



# CATHOLIC COURIER

DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER

Vol. 104 No. 26

Thursday April 1, 1993

75¢

20 pages

## Bishops' conference works to meet needs of the times

Story by Rob Cullivan, Staff writer

**T**hey have translated the Mass from Latin to English.

They have allowed Catholics to receive the Eucharist in their hands.

They have authorized the ordination of married deacons, and established a Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults.

And currently they are examining when and why Catholics should receive the sacrament of confirmation.

At the same time, they have denounced legalized abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, the nuclear-arms race, and the nation's treatment of its impoverished and powerless members.

In the process, this group has infuriated and soothed conservatives, liberals and moderates, all of whom cherish and resent this organization's influence depending on how it wants to stand on various issues.

And for all their efforts, they charge a little more than 14 cents per U.S. Catholic — which adds up to about \$70,000 annually from the Rochester diocese alone.

"They" are the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, a group comprising 290 active members along with more than 80 retired bishops who are also members but who cannot vote in the conference.

On Saturday, March 27, Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk of Cincinnati spoke to the *Catholic Courier* about the conference, which he served as president from 1989-92. The prelate was in Corning for a fundraising dinner for All Saints Academy.

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The archbishop noted that the conference serves two purposes: to strengthen and support the church's internal world, and to critique and bear witness to church teachings in the world where the church exists.

"I believe we have to maintain a balance," Archbishop Pilarczyk said. "If all we do is look inward, then there's the danger we might become a sect. If all we do is concentrate on social justice issues, then we risk a loss of the faith that sparked the commitment to social justice in the first place."

Most of his colleagues have agreed with the archbishop on that score, although some have emphasized correcting the church's deficiencies, whereas others have stressed the church's responsibility to correct society's faults.

To understand why the conference takes the stands it does, it's important to examine the members themselves. The bishops form a unique and powerful "club," according to the 1992 book, *A Flock of Shepherds: The National Conference of Catholic Bishops*, by Father Thomas J. Reese, SJ.

"Like many exclusive clubs, it is mostly white (42 percent of Irish ancestry, 20 percent German, 8 percent English, and 14 percent other European)," Father Reese wrote.

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