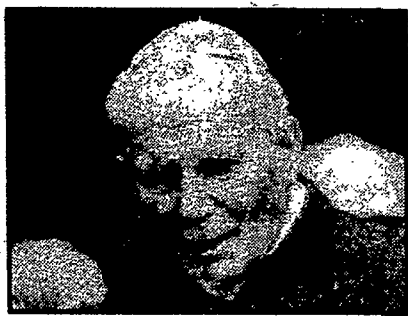


Singles deserve welcoming arms



Pope: Church more aware of laity's role

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — The Catholic Church is becoming more aware of the essential role of the laity in the work of the church and in bringing the Gospel to the world, Pope John Paul II said.

"A pastor of souls cannot pretend to be able to do everything in the community entrusted to him," the pope said March 2 during his weekly general audience.

Greater attention to the role of the laity, "once left a bit in the shadows," comes from the church's understanding of itself as a body which needs the different contributions and gifts of everyone to develop fully, he said.

"A lay person cannot be a substitute for a pastor in ministries requiring the powers given in the sacrament of Holy Orders," he said. But "the pastor cannot be a substitute for lay men and women in fields where they have more competence than he does."

In the modern world there are many situations which require the presence of committed lay men and women to carry out the church's work, he said.

As examples he cited growing urban areas where the number of priests is insufficient; workplaces, schools or vacation spots that are not part of established parishes; and segments of society and professional disciplines with infrequent contact with clergy but still requiring the ethical or moral input of the church.

All the areas require a new commitment on the part of lay men and women, Pope John Paul said. Because of a growing appreciation of democracy many are ready to become involved, and because of increased educational opportunities many are qualified to do so.

Lay involvement in the church's work "is not limited to being a supplement in situations of emergency and chronic necessity," he said.

"There are areas of church life in which, alongside the tasks proper to the hierarchy, the active participation of the laity is desired," he said. "The first among these is in the liturgical assembly."

While the celebration of the Eucharist requires the ministry of a priest, the Mass is "a community action" requiring the participation of the entire assembly, he said.

He thanked the many lay people — men and women, young and old — who are involved in their parish liturgies by serving at the altar, reading, singing and carrying out other tasks.

Pope John Paul also thanked those involved in proclaiming the Gospel through religious education, Catholic schools and church publications and other media.

HARRISBURG, Pa. (CNS) — Often misjudged by others and left to cope alone with life's complexities, singles should be helped more by their churches in finding fulfillment, said a Pennsylvania ecumenical group.

"Singles exist within all of our congregations," said the Pennsylvania Conference on Interchurch Cooperation. "Their needs are sometimes unique and sometimes shared by those who are not single. Yet, as a specific segment of our churches, singles have often been neglected or their presence unintentionally devalued."

The statement challenged churches to do a better job of ministering to singles and urged unmarried people to take the initiative in their congregations.

The Conference on Interchurch Cooperation is an ecumenical organization of the Pennsylvania Council of Churches and the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference, public policy arm of the state's Catholic bishops. The Harrisburg-based Catholic conference released a copy of the statement.

"In many of our churches the traditional ministerial emphasis has all too often been toward those who are married or towards families. Often those who are single, those who worship alone, feel isolated and lonely even within their own faith communities. This need not be," the statement said.

Noting that more than one-third of the U.S. population is unmarried, the statement cited New Testament refer-



ences to the value of single people in the life of the church and pointed out some of the problems they face.

"Singles are often misjudged by others," it said. "They are frequently thought of as carefree or irresponsible and selfish (the 'swinging singles'). Some may consider singles to be more financially stable than those who must support a spouse or family. At times even their sexual orientation may be questioned."

"All of these generalizations involve misconceptions that perpetuate the myths surrounding the single life."

The religious group said churches must be attentive to singles in their congregations so they feel at home; should incorporate them into ministry, education, parish programs and worship; and should pray for them and even choose language that reflects their presence in the community. For instance, the group suggested churches avoid terms like "family picnic" when the whole congregation is invited.

The statement also challenged singles to take advantage of their time alone to deepen their own prayer life and to participate in communal faith experiences.

"Make your needs known. Take an active role in church life," it said.

"Singles must strive to incorporate themselves into the larger community of faith to which they belong. Gifts, joys, sorrows and challenges are meant to be shared," the statement concluded. "Together we form a single people, the one Body of Christ. Each member is different and performs a diverse function of that Body. Without one member or another, the entire body suffers and its work is diminished."

Mass attendance seen as key to identity

By Maura Rossi
Catholic News Service

MORRISTOWN, N.J. — Now more than ever, Catholics need to go to church in order to preserve their Catholic identity, said Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland of Milwaukee.

Because the "very strong" ethnic, family and community supports for Catholics are no longer in place in the U.S., going to church has become essential as a way of participating and feeling a sense of belonging, the archbishop said in an interview with *The Beacon*, diocesan newspaper of Paterson, N.J.

Archbishop Weakland was in northern New Jersey last fall for a presentation at St. Mary's Abbey in Morristown on how Catholics should prepare for the 21st century.

During his address he recalled the pastoral letter on Catholic identity that he wrote during his archdiocese's 150th anniversary. In the letter, he said, he ended up describing the Catholicism of various ethnic groups who came to this country over the past century rather than describing Catholicism today.

Today, the Catholic identity is "in crisis," said Archbishop Weakland, because of a lack of the essential "sacramental concept" that God acts through signs and symbols.

"Catholics don't see the sacraments as such as imparting grace. That's the real problem with penance now," he added.

By contrast, he said, other Christians see the sacraments as important elements of being Catholic. For example, he said a Russian Orthodox bishop in Moscow recently asked him about fundamentalism, and in particular, the Rev. Billy Graham.

"I did the best I could to explain the evangelicals to him and then he asked me, 'Does Billy Graham use incense?'"

"When I told him no, he said, 'Billy Graham will never do well in Russia,'" thus illustrating how the Orthodox view the sacraments, the archbishop said.

Archbishop Weakland stressed the need for support systems for Catholic professionals and manual laborers to replace those that were provided by the ethnic communities of the past.

He also said that Catholic schools could do their part outside of religion classes through "Catholic socialization — introducing Catholics to being Catholic."

Part of learning Catholicism would involve feeling the "guilt" commonly ascribed to Catholics, he said. He described feeling guilty as very much a Catholic tradition because it connotes a "passion for the poor, the underprivileged." Quoting Pope Paul VI, the archbishop said, "How can anyone go to bed

at night and not feel guilty" about having so much in a world of so much need.

Another area he said would enhance Catholic identity would be the stimulation of Catholic culture — the best in art, literature, music — because "handing on a faith is not just handing on formula," he stressed.

As for music in the post-Vatican II church, he said it is a "little better" than it had been in the beginning of the liturgical changes, although he feels much of the new church music will not last.

Reminded that he has predicted continuing changes for the liturgy because "we are a pilgrim people," he said the church in general is "only at the tip of the iceberg as to change."

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