves over the Diocese of Rochester. In their wake, those waves have radically changed how Catholics at all levels of the church's structure — cardinals, bishops, priests, religious and lay people — view themselves, and each other.*

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

For Father Benedict A. Ehmman, the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred

Liturgy was the answer to a lifelong prayer. The resulting changes in the Mass — Scripture-based homilies, congregational singing, the use of the vernacular — were some of the most visible reforms that came out of council.

Father Ehmman said he and other liturgists had imagined such changes would not come to pass for at least another century when, in the 1930s and '40s, they began examining the church's liturgies.

"We never dreamt that anything like this would happen in our lifetime," said the 85-year-old priest, currently in residence

at Holy Apostles Parish in Rochester. A pioneer in liturgical reform, Father Ehmman belonged to an international circle of liturgists whose numbers kept growing through the mid-20th century.

The liturgists began meeting at yearly conferences devoted to examining ways in which the church's sacramental celebrations might be made more meaningful to the faithful, Father Ehmman recalled. Essentially, the liturgists wanted to increase lay Catholics' involvement in each of the sacraments, making them understand that the sacraments were a concrete way of experiencing Christ's life, Father Ehmman said.

Yet, prior to Vatican II, the faithful were often "just there" during the adminis-

tration of sacraments, Father Ehmman said, pointing out that this sense of detachment was most notable during the Mass, when a priest with his back to the congregation used the Latin tongue to celebrate.

Priests would sometimes encourage an air of apathy by rushing through such events as the Easter liturgy in order to end the celebrations quickly, he said. Father Ehmman illustrated this point by saying that he once saw a group of parish priests perform three rites simultaneously at an Easter Mass when, ideally, the rites should have been performed consecutively.

"All these shortcuts gave evidence of the fact that (the priests) did not deeply appreciate the idea of the paschal mystery," he remarked.

Yet some of the changes envisioned by the liturgists have borne fruits other than those they intended, Father Ehmman admitted.

For example, the sign of peace, intended to enable parishioners to briefly acknowledge the presence of Christ in one another, has in some parishes turned into a five-to-10 minute social break, he said.

"The rationale for the peace greeting is, 'I am to recognize that in you the Christ is present,'" the priest said. "That's the only idea, not to exchange all this Rotary Club stuff."

Nonetheless, Father Ehmman asserted that the average Catholic today is far more involved in the celebration of Mass than his or her counterpart in pre-conciliar times. "The change from Latin to the vernacular certainly has done wonders to help peo-

ple feel they're part of the Mass," he said.

Father John P. Norris, pastor of Assumption Church in Fairport, agreed that Vatican II definitely changed how his parishioners now participate in the Mass.

"(Vatican II) certainly has revived participation of the people in the liturgy," he said. Before Vatican II, "the people in the pews at that time were a silent majority," he continued. "They, in a true sense, didn't own the Mass. The priest was celebrating Mass, and they were hearing Mass."

Yet some Catholics did not warmly greet the post-conciliar liturgical reforms, he noted. "I think (liturgical reform) might have been negative for some people who hanker back to the old Tridentine Mass," he said.

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## Council produced a wealth of documentary milestones

Twenty-five years ago this fall, bishops at the Second Vatican Council concluded their deliberations by approving 11 of the council's 16 documents. What follows is a capsule summary of the 11 documents put forth in 1965, and the five that were issued beforehand in 1963 and 1964.

• **Liturgy** — The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy touched on the biblical foundation of the liturgy; the Word of God was brought to the fore as a unifying factor in liturgy. The series of instructions in the constitution discussed the use of vernacular in liturgy; incorporation of national and local customs or traditions; concelebration of the Mass; Communion under both species; and a host of other sacramental concerns.

• **Communications** — The church had a right to use the press, film, radio and television in order to spread the Gospel, according to the Decree on the

Media of Social Communication. The decree called for the fostering of programs appealing to people of different cultures and ages. Other items discussed included the creation of an international Catholic news agency, the formation of "sound public opinion," and responsibility of lay Catholics in the area of the media.

For a firsthand look at what it was like to attend Vatican II, please see page 10.

• **Dogmatic Constitution on the Church** — Entitled in Latin as "Lumen Gentium," this document is probably best known for its section on "The People of God," which stressed the unity of the faithful and gave new dignity to role of the lay person.

"Though they differ essentially and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and

the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are none the less ordered one to the other . . .," stated the section on "The People of God."

"The faithful indeed, by virtue of their royal priesthood, participate in the offering of the Eucharist. They exercise that priesthood, too, by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, abnegation and active charity."

• **Eastern Churches** — The pope's concern for the Catholic Churches professing rites other than Roman was affirmed in The Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches. The document also stated the right of Eastern Christians separated from the Roman church to have access to the sacraments if they request them. In turn, Catholics were encouraged to participate in the sacramental life of the

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