

Address by the President - July 11, 1972

Part I - Reflections on the Senate

We have been in existence as a Presbyteral Senate for over six months. They have been exciting months - involved as they have been with the creation of a new structure. They have been challenging months as we began to work out our own procedures and policies.

We are in a unique moment in history in this portion of the Church. We are priests of the Archdiocese of Chicago - rich in tradition, proud of our heritage, innovative in approach, aware of a vision peculiarly our own that captures the minds and lives of priests throughout the country.

We exist today as a Presbyteral Senate as a result of the theology of Vatican II. Our existence, work, vision and goals must be based on assumptions which are the result of Vatican II. They are assumptions simply stated, but their import has repercussions in each of our lives and the lives of the men whom we represent.

The first of these assumptions is inherent in the very theology of the priesthood itself - a theology which states the fact that the Christian priesthood has a collegial dimension which must never be lost sight of. We are to be a living witness of this collegiality through our unity of mind and purpose.

The second of these assumptions follows from the first: that in decisions and legislation affecting the Church we serve, the sound principle of subsidiarity should influence all legislation whenever and wherever possible.

And finally, the individual dignity and right of the priest as a member of the Church must be stressed for the priest possesses the same personal rights as any other member of the Church. But he also possesses a greater responsibility and accountability. And we, as members of the Presbyteral Senate have even a greater position of projecting a vision of faith, of hope, of unity - and responsibility.

With these assumptions established, we are able to consider our role as individual priests who come together to constitute a Presbyteral Senate of the Archdiocese of Chicago in response to its call for creation by the Cardinal Archbishop. We come from different backgrounds; we exercise different ministries; we hold different positions. But we come together, not with the assurance that we have the infallible solution to all questions, but rather with a spirit of hope, of listening, of dialogue so that on behalf of the total presbyterate we are able to recommend to the Ordinary our thought, our reflections, our decisions.

The existence of a Senate of Priests in a diocese is not a haphazard experience. The Senate exists as a manifestation of the presbyterate united with the bishop, concerned for the total good of the Church. To the Senate also belongs the right to express a vision, a sharing of goals, a manifestation of concern that must be articulated loud and clear.

To do this, the Senate itself must be an effective instrument. It must see its own structure as optimum; it must be aware that its strength belongs to each member of the Senate; it must be truly representative of the presbyterate. If the Senate is truly effective in structure, goals, and vision, tremendous benefits become apparent to the total presbyterate.

- Two obvious benefits emanating from a Senate that is truly effective are:
- (1) Each priest will have a newly articulated tie to the Bishop.
 - (2) Members of the presbyterate will witness the cooperation that grows out of common effort.

But this is a new process, and just as there are various pressures and tensions inherent in the functioning of society, so also in the workings of the Priests' Senate.

We must be able to absorb and adjust to numerous pressures and tensions simultaneously without losing any of our effectiveness. If this is not done, the Priests' Senate, like any other system, may suddenly and disastrously malfunction, causing pain and disappointment in the society which gave rise to the system.

Within the structure of the Church, the Presbyteral Senate now has a marvelous opportunity to ease tensions by assuming prominence as a primary structure of the Church here in Chicago. It remains for us to make it a serious structure of a sustained and effective functioning.

I take this time with you today to share with you a vision of the direction, I believe, the Presbyteral Senate can take in the next six months. This vision or goal-setting will be idealistic, yet practical; flexible, yet directive; open-ended, yet precise. This vision is the result of a shared process of thought and reflection with the officers and members of the Executive Board.

But before this vision is articulated in terms of practical tasks, I would like to look at the total operation in which we are involved from a human aspect. Inherent in a vision of the Church as it should be is the reality principle of our own humanity, which prevents the Church from becoming the reality to which she is destined. There are four points worth considering.(1)

1. First, from the human point of view, we must be motivated under a single design which limits our activities and channels our energies to specific goals. We are a group of 110 priests brought together not because we have total knowledge or expertise "de omne re." We are representatives of the total presbyterate who come to share, discuss, evaluate, recommend in terms of the Church which is ever renewing itself to meet the challenges of the modern world. As such, in our working together, we must be disciplined, yet flexible.

2. We need a mature attitude toward authority whereby it is not a matter of "we" and "they" - contradictory points at polarization with each other. We must be always aware that we work and live our lives as priests in an authority structure. The sociological survey of priests in the United States maintains the priest desires the authority structure but desires changes in how it is exercised. We must work with this authority in a way which enables us to take the initiative with problems in the archdiocese. The archbishop in turn along with the presbyterate would respond with initiative and cooperation.

3. The third requisite for the successful functioning of a Priests' Senate is cooperation. Cooperation involves the creative use of energies which are employed in the service of the common good. Cooperation involves the suppression of selfish competition of one group against another whereby all become involved in promoting the common good at the expense of self-interests. We cannot be caught in the trap of statements that 50 of the 110 members are one nationality or another, young or old, pastors or associates, and that thus they will have a certain

pre-determined philosophical thought pattern. Such distinctions among us as members of the Presbyteral Senate are artificial, and even violate the very nature of our task as Senators, which is to represent our constituency. We are one presbyterate, and we are one Presbyteral Senate.

Cooperation within the context of Church should not be a rare quality in our lives. We must not take an attitude that in our deliberations, our studies, our research, that we are "winning" or "losing," but rather that we are involved in a structure ideally suited to serve the common good of the Church.

4. Finally, a fourth element humanly speaking for the successful functioning of a presbyteral senate is reality orientation. We must be oriented to the spiritual and theological reality of priesthood itself which exists in men, but is not of human origin. The priesthood operates from radical spiritual values founded in Scripture and Tradition. A priest's life is at variance with society, and thus we must not only be concerned with the personal and material good of our own selves. Such an orientation would be natural, but, for the priest, unrealistic.

Reality orientation also involves appropriate goals - advice to the bishop on sanctification, doctrinal teaching, and diocesan government. These goals sound clear and easy. However, they pull against both nature and society. They demand a view that comprehends the final end of man first. It is difficult to adopt this view in our times. To do so demands a high degree of non-conformity and a set of values, firmly held, radically different, yet Christian and very likely, unpopular.

Reality orientation also includes an adequate concept of our own work load and capacity. We must assess our own ability to accomplish current tasks. It implies ongoing education of our own selves and the total people of God to the theological reality of the presbyterium. It means rejoicing at small achievements at the expense of grandiose dreams.

Reality orientation means long range planning as well as constant adjustment and growth as a group of priests representing 2,400 others. And this same growth must be experienced by the total presbyterate or else our voices, our concerns, our vision, our challenge will be echoed in a vacuum.

At this moment in history, we, as the Priests' Senate of the Archdiocese of Chicago, have the opportunity to operate as a courageously realistic, Gospel-based, compelling witness, bringing to anxiously and spiritually deprived men the love of Christ. However, romantic and idealistic this may sound, it is the only realistic motivating factor for a priesthood, a priests' senate, a people of God.

What then practically speaking can be said of a vision which the Priests' Senate could dedicate itself to implement? What can we do, as the Cardinal himself calls us, "as participants in the decision making of the Archdiocese" so that we can be a voice of help, of consultation to face the challenges which exist in this critical era of the Church?

I would like to propose areas of concern, areas of challenge to the Presbyteral Senate. I would term these concerns, these challenges as our goals which we share with the archbishop. By a collegial sharing of ministerial responsibility within the presbyterate, the leadership of the bishop is actually strengthened, for all will have contributed input to the decision making process and thus have a personal stake in the successful execution of policies.

The final word of authority rests with the bishop, but we share his responsibility, for we can provide a broader range of wisdom, experience, and ideas which come from our own exercise of authority.

Part II - Goals for the Presbyteral Senate

Earlier this month, His Eminence John Cardinal Cody offered to the priests of the Archdiocese his "Reflections on the Priesthood."⁽²⁾ It is within the context of those reflections that I want to set some specific goals. The "Reflections on the Priesthood" is a beautiful statement of priesthood today. As the pastoral letter mentions, "Priests and bishops alike, we have been profoundly moved by a world in turmoil and a Church in transition."

The pastoral letter uses the reference from the Synod Document on Ministerial Priesthood to describe the priest's function as continuing the work of the apostles by "effectively preaching the Gospel, by gathering together and leading the community, by remitting sins, and especially by celebrating the Eucharist." What goals can we achieve within this description of the priest's essential work in the midst of a world in turmoil and a Church in transition?

I. Effectively Proclaiming the Gospel

To effectively proclaim the Gospel in a world in turmoil and a Church in transition, permit me to offer specific challenges for the Senate:

- A. What can we do within our own ministry to translate this experience of parliamentary procedure and democracy into our parochial and institutional structures? I would recommend the Senate to work out procedures to provide a guide for parish councils, liturgy teams, school boards to work more effectively, to use the experience which is ours within the Senate and bring it to other priests and our people.
- B. To effectively proclaim the Gospel, we should make the best use of talent and resources in our midst. I would recommend the Senate to help restore the homily outlines as guides for a unified announcement of the Word.
- C. To effectively proclaim the Gospel, we must be open to new ideas, new dimensions in theology and exercise of ministry. I would recommend that the Presbyteral Senate make a firm commitment to continuing education in priesthood. I would further recommend that the work and goals of the Center for Pastoral Ministry be strongly endorsed and supported by the priests of the Archdiocese.
- D. We proclaim the Gospel in an organized fashion through our commitment to Catholic education in our schools and through the CCD program. I recommend that the Presbyteral Senate seek out ways in which the priest as the proclaimer of the Gospel would become more involved in the organization, educational and formational dimensions of religious education in our schools, parishes, and CCD programs - to seek out ways in which all priests could become well-trained in the classroom situation itself. Realizing that the education of youth operates best in a faith-level adult community, I recommend further that the Senate consider support for an intense, well-thought out archdiocesan adult education program.
- E. The proclamation of the Gospel is effectively being achieved in catechetics and liturgy, among children, youth, and adults in so many sections of our archdiocese by hard-working selfless ministers of the Word. The Senate could be the agent for bringing together teams of priests involved in parishes who would share their expertise through "ad hoc parochial teams of parish priests" who would offer their vision and experience to the total Archdiocese.

- F. We proclaim the Gospel at this point in time. From the paper on manpower distribution, it is obvious that we must be concerned for the proclamation of the Gospel by ministers of the Word in future years. I recommend that the Senate should seriously think out methods and procedures for a recruitment of men to the vocation of priesthood.

The pastoral letter stated that "a zealous proclaimer of the Gospel cannot afford to stand aloof from a quest"; that "there is great excitement to be shared in finding the ideal approach." The times may be trying, but the preaching of the Word has never been more demanding and exhilarating than it is today. As the Presbyteral Senate, what will we do to effectively proclaim the Gospel?

II. Gathering Together and Leading the Community

The second task of the priest in continuing the work of the Apostles is "to gather together and lead the community." Within this task, goals for our Senate are obvious.

- A. So many of us come from Senatorial districts based on geographical ministry. Others come from an educational or specialized ministry. The Senate could see as a goal the bringing together of the parishes in our geographical ministry to share, to learn from, to help each other. Moreover, the Senate has the opportunity to achieve greater collaboration between the parochial ministry and specialized ministry in a particular area. Schools, hospitals, religious houses are part of a community. I recommend that the Senate seriously consider ideas for creating a stronger bond of unity between parishes and/or institutions in Senatorial districts.
- B. To gather together and lead the community in the midst of a world in turmoil and a Church in transition means the involvement of the priest in the parochial organizations which offer so much to each parish and/or institution. These various parochial organizations can be given real unity by drawing them together by means of a parish council that truly understands the extraordinary possibilities of a Catholic congregation and wishes to serve the entire community. But parishes in the archdiocese differ from one another. I would recommend that the Senate begin to establish different models of successful parish councils which then could be imitated by others throughout the archdiocese. Options would be exercised and the best possible structure would then arise in each community. Our bishops speak of a National Pastoral Council in 1976 to celebrate the 200th anniversary of our country. If the spirit, the vision, the talent of the Chicago Church are to contribute to the structure and formation of a National Pastoral Council, then we should begin now on the local level - in parishes, geographical Senatorial districts, vicariates. New structures should not be super-imposed on people. Rather, structures with the necessary variety and differences of people themselves should evolve from the community. Let us state definite goals and time-table implementation for the effective bringing together of the total people of God in our Archdiocese to achieve greater unity. The Priests' Senate has a fantastic opportunity here not only to create a future, but to shape it.
- C. At the same time that we examine the possibilities of bringing together the local community at various levels, we should re-examine the very structure in which we operate as ministers who gather together and lead the community. What is the best structural way in which the Church proclaims the Gospel to man in the Archdiocese of Chicago? What can the Senate offer as recommendations for a restructuring of the Archdiocese?

- D. To gather together and lead the community, we must know the community. The Senate has the challenge to seek out ways in which a thorough knowledge and awareness of our people is best achieved. What recommendations pastorally speaking will we offer in the traditional, but valuable, methods of parish census, house to house visitation, etc.?
- E. The gathering together and the leading of a community means the giving of oneself in ministry to the total community. But special dimensions in each community call for greater expertise in our exercise of ministry. I recommend that the Senate seek out the best ministerial approaches to the aged, the young marrieds, the sick, the retarded - the anonymous Christians of so many parishes, yours and mine.

III. Remitting Sins

The Cardinal's pastoral letter calls for the priest to "identify the sins of the community and, insofar as he can, lead his people from them." The pastoral letter lists the tolerance of war, insensitivity to poverty at home and abroad, indignity and injustice because of racial or religious differences as examples of contradictions to the Gospel message. The Senate can set clear and defined goals within this spectrum.

- A. I recommend that the Senate should consider educational programs for peace. What are we willing to do in our parishes, our schools, our institutions, our rectories, not only to hate war, but to educate our people towards peace in a positive way?
- B. The Campaign for Human Development is an eloquent testimony of the Church in the United States in its concern for the poor. This same campaign has offered countless opportunities in education and awareness of the people of God towards the problems of poverty. I recommend that the Presbyteral Senate do everything possible to take this program and help it come alive throughout the Archdiocese.
- C. As ministers of the Word, we must preach the Word against ethnic, racial, and religious discrimination. We must not only preach the Word, we must believe it ourselves and convince our constituents, our people. I recommend that the Senate not only endorse, but work toward the establishment of a truly effective Community Life Program or similar undertaking in every parish and institution in the Archdiocese.
- D. Within the local community, there are additional ways in which we can lead our people away from sin. Law enforcement is an essential dimension of contemporary society. How are we as priests willing to serve law enforcement agencies? I recommend that the Senate seek out ways by which every local police station, every community law enforcement agency would have a trained priest as chaplain to minister in the truest sense of the word. This same ministry could be extended to other public service agencies.

IV. And Especially By Celebrating the Eucharist

The final way in which the priest continues the essential work of the Apostles is by especially celebrating the Eucharist. It is within this Eucharistic context of sacrifice and service that the Senate can also set definite goals.

- A. To celebrate the Eucharist, we must be men steeped in prayer and spirituality. I believe that our Senate should recommend organized days of prayer, serious weeks of reflection for the priests of the Archdiocese.
- B. The celebration of Eucharist is the focal point of the celebration of the Christian community. What is our attitude towards the implementation of the full liturgical reform in our parishes, schools, institutions? How do we ourselves celebrate Eucharist? I would recommend that the Senate support the Office for Divine Worship in achieving unified liturgical

- involvement of the people of God in our Archdiocese.
- C. The celebration of Eucharist presumes a life of service to the people of God. Will our Senate be able to develop a realistic theology of service out of which will come practical resolutions affecting the life-style of the 20th century American priest? It is natural that we face individual issues affecting our life style, but these individual issues are given more meaning and substance if seen in the total context of our vocation to serve, to minister, to celebrate the Eucharist. I recommend that the Senate develop a theology of service wherein the total vision of priesthood is embodied.
 - D. The celebration of the Eucharist in an Archdiocese has special meaning when it is celebrated by bishop and priests together. What practical recommendations can we make to invite the Cardinal Archbishop and his auxiliaries to celebrate the Eucharist in the parish situation as often as possible? Why not a recommendation for the Cathedral itself to be the focal point for bringing the people of God from various parishes together to celebrate the Eucharist with their bishop and parish priests?
 - E. The Eucharist is the source of growth and strength for the priest and the Christian. But the priest himself must also grow professionally in his own ministry. Once again, we return to the challenge of the Senate to recommend full participation by all priests in the Archdiocese in the continuing education programs offered by the Center for Pastoral Ministry.
 - F. As priests, we are aware of the doubts and frustrations of our brothers who exercise this same ministry with us. I recommend that the Senate consider ways in which we could offer to all active priests support, encouragement, concern in this age of a world in turmoil and a Church in transition.
 - G. Finally, as celebrators of the Eucharist, we are in the position of service to the people of God. We take our performance of service for granted so often. Are we willing as a Senate to recommend evaluation processes for our performance as ministers of the Eucharist, leaders of the community? Are we ready as a priests' senate to ask ourselves and others for accountability in what we do and who we are?

Conclusion

To the Senate as a totality, I present these challenges, these goals. The challenge is to broaden our vision towards the common good of the Church. Already, in our six months of existence, specific areas of concern have been brought to us for consideration. But how do they fit into the total vision of the Church today?

We are a group of 110 men who have come together as the result of an elective process. We do not possess the answer to all problems. But we can offer to the Church of Chicago a charism whereby our voice, though at times divided, our sight, possibly limited in some areas, our vision and talent, given without restraint or reservation, all come together to announce the hope and optimism we must possess as priests today.

These are challenging times, demanding times, uncertain times. But to us, I believe, is given that rare opportunity in these paradoxical times of a world in turmoil and a Church in transition of being able to create a future. This opportunity may never come again in our lifetime. It is ours now as a Presbyteral Senate of the Archdiocese of Chicago. The question is: what are we going to do about it?

(1)

These four points are based on "The Presbyterium" by James Campbell in the June, 1972, issue of The Priest.

(2) "Reflections on the Priesthood," John Cardinal Cody, July 2, 1972.