

COLUMNISTS

Laity's involvement will strengthen church

The sexual-abuse crisis has generated a number of short-term consequences for the Catholic Church: most bad, some good. The hope is that, in the long run, the church will emerge from this crisis even stronger than before — spiritually, ministerially and structurally.

One of the most promising short-term effects that may help to realize this long-term hope is the evident determination of Catholic laity to involve themselves more directly in the church's decision-making processes.

There is nothing particularly novel or revolutionary about this development. Almost 40 years ago, the Second Vatican Council called upon the laity to play a more meaningful role in the internal life of the church: "As sharers in the role of Christ the Priest, the Prophet, and the King, the laity have an active part to play in the life and activity of the Church" (Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, n. 10).

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church was just as specific. The laity share equally, although in different ways, with the hierarchy, clergy and religious in the threefold mission of Christ — of teaching, ruling and sanctifying (n. 30).

Pastors "were not meant by Christ to shoulder alone the entire saving mission of the Church toward the world." They



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

must recognize the ministries and charismatic gifts that the laity also have, and they must work with the laity so that "all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one heart."

Vatican II urged that pastoral councils, made up of laity, religious and clergy, and presided over by the bishop, be established in every diocese (Decree on the Bishop's Pastoral Office in the Church, n. 27), and that bishops not only seek the advice of laity but also "allow [them] freedom and room for action," encouraging them to "undertake tasks on [their] own initiative" (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n. 37).

"The Church," the council declared, "has not been truly established, and is not yet fully alive, nor is it a perfect sign

of Christ [in the world], unless there exists a laity worthy of the name working along with the hierarchy" (Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, n. 21).

The same spirit of collaboration must exist at the parish level as well. The council urged parish priests to listen to their parishioners "willingly," to take their opinions and recommendations seriously and to "recognize their experience and competence in the different areas of human activity" (Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, n. 9).

The laity, therefore, are not restricted to the temporal order alone, leaving the bishops and priests to manage the affairs of the church without lay involvement. On the contrary, the laity "exercise their apostolate both in the Church and in the world, in both the spiritual and the temporal orders" (Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, n. 5).

On Saturday, July 20, a congress will be held in Boston's Hynes Auditorium under the auspices of a new and rapidly growing lay organization called Voice of the Faithful. Some 5,000 people are expected to attend.

Voice of the Faithful was founded in January of this year, just as the sexual-abuse scandal began to unfold. The idea was conceived by Dr. James Muller, an in-

ternationally recognized cardiologist at Massachusetts General Hospital and a recipient of a Nobel Peace Prize in 1985 as a cofounder of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. Dr. Muller launched Voice of the Faithful as a way of responding constructively to the sexual-abuse crisis in the Catholic Church. The group has a Web site is www.votf.org.

Its goals are threefold: 1. Support those who have been abused; 2. Support priests of integrity; and 3. Shape structural change within the church. These goals are encapsulated in the organization's motto: "Keep the Faith, Change the Church."

Whether Voice of the Faithful or any similar lay initiative will continue to flourish as a pastorally effective force in the church long after the current crisis disappears from the media's radar screens is something that no one can predict at this juncture.

What one can safely predict, however, is that the hopes of Vatican II will never be fulfilled without the direct and meaningful involvement of laity in the life and mission of the Catholic Church.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Self-perception reflected in good, bad choices

16th Sunday of the Year (July 21): (R3) Matthew 13:24-43; (R1) Wisdom 12:13, 16-19; (R2) Romans 8:26-27.

In Sunday's parable Jesus tells of a farmer who sowed good seeds in his field. But while he was sleeping, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat.

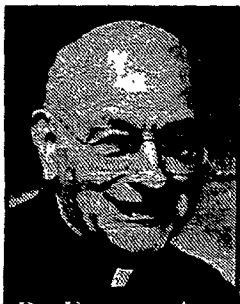
The parable implies that there are good and bad people in the world. The good people are those who follow God and his ways. The bad people are those who follow the devil and his aim to harm others. On Judgment Day, the good people will be separated from the bad.

Jesus wants all of us to be wheat, not weeds. Yet there are times when good people do stupid things. People are not just good or bad. Sometimes good people do what is bad.

First of all, we need to recognize that life is made of choices. People are not born good or bad. Some people are born in very bad circumstances and they become scarred for life. That is why we dare not judge others.

A second point is this: How we feel about ourselves often determines the choices we make.

If we feel that our life does not ultimately matter, then we will make our decisions accordingly. However, if we be-



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

lieve our lives ultimately do matter, and if we have hope that we can improve our situations, then that also will be reflected in the decisions we make.

Former President Jimmy Carter often reflects on the changes he sees in people's lives because of the work of Habitat for Humanity.

"We see ... lives changed among forgotten people," he says. "A Habitat family that lived near Washington had been living in an abandoned automobile. One of their children was an 8-year-old boy. He was very excited about getting a new house. When the family was chosen, he jumped up and down and said, 'We won, we won.' After the home was finished and the family had moved in, the little boy attended a different school. He had

always been in a slow learners' class, but when he moved his records had been lost and he was put into a regular class by mistake. No one noticed the error, and at the end of the first half of the year, his lowest grade was a B. Now he is still learning with the smartest of students. This is what having a decent home for the first time in life can do."

One last thing we need to see: Jesus says to us, "You are a winner. There is hope for you. By my grace, you can do it."

In a Peanuts strip, Lucy is parked in her psychiatric booth and Charlie Brown is sharing his problems with her. "Sometimes I ask myself questions," he begins. "Sometimes I ask myself, 'Is this your real life, or is this just a pilot film? Is my life a 39-week series or is it a special?'" In no time at all Lucy analyzes his problem and gives an instant answer; "Whatever it is," she says, "your ratings are down. Five cents, please!"

Jon Tal Murphree, in his book *Made to Be Mastered*, writes, "Without Lucy's special permission, I want to answer every Charlie Brown in the world. Yes, this is your real life. No, it is not a pilot film. Yes, it is a special — it is very special!" Why? Because Christ died in our behalf. Why do good people do stupid

things? Nobody knows all the answers. But we do know this: We always have a choice. The choices we make reflect how we feel about ourselves. God tells us our lives are special, that our choices do matter, that there is always hope.

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, July 22
Micah 6:1-4, 6-8; Psalms 50:5-6, 8-9, 16-17, 21, 23; John 20:1-2, 11-18

Tuesday, July 23
Micah 7:14-15, 18-20; Psalms 85:2-8; Matthew 12:46-50

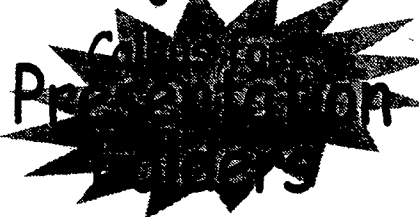
Wednesday, July 24
Jeremiah 1:1, 4-10; Psalms 71:1-6, 15, 17; Matthew 13:1-9

Thursday, July 25
2 Corinthians 4:7-15; Psalms 126:1-6; Matthew 20:20-28

Friday, July 26
Jeremiah 3:14-17; (Ps) Jeremiah 31:10-13; Matthew 13:18-23

Saturday, July 27
Jeremiah 7:1-11; Psalms 84:3-6, 8, 11; Matthew 13:24-30

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