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Catholic Courier

0 74470 73013 2 03
DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER, NEW YORK ■ VOL. 108 NO.15 ■ THURSDAY, January 23, 1997 ■ 75c ■ 12 PAGES

Call to Action



Reform group stirs sea of controversy

According to detractors, it is a group intent on destroying the Catholic Church.

But it is also a group that is supported by Rochester Bishop Matthew H. Clark, and whose membership includes a number of priests from the Rochester diocese. Members claim to be working for the betterment of their faith.

Middle ground often disappears when the spotlight is on Call to Action, a Chicago-based national organization dedicated to what members call "church reform."

Many of Call to Action's viewpoints are controversial because they not only oppose directives of Pope John Paul II, but also question the infallibility of papal decrees. Some changes sought by Call to Action are:

- Inclusion of laity and clergy in the formulation of church doctrine and discipline, particularly on such issues as artificial contraception and homosexuality.
- Opening of the priesthood to married men and to women.
- Selection of diocesan bishops based on input from local laity and clergy.

The group garnered considerable national media exposure last March when Bishop Fabian

Bruskewitz of Lincoln, Neb., threatened to excommunicate any Call to Action member in his diocese. Also last year, Call to Action chapters were denied access to church facilities in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Ind., and the Archdiocese of Hartford, Conn.

However, the threat of excommunication is not present in the Rochester area. Approximately 40 people from this diocese - including several priests - attended the annual Call to Action national conference held Nov. 15-17 in Detroit.

Bishop Clark said he was pleased that many people from this diocese journeyed to Detroit for the conference.

"I have been in touch with several of the Call to Action people, for whom I have great respect," Bishop Clark said.

Bishop Clark added that he himself is "open to the possibility" of attending the 1997 Call to Action conference, to be held in Detroit again this November.

According to the organization's president, Linda Pieczynski, the gathering attracted 5,000 people to Detroit's Cobo Center - the same site of the first Call to Action conference two decades ago.

Among the speakers was Father Charles Curran, a Rochester diocesan priest who was banned from teaching as a Catholic theologian because of his views on such issues as birth control, abortion and homosexuality.

Another diocesan connection in Detroit was Sister Nancy DeRycke, RSM, who staffed a booth for women's ordination. She is currently on sabbatical after having served as temporary pastoral administrator at St. Helen's Church in Gates last year.

But even as the members of Call to Action gathered in Detroit, a counter-conference dubbed Call to Holiness was held on the same dates in Sterling Heights, a suburb of Detroit. Organizer Gino Vitale said the conference was attended by 2,000 people, mostly from the Detroit area. He said he is already planning another Call to Holiness gathering to coincide with the next Call to Action convention.

With a group of speakers led by Mother Angelica of Eternal Word Television Network, the Call to Holiness gathering stressed the preservation of traditional church teachings.

"There seemed to be a hunger for the truth,"

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