

Cohabitation

Continued from page 1

"Perhaps we need to add a portion into the guidelines to remind people to deal with this issue," Carroll remarked.

Because the diocese has not issued any official directives on cohabitation, Carroll noted, "It really is a pastoral issue."

On the other hand, Father Eugene R. Weis pointed out that several dioceses in the United States uniformly refuse to extend the sacrament of marriage to couples who are already living together.

Yet Father Weis, who serves as pastor of St. Patrick's Church in Owego, believes that the absence of such a strict policy in this diocese may be better in the long run.

"I look at it as that the barn door is already open," Father Weis said, explaining that "people don't come up to us first and ask if it's OK (to live together)."

"I'm not condoning their actions, but I have to lead them toward marriage. We're not dealing with an ideal situation, but that's practical reality."

"Today it seems to be the minority of engaged couples who believe that sexual intercourse and cohabitation are wrong or even inappropriate prior to

marriage," author Mitch Finley noted in the July 1993 issue of *America* magazine. "Still such couples approach a priest or deacon and ask to be married in the church.

"What are we to do?" Finley asked. "Turn them away? Tell them to repent of their evil ways first, then come back? Are we so free of sin ourselves that we should demand such righteousness? After all, by the time they get to us they have decided to marry, which will soon put cohabitation behind them anyway."

Father John J. Philipps, pastor of St. Bridget/St. Joseph Church in East Bloomfield, noted that he regularly deals with similar scenarios.

"I think it's always *post factum* that 'We're going to (cohabit),' " Father Philipps said. "And very often these are very good, church-going people."

Therefore, Father Philipps said he does not see much sense in turning his back on cohabiting couples when they wish to be married in a Catholic church.

"I don't ignore the fact when they both give the same address," said Father Philipps. "But we have to be more positive about it. When they come to the front door of a rectory, it's no easy thing to do for young couples."

To demand that the couple establish separate residences before they marry,

he maintained, "would be pastorally unwise. That would just cause more bitterness."

Father Philipps admitted that other diocesan pastors might not choose to be as lenient as he is on this matter. Some, he said, might completely refuse to marry the couple, or not begin marriage preparation until they separate, or "demand that the wedding be very simple."

The latter option is most frequently exercised by Father Paul R. Schnacky, pastor of St. Joseph's Church in Wayland.

"What I have done is say I will not celebrate Mass for them. It's my way of making a statement, which is my responsibility," Father Schnacky commented.

He explained that while he still extends the offer of a wedding ceremony without Mass to these couples, he also needs to remind the parish community that living together goes against Catholic Church teachings.

"If I treat it just like they were a regular couple, my concern is that the message we're giving to all the other people, and the children, is that (the cohabiting couple is) doing nothing wrong," said Father Schnacky.

Because different pastors have different feelings on the matter, Father Philipps suggested that some sort of diocesan policy would be helpful.

"It's kind of unfortunate that we don't have one. Now, if you don't get what you want at one church, you can kind of go shopping," he said.

Such has occasionally been the case with Father Schnacky. The Wayland pastor acknowledged that while most of the cohabiting pairs who approach him accept having their wedding performed without a Mass, "some have gone other places and gotten their Mass," he said.

Meanwhile, Mike and Diane would have a hard time understanding why any priest might treat them any differently because of their living arrangements. They argue that many unmarried couples who *officially* live apart conduct lifestyles similar to their own.

"It's funny — I have friends at work who have been dating for years and maintain separate residences, and maybe twice a month they actually reside separately," Mike said.

Father Philipps agreed with Mike's point in a homily he issued last fall, when he observed: "One thing you can say for couples cohabiting — with or without the intention to marry — is that they are honest. What their elders may have done or wanted to do in the back

seat of a Chevy on a dark, secluded lane, unmarried couples today do in a rented townhouse and list themselves in the phone book."

In spite of the openness of those who opt for cohabitation, Carroll warned, married couples who have lived together first are much more likely to divorce.

"First off, the commitment you make in living together is not the same as the sacrament of marriage," she pointed out. "There's a sense that when living together, you can end things at any time. There's a door open that when things get too stressful, you can opt out. But celebrating the sacrament of marriage calls for conversion. Everything in your life changes; none of your relationships are ever the same again."

Father Philipps contrasts the obligation levels of cohabitation and marriage by stating that "marriage is a commitment so important that it demands a public statement, whether it's in a religious or civil realm."

Although Mike and Diane acknowledged that their parents and churches — she's a Catholic, Mike is a Methodist — would have encouraged them to marry before living together, they ultimately feel their decision is between themselves and God.

"It's a real complicated issue when you look at all the aspects of the relationship — physical, spiritual," said Mike. "But I truly believe that in God's eyes, the positives that came out far outweigh the negatives. It would be one thing if we weren't truly committed."

"I made my commitment to Mike, period," Diane remarked. "In my eyes it was made in front of everyone, including God."

Diane said she was aware of the increased likelihood of separation among cohabiting couples who marry, but felt that she and Mike "entered into it with a certain level of commitment. Some people will enter into something like this a lot more lightly."

Still, Mike and Diane both admit that their living together has been, in some respects, a way of simulating marriage without making the complete commitment.

"With the ridiculous levels of marriage failures in today's society, I wanted to do everything I could to make sure that didn't happen with us," Mike said.

"Probably the only thing that kept us from being married so long is that we only wanted to be married once," Diane added. "Probably in the back of my mind there was a fear, and maybe that I had a slight (way) out."

Father Philipps noted that marriage itself must be presented in a more positive light if such concerns actually are leading people to cohabit.

"If there is blame, let it be shared by all, who, by our silence, often permit matrimony and true married life to be trivialized and even mocked," he stated. "If there is guilt, let it be borne also by those who, having married, do not take every measure and opportunity to nourish the love and support they pledged to each other in their marriage vows."

Catholic Child Sponsorship For Just \$10 a Month



Little Conchita lives in a small village in the mountains of Guatemala. Her house is made of cornstalks, with a tin roof and dirt floor. Her father struggles to support the family as a day laborer. Your concern can make the difference in the lives of children like Conchita.

Your opportunity to help one very poor child is much too important to miss. And **Christian Foundation for Children and Aging is the only Catholic child sponsorship program** working in the 22 desperately poor countries we serve.

For as little as \$10 monthly, you can help a poor child at a Catholic mission site receive nourishing food, medical care, the chance to go to school and hope for a brighter future. **You can change a life.**

Through CFCA you can sponsor a child with the amount you can afford. Ordinarily it takes \$20 per month to provide one of our children with the life-changing benefits of sponsorship. But if this is not possible for you, please do what you can. CFCA will see to it from other donations and the tireless efforts of our missionaries that **your special child receives the same benefits as other sponsored children.**

And you can be assured your donations are being magnified and are having their greatest impact because our programs are directed by dedicated Catholic missionaries with a long standing commitment to the people they serve.

You will receive a picture of your child, information about your child's family and country, letters from your child and the CFCA quarterly newsletter.

Please take this opportunity to make a difference in the life of one poor child.

Become a sponsor today!

Yes, I'll help one child:

Boy Girl Teenager

Any in most need

My monthly pledge is: \$10 \$15 \$20 \$25 \$50 \$100

My support will be: monthly quarterly semi-annually annually

Enclosed is my first sponsorship contribution of \$ _____.

I cannot sponsor now but I enclose my gift of \$ _____.

Please send me more information.

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Christian Foundation for Children and Aging (CFCA)
c/o CATHOLIC COURIER/1150 Buffalo Road/Rochester, New York 14624
Make checks payable to: Christian Foundation for Children and Aging (CFCA)

Financial Report available upon request / Donations U.S. tax deductible.

Member: U.S. Catholic Mission Association - Nat'l Catholic Development Conference - Catholic Press Association
Catholic Network of Volunteer Service - Nat'l Catholic Stewardship Council - Nat'l Catholic Council for Hispanic Ministry

2/9/95

If you prefer, simply call
**Ray Frey at the
Catholic Courier
(716) 328-4340**

THE TAX MAN COMETH!!!

And many of our 51,000 subscribers may be looking for the expert services offered by tax preparers and accountants.

Advertise your service in our special classified tax preparation section, running January 12th-April 6th, 1995.

Special pricing available.

Call Michela or Kathy in the classified advertising department for information:

Catholic Courier
(716) 328-4340

BARTOLOMEO FUNERAL HOME, INC.



Peter W. Giullari, Jr. Philip P. Perotto Michael P. Perotto

Personalized service in the community since 1922.

1425 Lexington Avenue, Rochester, NY 14606
conveniently located near 390

(716) 254-5400