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## Sheen

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tabs on the Archdiocese of New York, and was concerned about whether he was keeping pace with — and surpassing — efforts to implement the council there. When it came to allowing the priests of the diocese to vote on leadership positions, Rochester "beat" New York.

"He felt that was a coup," Bishop Hickey said with a chuckle. "I consulted my priests to decide who was the vicar."

On Jan. 27, 1967, Bishop Sheen asked the priests of the diocese to vote again, this time on representatives for the new Priests' Senate, a body cited in council documents.

"We were shocked when he had the priests vote for their own representatives," acknowledged Father James Marvin, who was among the priests elected.

### Personal approach

But even before that body first met, he changed its name to the Priests' Council.

"He didn't like Priests' Senate," Bishop Hickey recalled. "That (name) was too legalistic. He wanted an advisory body, so he named it the Priests' Council."

In the same way, he officially changed the name of the diocesan administrative offices from chancery to Pastoral Office on May 22, 1967.

"He said the term 'chancery' was too juridic," Father Shamon noted. "It lacked personal warmth."

Part of the idea behind the name change was to signal diocesan priests that Bishop Sheen wanted to take a personal approach with them, Bishop Hickey observed.

"It is interesting, other dioceses have done that since," Bishop Hickey said. "I'm sure that if he was not the first, he was one of the earliest ones."

Beyond the name changes, both the Pastoral Office and the Priests' Council symbolized new roles for priests in the diocese.

The Priests' Council began to look at issues affecting priests — including salaries and personnel policies.

According to Father Michael Hogan, who served as Bishop Sheen's secretary, the

archbishop had not envisioned the council being that active.

"He saw it as more a spiritual thing," Father Hogan recalled.

Nevertheless, he ultimately allowed the council to delve into those areas.

"He did give us responsibility to review the diocesan financial pictures," Father Marvin acknowledged. "That was the first time we were allowed to see the diocese's finances. We talked about sabbaticals. Nobody ever talked about that before. We didn't think we had a right to."

### Seeks clerical, lay input

The effect of this freedom was that priests felt they had greater ownership of the diocese, Father Marvin noted.

"It was a morale booster, because the priests thought, 'He's going to listen to us,'" Father Marvin said. "The priests really did take it seriously that diocesan officials wanted our input. It made the church more democratic."

Bishop Sheen sought input in less formal ways as well, Father Hogan noted. He held daily meetings with the Pastoral Office staff to hear their ideas and concerns. And he regularly invited in priests for meals.

That desire for input extended beyond the priests, Father Shamon observed.

"The bishop always seemed to want input from everybody, the priests and the people," Father Shamon said. "Mark my word, vicar, the laity will save the church in the U.S." He said that many times.

One of Bishop Sheen's early decisions was to place oversight of diocesan finances in lay hands. Thus he hired John Ritzenhaller as diocesan comptroller. He also named laymen as counselors and appointed them to ad hoc advisory boards formed to deal with various issues as they arose. He even established a lay board to oversee St. Bernard's Seminary, though that body dissolved amid disagreements over its recommendations.

These efforts helped to pave the way for greater lay involvement in diocesan operations under Bishop Hogan and his successor, Bishop Matthew H. Clark, through such bodies as the Diocesan Pastoral Council and the Stewardship Council.

## New ministries

Bishop Sheen also created vicariates to oversee some functions of the pastoral office, and launched new ministries. Thus religious education and Catholic schools were placed under the supervision of Father Shamon as the vicar for education.

The other three vicars were the vicar for urban ministry, the vicar for pastoral planning, episcopal vicar for the Southern Tier and a vicar for the eastern counties of the diocese. He also created the Secular Mission to work with the rural poor, the Spanish Apostolate and the Bishop Sheen Housing Foundation to help low-income people find decent housing.

Bishop Moynihan pointed out that many of these activities arose out of a concern for the poor — a concern enunciated in the conciliar documents.

"He was very much a social activist, very much a believer in the social gospel of the church," Bishop Moynihan noted.

But even though Bishop Sheen launched these various programs, he generally gave them free hands, Father Hogan observed.

"He wasn't a person to give blueprints," Father Hogan said. "Rather, he wanted to give general ideas and let people develop on their own."

Father Hogan said that with the housing foundation, for example, "He wanted them to come up with the ideas. He just wanted them to come back with progress reports."

"That was a freedom that both priests and lay people had a hard time with," he added.

### A Rochester first

Bishop Sheen can also take credit for being the first bishop to carry out one of the council's suggestions: He ordained the first permanent deacon in the United States.

Pope Paul VI had issued guidelines in June 1967 and the U.S. bishops had approved the guidelines in April 1968.

Hundreds of men had begun to study for the diaconate, but on June 1, 1969, at St. Augustine's Church in Rochester, Bishop Sheen ordained Deacon Michael Cole.

Deacon Cole was a former Anglican priest who had converted to Catholicism in

1968. Bishop Sheen had invited him — along with his wife and children — to the diocese, where the future deacon became the director of the diocesan Family Life Bureau. Because of his theological training, he was allowed to forego the process through which the other deacon candidates were going.

"He was triumphant," Bishop Hickey recalled of Bishop Sheen's reaction. "He ordained the first permanent deacon in the United States."

Indeed, another permanent deacon would not be ordained in the United States until the following May — and in the Diocese of Rochester until 1982.

### Resistance, resignation

The ordination of Deacon Cole was one of the last innovative actions Bishop Sheen took in the diocese. He had by that time asked Pope Paul VI to be allowed to resign as bishop of Rochester. His resignation became effective Oct. 15, 1969.

Part of the reason for his sudden resignation was that he was unprepared for some of the resistance to his ideas and actions, Father Hogan acknowledged.

"When he saw that many of his ideas weren't getting the support he wanted, I think maybe he thought maybe someone else could do it, kind of build on the foundation he started," Father Hogan said.

"I think he was so far ahead of everybody, they couldn't keep up," Father Shamon remarked.

At the same time, Father Shamon cautioned, Bishop Sheen did not see the council as an attempt to change things just for the sake of changing them.

"He said Vatican II didn't change anything," the priest said. "It was to update (the church) to the world. It was to best see how it could meet the needs of the world."

Indeed, in his 1980 autobiography, *Treasures in Clay*, Bishop Sheen said the council stressed the unity of creation and redemption, and contended that the seemingly new direction the church was taking "was nothing else than the old direction that Christian salvation has an earthly and historical dimension, namely, the relation of the love of God and love of neighbor."

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