

Council elevated action above self-denial

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Prior to Vatican II, Catholics between the ages of 21 and 59 were required to fast on all Lenten days except Sundays. "Fasting" also was defined more strictly before the council. Like today, Catholics ate no meat on Fridays before the council, but neither did they eat meat at more than one meal of any Lenten day. They ate no food between meals throughout Lent, and limited their consumption at two of the three daily meals to no more than half of what they ate at the main meal of the day.

Given the comparative lenience of today's Lenten regulations — with "intense" fasting required for only two days of the season — how can modern Catholics make a true Lenten sacrifice?

The answer depends on the individual.

"The (Vatican II) changes allow for greater freedom and creativity," Father Reif explained. "Someone can now spontaneously choose this or that form of Lenten discipline."

Although more than 25 years have passed since Vatican II changed the way the church approaches Lent, many Catholics remain confused about the current regulations, and others — especially older people — are unwilling to adapt to the changes.

"Even though people know what the new rules are, they still want to go by the way they were brought up," acknowledged Susanna Weatherholt, Director of Liturgy for the Diocese of Rochester. "They remember from the old days when the regulations were so strict."

Father Farrell concurred. "Many of my patients who are elderly and not obligated (since they're past the age of 59) still abstain from meat on Fridays," he said.

In fact, observers note, by easing its regulations, the church made it more difficult for some Catholics to feel secure in their Lenten observances.

"We've become much more aware of ourselves (since Vatican II), but now we struggle in a lot of ways," remarked Father Jim Sauers, campus minister at Rochester Institute of Technology. "It may have been easier when we really knew what we could and couldn't do."

Although her office annually sends parishes a list of Lenten regulations and encourages their publication in parish bulletins, Weatherholt said she fields numerous calls in the weeks before Lent from Catholics unsure of what is expected of them.

Yet Vatican II sought to bring the regulations into proper perspective, so



that Catholics could better focus on the spirit of the Lenten season.

"What Lent is all about is to assist people in their faith journey with God," Weatherholt noted. "People should find whatever way they can to help them do that."

And, as Father Farrell observed, combining traditional practices with fresh approaches might be the most valid way to mark the season.

"It's good to emphasize both," he said. "Giving up, or fasting, can help us with our interior spirituality; and reaching out to help is also necessary. Now we're adding the other side of the coin."

Thus the greater flexibility in Lenten observance does not mean abandoning tradition. Catholic observance of the season remains based on the three dimensions of Lent — prayer, penance and almsgiving.

Prayer: Participation in Stations of the Cross and Lenten weekday Mass is still encouraged. Supplementing those services have been the evolution of morning and evening prayer services, consisting of Scripture readings and reflection.

Penance: Most people continue to associate Lent with "giving up" candy, cigarettes or some other pleasure. While this individual type of sacrifice is still encouraged, Vatican II empha-

sized forms of public penance that relates to dealings with other people.

"It's a time to step back and see how we're living," Father Sauers remarked. "The important thing is to discover a change that needs to be made and to act on it."

"I'm finding, for myself and other people, that what is more beneficial is fasting from negativity," said Weatherholt.

Father Sauers likewise encourages his student parishioners to be more conscious of other people during Lent.

"Maybe we need to take more time to be patient, be kind to others, and not get caught up in the whirlwind of activity," Father Sauers remarked.

Almsgiving: Performing acts of mercy — in the form of monetary, food or clothing donations — has taken on a new look over the last two decades with the influence of such projects as Operation Rice Bowl and the more lo-

calized Operation Breadbox. Both projects seek to educate Catholics about the needs of the poor in developing countries and to support development efforts there. Last year Operation Breadbox generated more than \$58,000 in donations from parishes in the Diocese of Rochester, with about \$44,000 going to overseas projects and the rest supporting local projects.

"Lent is the church on retreat," said Father Reif. "It gets right down to the nitty-gritty of focusing on what's important in Catholic life. It's the most graphically potent time frame in which Christians really come alive."

Part of the vitality in today's Lenten observances stems from the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, the process by which adults now join the Roman Catholic Church. This method — called for by Vatican II and subsequently made mandatory in all U.S. dioceses — harkens to a tradition of the early church and re-emphasizes the need for ongoing spiritual conversion.

Previously, adults wishing to convert to Catholicism received instruction and sacraments on an individual basis. Most of today's RCIA participants, on the other hand, receive the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and/or first Eucharist in groups during community celebration at the Easter Vigil Mass.

"Historically, Lent went hand-in-hand with Christian initiation," Father Reif noted. "Vatican II tried to bring the Church into greater awareness of our roots in this regard."

Thus, for the most part, the changes Vatican II brought to Lenten observance have succeeded in creating heightened spiritual awareness among Catholics, Father Reif maintained.

"I feel that the majority of conscientious Catholics reflect today what the fathers of Vatican II had envisioned for the church," he said. "For some people in our congregations, the lack of measurable 'dos' and 'don'ts' have resulted in a laxity of Lenten discipline; yet overall, the new emphasis has borne good fruit."

Irish musician performing at Mercy tomorrow night

ROCHESTER — Frank Patterson, an internationally acclaimed Irish tenor and recording artist, will perform at Our Lady of Mercy High School's auditorium, 1437 Blossom Road, on Friday, March 20, at 8 p.m.

Patterson, who had a feature role in the Irish movie *The Dead*, will sing a series of Irish ballads as well as selections from Broadway musicals. He will be joined by his wife, Eily O'Grady, a pianist and Irish-harpist; and their son, Eanan, a violinist.

Tomorrow's event will also include

a performance by 16 members of the Murphy School of Irish Dance.

The program is sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy of Rochester, who are planning to develop a housing project that will serve as a home for needy women and their children. The facility will be known as the Catherine McAuley Housing Project, named after the order's Irish founder.

Tickets for this performance are \$20, \$15 and \$10. They may be obtained by calling the Sisters of Mercy at 716/288-4956.

The Catholic Physicians Guild in Conjunction with Natural Family Planning Education Center and the Problem Pregnancy Help Center will hold a mini forum on...

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