

Priest: Synod must go beyond social work

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Catholics must recognize that the upcoming Diocesan General Synod of 1993 is not only about tackling social and church issues, but about the church becoming the body of Christ in the world.

That was the essence of the message conveyed by Father Richard N. Fragomeni, a priest of the Diocese of Albany, who conducted a Lenten renewal mission from March 23-26 at St. Philip Neri Parish, 1782 Clifford Ave.

Father Fragomeni — a nationally known renewal leader and liturgist currently based at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago — used humor, folk parables and question/answer sessions to prepare his listeners for reflecting on the themes that will be explored during the synod.



From left, Sister Mary Bernarde, RSM, Clara Antonucci and George Perrotta listen intently during a discussion of sin.

"What the synod isn't about is philosophy," Father Fragomeni said during the renewal's final session on Thursday night, March 26. "It's about being the living body of Christ to our world. What we're about is a divine mission."

To that end, Father Fragomeni wanted parishioners to contemplate "the underlying theology that makes the goals and objectives (of the synod) more than social-work acts."

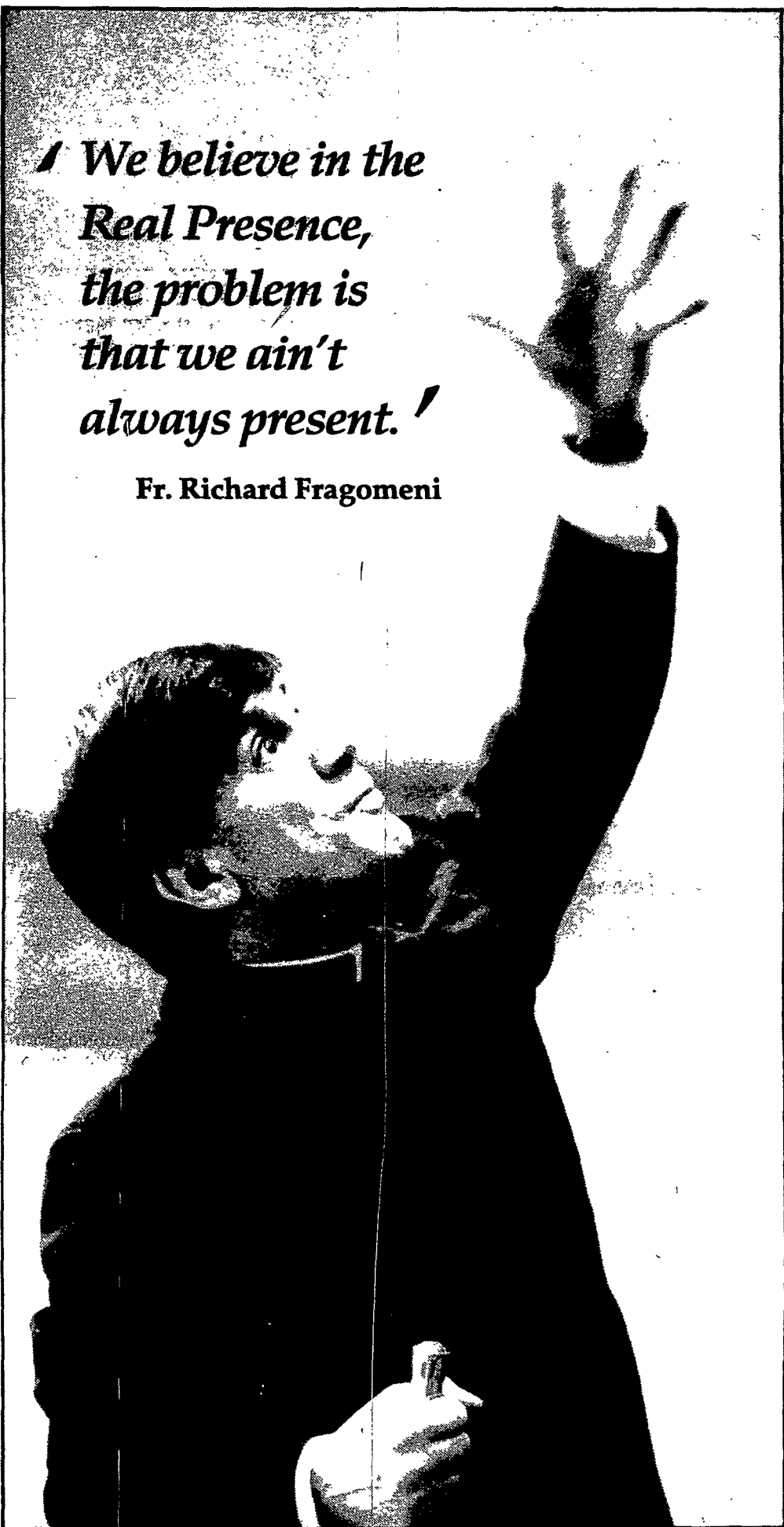
Father Fragomeni dwelt on the meaning of the sacraments to illustrate his contention that Catholics should explore the relationship between their social activity and their spiritual life.

"The sacraments are the life of Jesus as it continues among us," the priest asserted. "Sacraments are communications of Jesus' life."

Sacraments also point to the kind of world the Lord wants to create, Father Fragomeni continued. In particular, the Eucharistic liturgy indicates how Catholics should envision the relationship between their individual lives and the community God wants to

! We believe in the Real Presence, the problem is that we ain't always present. !

Fr. Richard Fragomeni



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor

Father Richard N. Fragomeni gestures dramatically during the Lenten renewal mission's last day at St. Philip Neri Parish in Rochester March 26.

bring forth.

Drawing on participants' comments during the renewal session, for example, Father Fragomeni said it was no accident that Jesus chose bread for the eucharistic food. Bread — which he reminded listeners was a slang synonym for money — symbolizes the labor in which Christians are engaged. Hence, it also symbolizes the means by which power is channeled in the working world, he said.

"What we do is bring our economy to the table," he remarked.

Bread also symbolizes the way in which people get along, since "the bread made from human hands" implicitly points to the relationships needed for the making of bread, Father Fragomeni continued.

Consecration of the bread is an act in which church members surrender their labor to the Lord who then transforms



Donna Pegelli (center) responds to one of the jokes by the Chicago priest, whose presentation was full of humor and solemnity.

it into Himself, the priest explained.

"We eat our world transformed into God's world," he said.

Father Fragomeni continually stressed the need for Catholics to be attentive to such sacraments as the Eucharist. Otherwise reception of the sacraments can become lifeless routines, he concluded.

In response to one questioner who complained that she couldn't concentrate on all of his insights while receiving Communion, Father Fragomeni said Catholics need to spend time praying and thinking about the Eucharist outside of Mass in order to better appreciate the liturgy's meaning.

"Cultivate your appreciation for bread and wine," he said. "Appreciate the stories of life. One of the reasons people find liturgy boring is because they find their whole life is boring ... We cultivate the awe and mystery of the universe by cultivating the depth and mystery of our lives."

"We believe in the Real Presence," he added. "The problem is that we ain't always present."



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