

Auburn priest points out laws to deal with dissent

By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

An Auburn priest is hoping a "word to the wise" — that cited potential canonical consequences — will curb complaints he described as unwarranted and dividing in his parish.

Father Robert L. Beligotti's "Brushstrokes" column in the March 15 bulletin of St. Francis of Assisi Church, included a section on "Obedience and Respect Due Our Bishop." In that section, he informed parishioners that someone who incites animosity against the bishop can be punished by the canonical penalty of interdict. And a person under interdict is forbidden to receive the sacraments.

"I quoted the canon because I wanted them to know there was something in the canon about it," he told the *Catholic Courier*, "not that I would ever refuse Communion or something like that. I wanted them to realize the seriousness of what they were doing."

Perhaps 20 to 30 people in the parish, but no one group, among the average 500 attending weekend Masses, persistently scrutinize what Bishop Matthew H. Clark does — such as invite gay and lesbian Catholics to a special Mass — and what he doesn't do — such as cancel Father Richard McBrien's controversial column in the *Courier*, the pastor said.

"I don't know where this comes from. It seems everything you do is questioned — things that are taken for granted in another parish," Father Beligotti said, adding the criticism is also aimed at himself.

He's been criticized for having a procession around the inside of the church on Palm Sunday, having parishioners sing the

Psalm during Mass and moving the altar toward the people. He's often used his column to explain reasons for such changes.

Also being questioned is lay involvement in the diocese, in light of a November Vatican document that questions lay involvement in liturgy. The U.S. bishops are studying the document, and diocesan officials are awaiting the results of their study.

In the bulletin piece, Father Beligotti stated that he would continue to implement Second Vatican Council reforms.

He also wrote, "There is an ultra-conservative group in our parish who bad-mouth and criticize Bishop Clark every chance they can get. This is unfortunate and will not be tolerated here."

"Attacking their own bishop cannot build up the Body of Christ. May I remind them of Canon #753 which says that the bishops ... are 'the authentic instructors and teachers of the faith,' and 'the faithful are bound to adhere with a religious submission of mind, to this authentic magisterium of their bishops.'"

Then he cited Canon 1373, which states "One who publicly either stirs up hostilities or hatred among subjects against the Apostolic See or against an ordinary on account of some act of ecclesiastical power or ministry or incites subjects to disobey them is to be punished by an interdict or by other just penalties."

He ended with, "A person under interdict is forbidden to receive the sacraments. A word to the wise is sufficient!"

A parishioner who had been among the critics — but who asked not to be named — said the column disturbed a lot of people.

Meanwhile, Gerald Servais, parish council chairperson, said that Father Beligotti may have gone overboard citing canons,

Charitable service



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Val Weyand, Good Shepherd School resource room teacher, serves food at McDonald's family restaurant, W. Henrietta Road, Henrietta, April 1. Teachers from Good Shepherd School took orders and served food from 5 to 7 p.m., with 10 percent of the proceeds being donated to the Melita House.

but added that the people who have complained are quite orthodox "and are the first to run there (canon law) and make sure it's done right."

The pastor wasn't being oversensitive, he said. "He's going to take a hit no matter what he does ... Like anything else, they (priests) have to say something about it, get it out of their systems a little bit instead of being on the receiving end of it."

Father Beligotti said while he may be "too concerned," he felt it was best, for the entire parish, to make a statement. "I'm trying to pull us together, not divide us," he noted. He added that the church does host numerous devotions and traditions considered more pre-Vatican II.

"I'm trying to carry both elements, let each of them feel at home," he said. "The majority of our people are respectful."

The only response to the column he'd had was from one person who asked if it re-

ferred to him.

Similar concerns about criticisms of the bishop have been voiced elsewhere.

At St. Mary's Church, Canandaigua, for example, Father Walter Wainwright, in a long "Pastorale" in the Nov. 30 bulletin, cited several difficult decisions Bishop Clark has made.

Noting people have a right to dissent, Father Wainwright wrote, "... that does not dispense them from being accurate, honest and respectful. Some have gone so far as to accuse our bishop of being against dogmas of our faith, being against the Pope, and leading us down a rosy path to destruction."

Father Wainwright, spurred by what he called "bad press" in Rochester, then began a series of columns on the Office of Bishop.

Contacted March 30, he said he'd had many responses, which were, "All positive."

Programming change spells quick end for 29-year-old radio Mass

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

A Southern Tier radio station has abruptly pulled the plug on a weekly Sunday Mass broadcast that had run for 29 years out of St. Patrick's Church in Owego.

Father William Moorby, administrator of St. Patrick's Parish, said he received a letter in early March addressed "To Whom It May Concern" from Derrick Black, operations manager of WEBO Radio. The letter read as follows:

"As of Sunday, March 8, 1998, WEBO will be terminating the broadcast of your program. WEBO is changing its direction and will no longer require your services. We have had a fruitful relationship and we are grateful for running your program on our station; however, we feel it is time to try something new. Thank you once again for your business."

Black, when contacted by the *Catholic Courier*, stated that "the letter pretty much speaks for itself. We feel it would be inappropriate to continue religious programming based on the new format." He declined further comment.

WEBO-1330 AM now employs an alternative rock music format. This shift also eliminates Sunday religious programming for Baptists and Presbyterians.

Father Moorby noted that the letter from Black came with no prior warning.

"People were surprised and upset, but that's the way of business nowadays," Father Moorby remarked.

Perhaps no one was more disturbed than Jim Raftis, a St. Patrick's parishioner, who operated the live radio Mass all of its 29 years. Raftis also hosted a Sunday sports call-in show and provided live coverage of local high-school sporting events on WEBO. Those broadcasts, also, were

purged under the new format.

Raftis performed all of these duties on a volunteer basis, beginning with his broadcasts of Owego Free Academy football games in 1959. He had overseen transmission of Mass from St. Patrick's Church ever since the first Sunday of Advent in 1968.

WEBO's call letters stand for Endicott, Binghamton and Owego. The 5,000-watt station, Raftis said, can be picked up in three dioceses: Rochester; Syracuse; and Scranton, Pa.

Raftis noted that the broadcasts of St. Patrick's 9:30 a.m. liturgy provided an invaluable service to the homebound. He added that the show also had a regular following among non-Catholics.

Because notification of the programming change was so sudden and final, Raftis said, there was no chance to negotiate with WEBO.

"That was the heart of what irked peo-

ple," Raftis said.

Raftis and Father Moorby said that the possibility has since been raised of continuing Mass broadcasts on public-access television. But Father Moorby termed the chances of a future radio Mass as "pretty much dead in the water."

"We have no local options," said Raftis, explaining that WEBO is one of only two radio stations based in the Owego area.

And even if a television Mass were to actually come about, Raftis contended, it would be on tape delay and not provide the same effect as a live radio broadcast.

Raftis, 66, tried to put a positive spin on the situation by saying he now has more time to spend with his grandchildren.

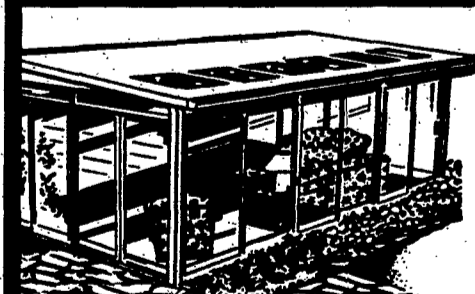
"But there's a definite void. It ends a longtime Owego tradition," said Raftis, who also serves as a human resources adviser at Lockheed Martin Federal Systems in Owego.

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