

Regressive liturgical changes rumored

Many Catholics have expressed concern recently about a proposed new Vatican document that was leaked to the press. It would forbid the use of girls as altar servers, except when no boys are readily available, and also prohibit applause and dancing during liturgical services.

To be sure, someone in charge of papal ceremonies may need to warn the pope against any longer allowing the congregation to applaud him when preaching or upon entering and leaving St. Peter's before and after Mass — or anywhere else.

And if any of the African bishops should propose having another papal Mass in the African style, complete with dancing and drums, the pope himself will have to step in to forbid such unseemly distractions from the sacred rites.

Other reported items in the directive include the requirement of bowing just before the reception of Holy Communion. One would expect many so-called traditional Catholics to be pleased with initiatives designed to enhance reverence for the Eucharist. There are ways to compensate for the added time.

They could follow the example of their forebearers in the "good, old days" before the Second Vatican Council, and sit in the back pews for Mass, slipping away quietly after the tabernacle door has been closed and beating the traffic out of



Father Richard McBrien
 Essays in Theology

the parking lot.

Regarding the threatened prohibition of altar girls, many Catholics have expressed the fear that the Vatican seems intent on turning back the clock on a change that has been generally popular. Given the tragic sexual-abuse crisis, one wonders how prudent it is to seek to enforce a boys-only policy for altar servers.

But why would the Vatican's restorers of early-20th-century liturgical customs stop there? Why would they not choose to revive several other pre-Vatican II practices?

It could be mandated, for example, that all new churches have at least four side altars for private Masses, while older churches could be given a reasonable grace period for redesigning their floor plans. Cathedrals, on the other hand, would have at least eight side altars, as in the early decades of the last century.

Yet another mandate could restore the Communion rails to remind the laity that their place is in the

pews, not the sanctuary.

Women and girls could once again be expected to have their heads covered whenever in church. A handkerchief pinned to the hair would be allowed as an alternative to a hat, but only in cases of emergency.

To show the connection between the Eucharist and Mary, highlighted in the pope's recent encyclical on eucharistic devotion, there could once again be a public recitation of the rosary during the celebration of the parish Mass on the weekdays of May and October. (Pope Paul VI's discouragement even of the private recitation of the rosary during Mass would be rescinded.)

To speed up the process on weekends, the distribution of Holy Communion would begin, as in the pre-Vatican II years, immediately after the consecration, with the assisting priests using hosts reserved in a side-altar tabernacle. Needless to say, no lay people — and certainly no women — would be authorized to distribute Communion, much less even touch the host.

Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament would immediately follow the last Sunday Mass, and be conducted three times a week in every convent chapel.

And these are just for starters.

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

Column fails logical review

To the editor:

Theresa Borchard's column against premarital cohabitation ("First comes love — then cohabitation?", Oct. 23) takes some pretty shaky logical leaps. Perhaps, as she says, cohabitators do "value their individualism more than do noncohabitators," but that's most likely a value they brought with them to the relationship. In fact, it probably helped to make them the kinds of people who tend to cohabit in the first place! Where is the evidence that, by itself, cohabitation breeds a sense of individualism where it had previously been absent?

Similarly, maybe "cohabiting couples (are) poor communicators, less effective at conflict resolution," but how does merely living unmarried together turn previously good communicators and conflict resolvers into poor ones?

Are married couples any better communicators and conflict resolvers than the unmarried? In the better marriages, maybe, but we all know "blessed" unions in which both parties have long since abandoned any hope of resolving conflicts and now live together in separate shells that no reasonable person could regard as sacred. And I think most of us know cohabitators who seem to communicate far better than certain marrieds.

Oddly, nowhere in Ms. Borchard's essay does she characterize cohabitators as "living in sin," a designation

which not long ago would have formed the first foundation of any argument against premarital cohabitation.

Peter Dzwonkoski
 Westmoreland Drive
 Rochester

Wrong to judge parish

To the editor:

Now that Thomas Horan has raked over the parishioners of St. Jude's Church for all the diocese to ridicule ("Wasn't drive responsibility of everyone?", Oct. 23), a couple of comments should be made. First, he complains that, as a faith-filled community, 79 percent of the parishioners did not contribute to the "Partners in Faith" campaign. Evidently, Mr. Horan does not really understand how faith-filled the parish community really is. If he did, he would realize that many parishioners see the campaign as supporting that which is alien to their consciences. They know that the sum of the funds raised by the campaign will do good, but they also know that some of that money will also be used for purposes which, in their minds, are not good. They are, then, obeying their consciences.

To clarify this for Mr. Horan, allow me to use the words of Bishop Raymond Burke of LaCrosse, who, in explaining his ban of the Crop Walk in his diocese, said, "It is important to recall that our cooperation with another must be morally good in all of its aspects." To many in St. Jude's parish, financial cooperation in the renovation of the cathedral or donating to St. Bernard's Institute may very well fall into that category.

The people of St. Jude's are good people, and they do not deserve to be placed under a magnifying glass to be examined by the entire diocese as to whether or not they passed "God's test." It is not for Mr. Horan to do this, just as it is not for Father Richard McBrien to decide when and why the Holy Father should resign. In this respect, I felt that it was

quite appropriate McBrien column ran letter should be the same page and to one another.

George A. Go
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Christ will guide church

To the editor:

In the October 23 column in the *Catholic Courier*, a column by Father McBrien calling for resignation of John Paul II.

I am appalled Catholic paper would print an article such as this especially when two other papers — one secular — rejected similar articles by this same priest. He misleads.

He claims, "If John Paul II were to resign who would be capable of making a more conscientious choice? He could assume the role of a true shepherd among the truly great of history."

To millions of Catholics and Christians, John Paul II is a living saint and assume a place among the greatest Popes of history.

Does this man for whom the Pope is the visible head of the church on earth that the true head of the Church — Christ — is in heaven? He is not a "rudderless ship" but some people think that the Father should "throw the towel" and take it the rest of his life.

The article ends by

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1136 Buffalo Road
 P.O. Box 24379
 Rochester, NY 14624
 585/529-9530
 800/600-3628 outside Rochester
<http://www.catholiccourier.com>
 e-mail: info@catholiccourier.com

President
 Bishop Matthew H. Clark
 General Manager/Editor
 Karen M. Franz
kfranz@catholiccourier.com

Editorial Department

Assistant Editor
 Jennifer Ficaglia
jficaglia@catholiccourier.com

Staff Writers
 Rob Cullivan
rcullivan@catholiccourier.com

Mike Latona
mlatona@catholiccourier.com

Jennifer M. Burke
jburke@catholiccourier.com

Staff Photographer
 Karin von Voigtlander
kvonvoigtlander@catholiccourier.com

Photo Intern - Leila Navidi

Editorial Assistant
 Louis Litzenberger
llitzenberger@catholiccourier.com

Business Department

Office Manager
 Mary DiPonzio
mdiponzio@catholiccourier.com

Administrative Assistant
 Arlene S. Gall
agall@catholiccourier.com

Circulation Manager
 Donna Stubbings
dstubbings@catholiccourier.com

Graphics Department

Graphics Manager
 Kim Parks
kparks@catholiccourier.com

Graphic Artist
 Linda Jeanne Rivers
lrivers@catholiccourier.com

Advertising Department

Advertising Director
 Daniel M. Zollo
dzollo@catholiccourier.com

Display Advertising Executives
 Tracy Moses
tramoses@catholiccourier.com

Donald P. Wilson
dwilson@catholiccourier.com