

U.S. bishops set agenda through conference

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"In 1991, two Native Americans, 12 blacks, 20 Hispanics, and no Asians were in the club, which brings the minority membership to about 11 percent," he continued.

Furthermore, Father Reese wrote, the bishops "preside over numerous multi-million dollar corporations whose combined finances would dwarf most major corporations. They employ thousands of people and manage large properties."

The author points out that most of the bishops were born into working-class families with pro-union, Democratic Party backgrounds, although many younger bishops have come from Republican families. Nonetheless, when it comes to politics and social policy, the NCCB and the United States Catholic Conference tend to lean toward a liberal definition of government and favor the causes of the poor and downtrodden over that of the rich and powerful.

About half of the bishops — especially those who tend to be more liberal in handling Catholics who dissent from the church for one reason or another — were appointed by Pope Paul VI. The other half received their appointments from Pope John Paul II, who is known to favor bishops more willing to toe the Vatican line on teaching faith and morals.

Despite the differences between the bishops appointed by the two pontiffs, neither group would be considered unorthodox, Father Reese writes.

"Its membership has been expertly vetted before appointment," he wrote. "Having an unorthodox bishop is even less likely than having a Communist in the CIA."

Father Reese's book examines the NCCB's origins and its public policy arm, the United States Catholic Conference, in detail since the groups' creation in 1966-67. Both institutions were fruits of the Second Vatican Council, whose document on bishops explicitly called for the establishment of bishops' conferences in every nation:

"(T)his sacred synod judges that it would be in the highest degree helpful if in all parts of the world the bishops of each country or region would meet regularly, so that by sharing their wisdom and experience and exchanging views they may jointly formulate a program for the common good of the church."

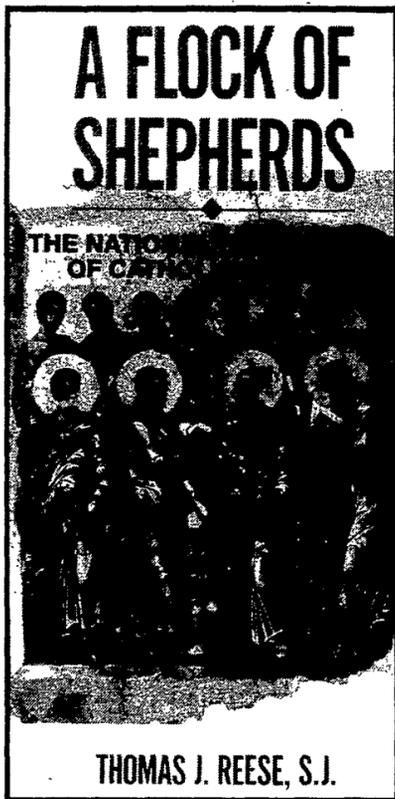
To that end, the U.S. bishops meet biannually in spring and November. Prior to Vatican II, U.S. church leaders had met on numerous occasions beginning in the late-18th century, but it was the growth of the federal government that prompted the formation of the National Catholic Welfare Council — a reorganized version of a council formed during World War I.

The NCWC was eventually renamed the National Catholic Welfare Conference and during the Great Depression — much like the USCC today — issued several statements on such social justice issues as the organized labor struggle, minimum-wage proposals and worker housing plans.

Throughout the 1940s and '50s, the NCWC also issued various statements regarding corruption in politics, public aid to Catholic education and the racial desegregation of U.S. society.

The NCCB continues that legacy today through the USCC, which is a well-respected social analysis, communications and welfare organization based in Washington, D.C., Archbishop Pilarczyk said.

"We're not looked upon as crazies," he said. "We're looked upon as serious."



THOMAS J. REESE, S.J.

Indeed, Father Reese noted that the testimony by NCCB/USCC staff has even swayed Congressional votes when it comes to certain crucial issues.

In 1976, for example, the Panamanian Catholic hierarchy lobbied their reluctant U.S. brethren to support the Panama Canal Treaty, he writes. The NCCB voted 170-61 to support the treaty — a tally that was music to former President Jimmy Carter's ears.

"The Carter Administration identified the conference as its most important supporter in the Senate ratification of the Panama Canal Treaty," Father Reese explained.

The conference employs numerous standing and ad hoc committees comprising its members to draw up documents, issue statements and formulate plans embodying the conference's goals, according to William Ryan, deputy director of the conference's Office for Media Affairs.

The committees oversee the conference's work on everything from foreign and domestic missionary work, natural disaster relief, and ecumenical efforts to black Catholic concerns, doctrinal questions and lay issues, he noted in an interview with the *Courier*.

Each committee's workload waxes and wanes depending on the church's needs at the moments, Ryan commented.

The Committee on Priestly Formation, for example, completed an updating of the U.S. church's seminary program in November, as required every 10 years, he said. Meanwhile, the Doctrine Committee just examined why Catholics do not go to confession frequently, he added.

Rochester's Bishop Matthew H. Clark currently serves on the Committee for Women in Society and in the Church, of which he was chairman until last fall. The bishop also serves on the Committee on Bishops Life and Ministry.

When asked how each committee set its agenda, Bishop Clark said that the committees generally survey conference members to find out what kind of questions they would like to see a committee explore. Bishops are free to serve as many committees as they wish, he said, or to join none at all.

Archbishop Pilarczyk pointed out that the work of Bishop Clark's Committee for Women in Society and in the Church drew the attention of the Vatican, which has often appeared suspicious of the NCCB's work.

"Various issues set off the alarms," Archbishop Pilarczyk said, noting that the Vatican often calls on conference members to explain their ongoing work — especially when it deals with potentially controversial issues.

At the root of much of the Vatican's scrutiny are disagreements over how much a role bishops' conferences should have in the church's life, observers agreed.

Indeed, particularly in the 1980s, such Vatican figures as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, cautioned that the conference had no canonical authority to teach when the NCCB was drafting a pastoral on peace.

Similarly, the Vatican has kept an eye on the U.S. bishops' work regarding a potential women's pastoral, the archbishop noted, adding that the church is concerned about the U.S. bishops' impact on the church in other nations.

Nonetheless, both Bishop Clark and Archbishop Pilarczyk saw a benefit in Vatican scrutiny of the NCCB/USCC work. The archbishop recalled one reporter asking him and a Vatican official what their major gripes would be with each other's institutions.

"I said, 'We don't think the Vatican understands how complicated things are in the United States,'" the archbishop said. "(The Vatican official) then said that the U.S. bishops don't understand how complicated things are in the rest of the world," he added with a smile.

@bituary

Sister Albertine Devereaux, SSJ

ROCHESTER — Sister Albertine Devereaux, SSJ, who taught in diocesan elementary schools for 41 years, died Tuesday, March 2, 1993, at the St. Joseph's Convent Infirmary at the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse.

Sister Albertine was a native of Winsted, Conn. She later moved to Rochester and became a parishioner at Holy Rosary Church. She graduated from Nazareth Normal School and Nazareth College, and entered the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1927.

Among the schools Sister Albertine taught at were St. Theodore, St. Stanislaus, and St. Monica's in Rochester; St. Francis DeSales in Geneva; St. Patrick's

in Mount Morris; and St. John the Evangelist in Spencerport.

In 1976, Sister Albertine began a nine-year stint as parish receptionist at Our Lady Queen of Peace Church in Selma, Ala. She moved to St. Joseph's Convent Infirmary in 1985.

A funeral Mass was held on March 4, 1993, in the chapel of the SSJ motherhouse. The celebrant was Monsignor William Shannon, with Fathers Robert Donovan and Donald Curtiss assisting.

Sister Albertine is survived by a sister, Beverly Heath of Unionville, Conn.; sister-in-law, Eleanor Heath of West Hartford, Conn.; several cousins and her fellow Sisters of St. Joseph.

Addendum

PITTSFORD — Following publication of our page-one story in the March 18, 1993, *Catholic Courier*, ("Helping the unemployed: Church considering means to assist the jobless"), members of Pittsford's Church of the Transfiguration notified Senior Staff Writer Lee Strong that their parish offers a program for unemployed people.

The Employment Network was created three years ago to help unemployed individuals. The program includes a series of six meetings on Thursday evenings, and a resource center open Monday mornings, from 9:30 a.m. to noon.

The Thursday sessions, which run from 7:30-9:30 p.m., include guest speakers, information about such topics as interview skills, self-esteem, and networking; and opportunities for private and career counseling.

Topics covered at the sessions vary to meet participants' needs, according to Mary Presutti, one of the program's directors. Although the participation level fluctuates, each six-week series draws about 25 participants, she said.

The resource center offers a variety of books related to job skills and how to search for employment. Job listings are available, as is a photocopier. Help is also available to type resumes and cover letters.

For information about the Employment Network, call 716/248-2427.

Corrections

The article titled "Time stands still for senior ballroom dancers," which appeared on page 9 in the March 18, 1993, issue of the *Catholic Courier*, included several errors.

John Kerr serves as the Stardust Senior Citizen Dance Group adviser. The group, which meets on Monday afternoons at Edgerton Community Center, charges \$1.50. The Big Band events at Edgerton on Tuesday evenings operate under a free-will offering system. A separate group meets on Friday afternoons at the Danforth Community Center.

Last week's Newcomers' Guide included two errors. A brief on page 7A of the March 25 supplement gave the wrong location for Sister Doris Klein's speech on Saturday, April 3 ("Religious artist to lead program at Mercy Prayer Center"). The program, which is sponsored by the Mercy Prayer Center, will take place in the auditorium of Our Lady of Mercy High School, 1437 Blossom Road, Rochester.

In addition, a brief on page 4A ("Talks to focus on Thomas Merton and American Culture") gave the wrong address for St. Bernard's Institute. The institute is located at 1100 S. Goodman St. We regret the errors.

Villa seeks volunteers

GREECE — St. Joseph's Villa, 3300 Dewey Ave., is seeking males and couples to provide moral support for young men served by the agency.

Volunteers must be 21 years of age or older. Orientation and supervision will be provided.

Those interested in helping these teens should call Kathleen Pexton, volunteer director, at 716/865-1550, ext. 206.