

DIOCESAN NEWS

New book argues case for church law

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Question: What do you do when your attorney is up to his neck in sand?

Answer: Look for more sand.

Such a joke indicates the high esteem in which the legal profession is held by the public, according to Father Kevin E. McKenna, chancellor of the Diocese of Rochester and author of a new book titled *The Ministry Of Law In The Church Today* (University of Notre Dame Press).

Yet, both civil and church law are vital to protecting the rights of citizens and Catholics respectively, he said. Canon law, in particular, needs to be studied better by pastoral ministers, Father McKenna wrote in his book. (In it he jokingly refers to canon law as "the dark side of the good news.")

During an interview in his office with the *Catholic Courier*, Father McKenna said that he was inspired to write his book precisely because some pastoral ministers may wonder why the church needs canon law at all. He said such critics might ask: Shouldn't the church be a vehicle for the free operation of the Holy Spirit guiding personal relations unburdened by human regulations?

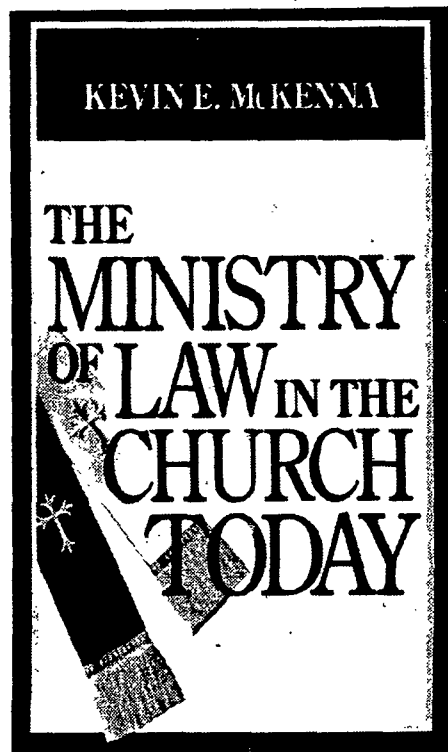
But the church is both a human and divine institution, he explained, and people are bound to run into conflict. Church law gives both lay people and clergy rules by which they can settle their disputes and work out their differences, said Father McKenna, treasurer of the Canon Law Society of America. Even the church's highest leaders must adhere to certain rules and cannot arbitrarily throw them out at whim, he emphasized.

"There are processes that are carefully articulated for the protection of people," he said of canon law. "These ensure that people's rights are recognized."

In his book, Father McKenna lays down certain conditions by which canon law should operate.

"(C)anon law must never be seen as an end in itself," he wrote, adding a quote from another canon law expert, Donald Heintschel, who contended that canon law should be devoted to the Holy Spirit. Father McKenna said that canon law can only work properly if it assumes that mature, responsible people can make their own decisions "as they attempt to respond in their own lives to the call of Christ to live each day the Gospel message."

Most pastoral ministers, he added, encounter canon law primarily during marriage preparation for lay Catholics and during the annulment process. Although some Catholics may see filling out the church's premarital investigation form as an arcane, or even intrusive, procedure, the process guarantees that people who shouldn't marry — for example, the



ordained or close blood relatives — don't marry, he said during the interview.

For that matter, the oft-maligned annulment process is also in place to protect the institution of marriage, Father McKenna said.

"The church has an annulment process because of its serious belief in the dignity of a sacramental marriage," Father McKenna said.

He pointed out that the annulment process can be an opportunity for both healing of a person wounded by divorce and for pastoral ministers to teach such a person more about the church's beliefs about marriage. In his book, Father McKenna addresses the annulment process at length.

"Perhaps most disconcerting for the potential applicant for annulment is the requirement that one review in depth many aspects of one's life and family background, recounting in detail one's

upbringing, one's relationship to one's parents and siblings ... and the actual breakdown of the marital relationship," Father McKenna wrote.

"Naturally," he continues, "there is an apprehension about sharing such a personal journey and the painful memories that may be dredged up. But, as many who have begun and successfully completed this process have found, there can be a sense of wholeness and redemption, as they put loose ends together and place anger into perspective."

Father McKenna devotes one chapter of his book to synods and canon law, pointing out that his own diocese benefited from the 1983 revised Code of Canon Law when it held the Diocesan Synod in 1993.

The synod, which took place with extensive lay input, would have been impossible under the old Code of Canon Law, Father McKenna pointed out, noting that previous synods were clergy-only affairs. But the revised code legislates lay input, he wrote. Hence, the 1993 Synod is a prime example of how paying attention to the church's canon law positively ensured that all diocesan Catholics had a right to be heard in how the diocese would set its course, Father McKenna noted.

"It will, in fact, be extremely difficult to engage people in future collaborative efforts in a diocese if it does not appear that the insights and recommendations that were gathered in the course of a synod experience have been fairly and thoroughly considered," Father McKenna wrote.

EDITORS' NOTE: Father McKenna will be signing copies of *The Ministry Of Law In The Church Today* at St. Helen's Church, 310 Hinchey Road, Gates, on Sunday, April 11, from 2 to 5 p.m. Proceeds from the sale of the \$12 book, which will be available at the signing, will go to fund a scholarship program of the Canon Law Society of America.

Grant begins FLCC project

Catholic Charities of the Finger Lakes is beginning a five-year Abstinence Education and Promotion Program in Ontario County.

The program is being funded by a grant from the New York State Department Bureau of Women's Health.

The goal is to prevent teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease through a nonreligious message of abstinence as a positive choice, "and to promote positive self-esteem, rewarding relationships, and responsible decision-making," according to a Feb. 23 statement from Catholic Charities.

Components include:

- An exclusively abstinence, health-based curriculum presented to participating schools.

- Youth development activities available through the Boys and Girls Club of Geneva, the Geneva YMCA and Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Wayne and Ontario Counties.

- A parent-child communication group conducted through Cornell Cooperative Extension.

Catholic Charities has hired as program coordinator Laurie Alexander, a graduate of the University of Maryland, College Park, with a master's degree in marriage and family therapy.

Hired as case manager and instructor for the curriculum is Paul D'Angelo. A graduate of Hobart College, he had been working in the Geneva school district.

Catholic Charities of the Finger Lakes is a collaborator with the Department of Health on a similar initiative in Cayuga County.

More information may be obtained by calling Catholic Charities at 315/789-2686.

Recognizing

★ **Deacon Brian McNulty**, coordinator of the diocesan Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, received the 1998 Deacon Stan Zawacki Memorial Diaconal Service Award, from the St. Stephen's Diaconal Community Association. The award, presented last October, was in recognition of his contributions to the permanent diaconate formation program, interfaith dialogue and for his service to Rochester's 19th Ward Faith Community.

★ **Gregory Korn, Christopher Zacharias and Matthew Kelly** of McQuaid Jesuit High School received awards at the 1999 Rochester-Finger Lakes Scholastic Art Awards and Exhibition. Korn and Zacharias received Gold Key Awards, and Kelly a Silver Key Award.

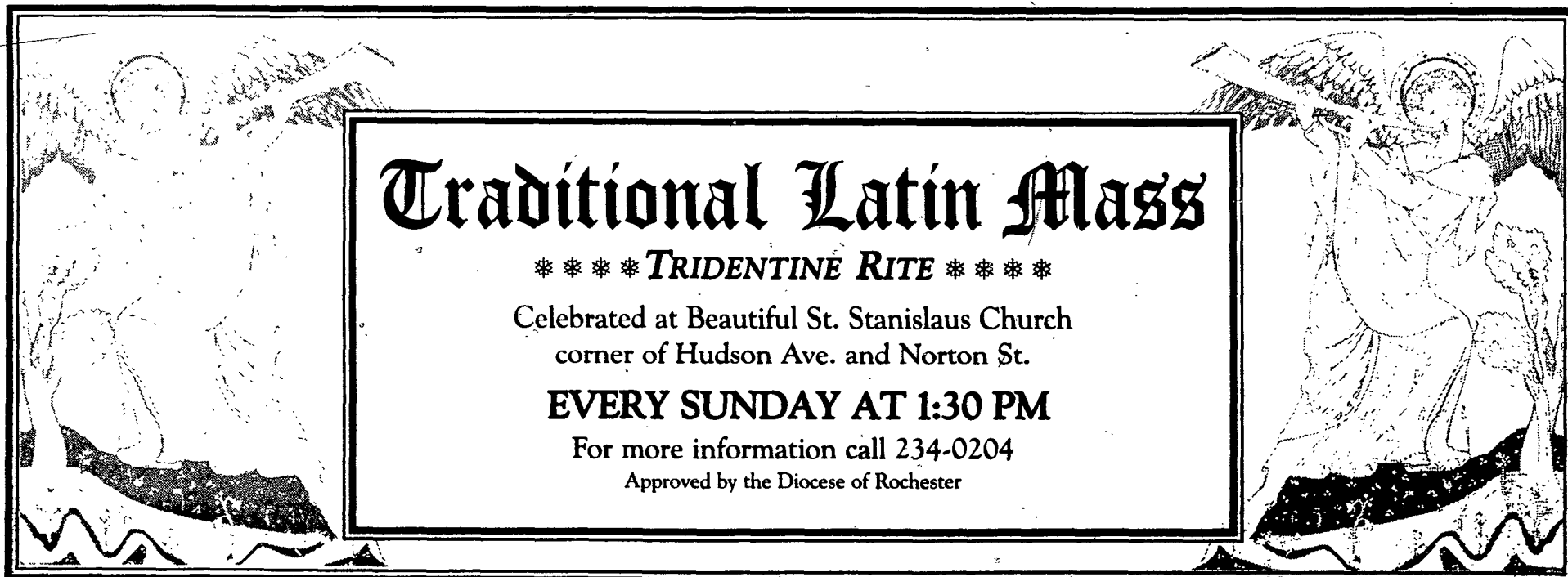
★ **Kara Noto**, a junior at Bishop Kearney High School, has been named a Kodak Young Leader as part of a program

sponsored by Eastman Kodak Company. She will be eligible to apply for a scholarship at the University of Rochester.

★ **Sarah Guarnere**, a sophomore at Our Lady of Mercy High School, has been chosen to attend the Hugh O'Brien Youth Leadership Conference in recognition of her leadership skills. The conference is scheduled for May 28-30 at the University of Rochester.

★ **Father Joseph M. McDonnell**, retired pastor of St. Michael's Parish, Newark, was honored Dec. 6 when the parish's pastoral council named the St. Michael School gym the Father Joseph M. McDonnell Hall.

★ **Katherine E. Keough**, president of St. John Fisher College, received the George M. Estabrook Distinguished Service Award, presented by the Alumni Association of Hofstra University. Keough earned a master of science in education/reading from Hofstra in 1972.



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