



Greg Francia/Staff photographer

Title chase

Nazareth's Meredith Craig, right, battles for the ball against Marcus Whitman's Amy Klerst March 9 during the Section V Class B title game at the Rochester War Memorial. Playing in their first sectional basketball title game, Nazareth (19-4) trailed the Wildcats (22-1) 22-14 at the half, but pulled within 3 points with 25 seconds left before losing 48-41. That same night, Our Lady of Mercy High School lost the Class A girls title game to Fairport, 69-60. And March 6, Penn Yan downed Bishop Kearney High School 60-52 in the Class B boys title game.

Syracuse suspends column after alleged slurs

By Lee Strong
Associate editor

A decision by *The Catholic Sun*, newspaper of the Diocese of Syracuse, to suspend publication of Father Richard McBrien's column in January provoked protest in the diocese headed by Bishop James M. Moynihan, a former Rochester priest.

Father McBrien had in a column criticized the use of foreign priests by U.S. dioceses, using what Syracuse officials described as racial and ethnic slurs.

Father McBrien, a theologian at the University of Notre Dame, however, contends that the concerns about the alleged slurs were a "cover for a decision to drop my column." (See Page 7.)

The decision has led a number of *Sun* subscribers to complain to the paper and the diocese, and in some cases to cancel subscriptions. Father Donald Bourgeois, the *Sun's* editor-in-chief, did not know how many subscribers had cancelled, but he did note that a small number of people had recently subscribed because of it.

In addition, the decision precipitated a Feb. 4 letter signed by 54 of Syracuse's 238 diocesan priests questioning the leadership style of Bishop Moynihan, former chancellor of the Diocese of Rochester (1967-74) and pastor of St. Joseph's Parish, Penfield (1976-91). In that letter, the priests raised concerns about the bishop making decisions without consultation.

In a telephone interview with the *Courier* March 5, Bishop Moynihan reported that in response to the letter he had held an open meeting with the priests of the diocese Feb. 18 at Immaculate Conception Parish, Fayetteville. He estimated that between 110 and 115 priests attended.

"I was able to listen to their concerns and told them I would do my best to cooperate with them and work with them," Bishop Moynihan said of the meeting. He acknowledged, however, that he has no specific plans for how to do so.

Meanwhile, callers to the chancery and the newspaper seeking information about



the suspension are read a statement that says in part:

"We believe Father McBrien's column frequently displays an attitude that is not merely critical of, but distressingly hostile to

the Holy See. We find such an attitude unhelpful to the mission of the church, and unhealthy in a Catholic newspaper."

Father McBrien's column has 26 subscribers, including 14 diocesan newspapers and three other newspapers.

Bishop Moynihan and Father Bourgeois decided to suspend the column indefinitely after reading a column intended for publication in November 1997. The column in question was published in the Nov. 4 edition of the *Courier*.

In that column, Father McBrien commented on Chicago Archbishop Francis George's plans to invite foreign priests to serve tours of duty in Chicago.

He wrote that the importation of foreign priests — especially from Poland, Asia and Africa — is a "short-term solution" to the priest shortage in the United States. Observing that Pope John Paul II is Polish, he wondered whether the increasing importation of Polish priests is intended to "curry favor with the Holy Father." He went on to question how the foreign priests would be able to work with women and the laity.

The statement that drew Syracuse officials' attention, however, raised questions about some of the foreign priests' motivation for coming to this country.

"A free ticket to the United States," he wrote, "guaranteed room-and-board, and an income and standard of living that far exceed those of their own countries constitute a temptation difficult for many to resist."

"I found that potentially racist," Father Bourgeois said. He added that the comment particularly concerned him because Bishop Moynihan had recently recruited

priests from Africa to serve in Syracuse.

In fact, the diocese had at that time six priests from Africa serving two-year stints as part of a program the bishop had launched in 1996. In addition, two Polish priests were serving in the diocese.

Father Bourgeois took the column to the diocesan chancellor, Father Michael P. Minehan, and then to Bishop Moynihan.

Bishop Moynihan said that after consulting with Father Bourgeois, he decided to suspend the column.

"As far as I'm concerned, these are racial and ethnic slurs," Bishop Moynihan said of the comments in the November column. "They are the sorts of things that have no place in a diocesan newspaper."

Father McBrien, however, defends what he wrote.

"I think the questions I raised in my original column are correct," he said in a telephone interview with the *Courier*. "It's not the way to address the priest shortage."

He said that the concerns he voiced in the column were "based on a lot of anecdotal evidence from priests across the country that I have talked to."

"My great problem is not with the foreign priests," he noted. "It is with the bishops who are using them as a tactic to deal with the priest shortage."

Father McBrien explains his position in the column printed in this issue of the *Courier*. In it, he offers some comments about the Diocese of Syracuse and Bishop Moynihan (without naming him, though).

Bishop Moynihan declined to comment on specific statements in that latest column, saying that he preferred not to battle in the newspapers with the priest.

As for the African priests serving in Syracuse, he said there have been no major problems.

"They've been wonderful," he remarked. Father Bourgeois pointed out that the column had been suspended, not cancelled, and thus could return.

Bishop Moynihan noted, however, "There is the possibility, but not the probability."

TGA nears record total



The Diocese of Rochester has launched the follow-up phase of what may be the most successful Thanks Giving Appeal campaign ever.

As of March 5, the diocese had received \$4,951,000 in pledges to the TGA, the diocese's chief source of income for administrative operations. Based on previous years' returns, diocesan Director of Annual Giving Tom D'Agostino projected that the TGA would receive \$5.04 million in pledges by the end of the campaign June 30.

In contrast, the 1996/97 appeal as of March 5, 1997, had received \$4,871,000 in pledges en route to a total of \$4.94 million by the campaign's end in June.

As part of the current follow-up phase, D'Agostino said, diocesan volunteers will call 10,000 individuals who had given to previous TGAs but had not yet given to this year's campaign.

D'Agostino acknowledged that slow returns during the parish-run portion of the campaign last fall had led to concerns about whether the appeal would reach its \$5 million goal, but a spate of contributions in late December had pushed the total ahead of last year's.

The total number of donors thus far — as compared to 1996/97 — was down from 56,500 to 54,420, D'Agostino observed. But he noted, the follow-up telephone campaign is starting later this year as compared to last year, thus he expects the number of donors to increase in the next few weeks.

He also pointed out that the average gift had increased from \$86.21 to \$90.98.

One of the trends in this year's campaign is that more parishes are moving away from the traditional "in-hall" collections to direct mail. D'Agostino said that he plans to study the success of direct mail to determine if he should recommend it to more parishes.

D'Agostino said that even individuals who are not contacted during the follow-up phase should consider giving to help support diocesan operations.

"If you haven't made a donation to the TGA, we would certainly welcome it," he said. "We still need you."

—Lee Strong

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