

Catholics in the Midwest  
Final Revised Draft  
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The Midwest is a region of the country that possesses a distinctive ethos. It remains a land of wide open spaces where farm houses, grazing cattle, and grain elevators still dominate much of the landscape. This rural quality contributes to the Midwest's reputation of having a laid back and casual life style. Within this region the Great Plains states are especially unique because of their vastness and heavily rural character. Their history is quite different from the New England and Middle Atlantic states. Nebraska did not enter the Union until 1867, six years after Kansas. The Dakotas did not gain statehood until 1889, more than one hundred years after the Boston Tea Party and the American Revolution. The other distinct area of the Midwest is the Great Lakes region. Those states- Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Minnesota-that border Lakes Michigan, Superior and Erie comprise this region. Like the Great Plains region this Great Lakes area did not become an integral part of the nation's development until the second half of the nineteenth century.

This was also the time when the Catholic church came of age in the Midwest. By this time the institutional structure of the church in the United States was firmly established. Several church councils, dominated by an East Coast hierarchy, had taken place prior to the Civil War. Through their legislation these councils shaped much of the institutional structure of the immigrant church. Both the national parish and the parochial school had become the centerpiece of the immigrant church by the mid-nineteenth century. The republican model of Catholicism that was normative in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was pushed aside in favor of a more monarchical, clerical model of Catholicism that remained normative well into the twentieth century. The recruitment of clergy and women religious from Europe became a standard practice by this time as well. Thus, in many respects the church in the Midwest followed the institutional pattern established by East Coast Catholicism.

The Midwest was not without its anti-Catholic bigots, but the bitter religious battles fueled by the rise of nativism in the 1850s were centered along the East Coast. This Protestant crusade to discredit Catholicism fostered an island mentality among Catholics. They quickly learned that they were religious outsiders in a Protestant nation. As a result Catholics turned in on themselves and concentrated on building up a religious and cultural citadel within American society. The Midwest had its own style of anti-Catholicism. The rise of the anti-Catholic organization, the American Protective Association (APA), in the 1880s and 90s reinforced this island mentality among Midwestern Catholics. Centered in rural Iowa, the APA had a sizable following in the Midwest. In the 1920s the Ku Klux Klan, headquartered in Southern Indiana, gained widespread popularity in the Midwest where Catholics were a favorite target of the Klan's heated hostility. Despite similar experiences of anti-Catholicism, Catholicism in the Midwest was not a carbon copy of East Coast Catholicism. There was something special about Catholicism in this region of the country.

One distinctive feature was its heavily rural character. The Midwest was a land of wide-open spaces throughout the nineteenth century. Small farming communities dotted the landscape. In terms of religion much of this territory was mission country, deprived of regular religious services. A small church was most often the only visible Catholic presence in these towns. Because of the absence of a large institutional complex and a sizable Catholic population, Catholicism in the rural areas of the Midwest acquired a spirit or style that was not so tied to the hierarchical structure and its legalistic mentality. It was more open to adaptation and experimentation. This could be seen in the area of the liturgy, for example.

The Midwest was the heartland of German America. Because of the large numbers of Germans in the region, bishops recruited German-speaking Benedictines. Emigrating from Switzerland and Germany, they ministered to the large numbers of German farmers who had settled in such places as Southern Indiana, Minnesota, and the Dakotas. Their monasteries became the center of religious life in these regions. A

centerpiece of these monasteries was the rich Benedictine liturgical tradition. Their elaborate ceremonies with music and song set them apart from the plain, stern Irish style of liturgy that was so commonplace in much of Catholic America. The Benedictine Abbey of St. John in Collegeville, Minnesota eventually became the center of a vibrant liturgical renewal that swept across the Midwest and the rest of the country in the middle of the twentieth century. Without a doubt the Midwest, with St. John's Abbey as its epicenter, was the American birthplace of liturgical renewal in the twentieth century. One reason this was possible was that this renewal was able to develop beyond the pale of East Coast Catholicism which, given its intense institutional structure and the dominance of an Irish style of Catholicism, was less open to innovation.

Another aspect of the mission character of Midwest Catholicism was the presence of Native Americans. The Native American mission, centered in the Plains states, has been a feature of Catholicism in this region since the mid-nineteenth century. This apostolate is unknown in the East though it is quite widespread in the Southwest where Catholic missionaries have been evangelizing Native Americans since the seventeenth century.

What sets the Midwest apart from Catholicism in other parts of the country is the number of reform movements that originated in the Midwest during the course of the twentieth century. Not so tradition bound as East Coast Catholicism, the church in the Midwest has been more open to change. The center where much of this renewal first developed was the Archdiocese of Chicago. This zest for innovation and experimentation began in the late 1930s and 1940s. In many respects these innovations anticipated the spirit of reform unleashed by the Second Vatican Council. A key figure in those early years was Bernard J. Sheil who was an auxiliary bishop in Chicago. He founded the Catholic Youth Organization in Chicago in the early 1930s. It was not long before the CYO, as it was popularly known, became one of the most successful youth organizations in the country. Sheil was also an activist on behalf of social justice, working closely with the emerging labor union movement in the 1930s. He was a key supporter of a young activist, Saul Alinsky, who was attempting to organize the workers in the slaughterhouses located on Chicago's South Side. With Sheil's support as well as the support of other clergy in the neighborhood, Alinsky was able to put together a neighborhood organization, the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council. By forming a unique partnership that joined together church, labor union and community, the council was able to organize the packinghouse workers and bring peace to a neighborhood and industry notorious for its labor unrest. Alinsky's success in Chicago launched his career as a community organizer who for the next three decades would help to organize dozens of powerless urban neighborhoods. In the 1950s he would return to Chicago and once again join with the Catholic clergy to help organize other neighborhoods that were struggling with urban blight. These neighborhood organizations that brought church and community together became models for similar organizing efforts in cities across the country.

Another innovative movement that got its start in Chicago and the Midwest was known as Catholic action. Imported from Europe it took root in the Midwest where it sought to evangelize young Catholic workers and students. Known as the YCW (Young Christian Workers) and the YCS (Young Christian Students) these organizations sought to reform society rather than the individual according to the values of the gospel. Another Catholic action organization that was born in Chicago was the Christian Family Movement (CFM). Founded by a husband and wife, Pat and Patty Crowley, it spread across the country and throughout the world during the course of the 1950s and 60s. Cana was another organization identified with the Midwest in the 1940s and 50s. With its nerve center in Chicago and under the direction of a charismatic priest, John Egan, it sought to reform society by strengthening the family. Cana quickly became popular with Catholics throughout the country and remains a viable organization whose goal is to strengthen family life.

In the 1950s and 60s the civil rights movement galvanized the nation. The nation's cities became the main arena for this struggle for full civil rights for all people regardless of their race, creed or color. The Catholic church in Chicago, spearheaded by a number of lay men and clergy, took a leading role in this struggle. In

January of 1963 Chicago's Catholics hosted the first National Conference on Religion and Race. This conference brought together Catholics, Protestants, and Jews in an unprecedented ecumenical effort to combat racial discrimination in the United States. Once again Chicago became the epicenter of a movement whose influence would spread well beyond the city.

Urban ministry took on a new urgency in the 1960s as racial unrest and urban blight challenged the churches. In Chicago the activist priest, John Egan, sought to organize the Catholic clergy working in the inner cities. His organization, The Catholic Committee on Urban Ministry, headquartered at the University of Notre Dame, sought to promote the cause of social justice. Chicago also was the setting for one of the first professional associations of Catholic clergy. Established in 1966 the Association of Chicago Priests not only sought to protect the rights of the clergy, but it also became a catalyst for reform in the church. It was not long before clergy in other dioceses formed similar associations using Chicago as their model.

The Midwest, Iowa in particular, was the center of the Catholic rural life movement that flourished in the middle decades of the twentieth century. The Catholic Charismatic Movement was also centered in the Midwest, both at Notre Dame and in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Call to Action, one of the most active reform movements in the church, has its headquarters in Chicago. Significantly Catholic lay men and women are the leaders of this organization.

In recent years the energy for reform that was so noticeable in the Midwest in the middle decades of the century has dissipated. Catholicism has adopted a more rigid character, less open to the spirit of innovation so prevalent in the 1950s and 60s. Sameness rather than diversity seems to distinguish the church in the United States. As a result Midwest Catholicism is now very similar to its East Coast or Pacific Coast counterpart. There are many reasons for this. In the wake of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) a zeal for renewal captured the hearts and minds of many Catholics. This fostered a climate in the church that was open to change and innovation. This climate began to change by the early 1970s as the enthusiasm generated by the council waned. The activists of the fifties and sixties aged, losing some of the spark of their youth. In 1965 a new archbishop, John P. Cody, took control of the church in Chicago. Unlike his predecessors Cody was not open to change or innovation. An autocratic monarch, he succeeded in slowly but surely destroying the climate of optimism and hope generated by the Second Vatican Council. Large numbers of clergy in Chicago, many of whom were actively involved in the changes initiated in the 1960s, left the priesthood. During the Nixon Presidency a culture of conservatism swept across the nation. This became even more pronounced during the Reagan presidency in the 1980s. Politically Catholic suburbanites joined this shift to conservatism by supporting the Republican party. In 1978 a new pope, John Paul II, was elected. He has sought to fashion a culture of authoritarianism and rigid adherence to orthodox Catholic teaching. Such a climate has stifled the spirit of innovation in the church. The hierarchy, the vast majority of whom have been appointed by John Paul II, are cast in his mold. Rather than encourage independent thinking and creative responses to pastoral issues, they favor an adherence to the past rather than an openness to the future. The declining number of priests and sisters has diminished the pool of potential innovators. With the decline of the clergy, the laity have assumed leadership roles at the local parish level. They are the ones who are pushing the church to become more open to the modern world and, in the words of Pope John XXIII, to bring "herself up to date." This is very noticeable in Chicago where one of the most visible reform groups, Call to Action, is based. Enjoying a national constituency, this organization has inherited the legacy of Midwestern Catholicism, a spirit open to experimentation and innovation. How successful they and other lay reform movement will be may well shape the future of Catholicism in the United States.

The Catholic story in the Midwest begins in earnest in the second half of the nineteenth century. This was when the Midwest became an integral part of the nation's economic core that stretched from New York to Chicago. Because of its late start the Midwest was never the heartland of Catholic America. Even though the church has been a major player in shaping the public culture of the Midwest, it cannot rival the East Coast

Catholic powerhouse. In the Midwest only twenty-three percent of the population is Catholic. That is considerably less than the Catholic population in New England (42 percent) and the Mid-Atlantic Region (37 percent) and somewhat less than the Pacific region (29 percent). Also noteworthy is that during the past twelve years (1990-2002) the Catholic population in this region has only increased five percent while the national Catholic population has increased 14 percent or almost three times as much.

The Great Lakes region is the most heavily Catholic area in the Midwest. These states- Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Minnesota – at one time comprised the industrial and economic core of the nation. This is where vast numbers of Catholic immigrants settled in the great era of immigration from 1820-1920. Today many of their descendents still call the Midwest their home. Illinois with 3.9 million Catholics and Wisconsin with 1.7 Catholics are the two most Catholic states in the region; in each of these states Catholics make up almost one third of each state's population. The Plains states (Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, North and South Dakota) are heavily rural. They never attracted large numbers of Catholics. In fact, Illinois alone has twice as many Catholics as the total Catholic population of these five states (1.6 million). Indiana is somewhat of an anomaly in the region. The northwest region of the state borders Illinois and Michigan and in times past shared the industrial features of this Great Lakes region. This is the most Catholic area of the state whereas the rest of the state was much more rural and agricultural with a heavy Baptist and Methodist population. As a result only 13 percent (776,441) of the state's population is Catholic. This made Indiana the least Catholic state in the entire Midwest region.

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the nation's cities were the chosen destination for the scores of unskilled immigrants, large numbers of whom were Catholic. Chicago, Detroit, and Cleveland were the major cities of the Great Lakes region. Linked to one another by railroads and waterways, they formed a huge industrial-urban complex. Like a magnet they attracted scores of immigrant newcomers searching for work in what they envisioned as the promised land. These cities still dominate the Great Lakes region today. Illinois is the most urban state in the region with an urban population of 88 percent. Ohio and Michigan, both of which have an urban population of 77 percent, are the next most urban states in the region. Not surprisingly North Dakota and South Dakota are the most rural states in the region with 44 percent and 48 percent respectively of their population living in rural areas.

This heavily urban nature of the Great Lakes states has shaped the Catholic church. Rooted in the developing urban-industrial complex of the nineteenth century, Catholicism in the twenty-first century still remains a very urban religion. This is most evident in Illinois. The archdiocese of Chicago which comprises Cook County and a small part of Lake County numbers 2.4 million Catholics or 63 percent of the total number of Catholics in the entire state. Cook County which is the Chicago metropolitan area is overwhelmingly Catholic claiming 69 percent of all churchgoers in the county. Detroit offers another example of the heavily urban nature of the Catholic church. The Detroit archdiocese which comprises five counties in the metropolitan region has a Catholic population of 1.5 million. This represents 75 percent of the total Catholic population in the entire state of Michigan. Even in the rural areas of North and South Dakota Catholics remain a very urban people. In North Dakota, for example, the largest concentration of Catholics in the state are in the cities of Fargo and Bismarck.

### **Here Comes Everybody- Ethnic Diversity**

James Joyce's famous description of Catholicism –“here comes everybody”- is certainly applicable to the Midwest. In 1900 the Catholic gospel was preached in 28 languages. Today the Catholic Mass is celebrated in Chicago in 44 languages. Such diversity is very American, but among the nation's churches it is uniquely Catholic.

### **Germans**

One feature of Midwest Catholicism that sets it apart from Catholicism in other parts of the country is its large concentration of Germans. Historians are fond of talking about the German triangle. This is the region of the Midwest anchored by three cities that had a heavily German population- Cincinnati, St. Louis and Milwaukee. These cities form a geographic triangle within which lived a sizable German population. Germans did indeed settle in other regions of the country, but this German triangle was the heartland of German America. Even today the Germans still remain the single largest European ethnic group in the Midwest.

Ohio is the state with the most people of German ancestry (2.8 million) followed closely by Illinois(2.5 million) and Wisconsin(2.3 million). Indeed, every state in the Midwest region has a sizable number of people of German ancestry. In fact, almost one out of four people in the region are of German ancestry. This is explainable by the tendency of German immigrants to settle in the heavily rural, agriculturally-based region of the Midwest. A sizable percentage of these people, a reasonable estimate would be around 30 percent or so, belonged to the Catholic church.

By 1900 German Catholics were a powerful presence in the Catholic community. This all changed with World War I and the rise of anti-German feelings. Hitler and World War II reinforced this climate of suspicion, persuading most Germans to emphasize their American loyalties rather than their German ancestry. By the mid-twentieth century *das Deutschtum* (German culture with its language and customs) had disappeared as the Germans became fully American. The Little Germanys in cities like Chicago, Milwaukee and Cincinnati which for so long had preserved the strong sense of *das Deutschtum* among the people vanished as African-American migrants from the South transformed these German enclaves. Most Germans moved out of the old immigrant neighborhoods into the surrounding metropolitan region. Even though Chicago's German ethnic villages are gone, the Germans still remain the largest European ethnic group in the city with 189,618 people claiming German ancestry in 2000. In the surrounding metropolitan Cook County over 600,000 people (611,008) are of German descent. A similar pattern is present in Cincinnati. The German neighborhood of Over the Rhine is no longer a German enclave, yet there are more than 65,000 people of German ancestry living in Cincinnati (65,659). In the surrounding metropolitan Hamilton County the Germans are also the largest ethnic group numbering 258,917. It is striking that as much as experts write about the mobility of the American people, the descendants of the immigrant generation, in this case the Germans, appear to have not moved far from the old immigrant neighborhoods.

Even though the urban ethnic villages have disappeared, some rural enclaves still remain. One such striking example is Stearns County in Minnesota.

Stearns County, a rural agricultural area situated in the center of the state, has been a citadel of Catholicism since the mid-nineteenth century. Fifty-eight percent of the county's population is of German ancestry and 86 percent of these are Catholic (66,563). In simple language this means that one of every two persons in Stearns County is a German Catholic. It is hard to imagine a more German Catholic enclave in the entire country.

These people trace their roots back to the mid-nineteenth century when their ancestors settled in this rural area. These pioneer settlers shared common values rooted in their Catholicism and their commitment to farm and family. Writing in 1990 about Stearns County, historian Kathleen Conzen said that "the descendants of German immigrants have not only preserved distinctive rural communities and cultures; they have also retained their commitment to a rural way of life to a greater extent than almost any other ancestry group – particularly Anglo-Americans- among today's rural farm population." In doing so they have constructed a world that still "bears their stamp, a stamp that shapes the values and goals that their descendants bring to current public policy debates and thus to the continuous making of American culture far beyond" Stearns County. This distinctiveness can be seen "in everything from the area's aggressive anti-abortion movement to the fiscal caution of its governmental bodies, the high persistence rates of its conservative farmers, the

unusually large size of its families and the traces of traditional legalism, clericalism, and devotionism that still mark its spirituality.”

Stearns County was also where German Benedictine monks settled in the mid-nineteenth century. They came from their monastery in LaTrobe , Pennsylvania in 1856 at the request of the local bishop who needed their assistance in caring for the increasing number of German immigrants settling in Minnesota. They took responsibility for a number of parishes in the county. Then in 1866 they built a monastery, St. John’s Abbey, in Collegeville. This abbey together with St. John’s University, a college they had founded in 1857, became a vital center for the German Catholic community. Both of these institutions have flourished and remain an important center for the Catholic community of central Minnesota. Today the college has an enrollment of close to 4,000 undergraduates. The abbey has become an internationally recognized center for liturgical studies.

Large numbers of German immigrants also settled in North and South Dakota. In fact, more than 40 percent of the population in each state was of German ancestry according to the 2000 census. As was true in Minnesota the Benedictine monks were the pioneer priests in these rural areas. Though they never gained the fame of St. John’s Abbey, the Benedictine monasteries did become important centers for German Catholic life in the Dakotas.

### **Irish**

Though they never rivaled the Germans in terms of population, the Irish of the Midwest did gain considerable clout both in the church and in local politics. Illinois, Michigan, and Ohio was where most of the Midwest Irish settled. As for cities, Chicago was clearly the most famous Irish city in the Midwest. Even though the Irish in New York or Boston outnumbered them, the Chicago Irish put their stamp on the city by “exerting an influence all out of proportion to their numbers.” The Irish clergy ran the Catholic church in Chicago for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As their numbers declined and their Irish parishioners moved to the suburbs, the Irish clergy ceased to be the power brokers in the church. A similar scenario took place with politics in the city. The Irish took control of city politics in the 1930s building a powerful machine that would rule the city into the 1970s. Richard J. Daley was the major figure in this forty-year reign of power. Elected as Mayor in 1955, he ruled the city with a firm hand until his death in 1976. During his time in office the Irish held “key positions in city government, on the judicial bench, and in the police and fire departments.” But even before his death it was clear that the Irish control of Chicago politics was changing. This became most evident in 1983 when Harold Washington became the first African American Mayor in the city’s history. The Daley name returned to prominence when the son of Richard Daley, Richard M. Daley, became Mayor in 1989. But his success on election day did not depend on the Irish vote. They had long abandoned the city for the suburbs. Daley owed his successful tenure as Mayor through four terms, 1989-2003, to a powerful democratic coalition of Blacks, Latinos, and an ethically diverse group of Whites.

What has happened in Chicago took place in other cities in the Midwest. In St. Paul, Minnesota, for example, the Irish were a dominant presence through much of the twentieth century. A 1959 study noted that “being Catholic is almost essential for political success in St. Paul ... and among the Catholics, the Irish predominate.” In 2003 that is no longer true. As in Chicago so in St. Paul, the Irish are no longer in control of the church or the city.

### **Latinos**

One of the most dramatic changes in recent years has been the immigration of thousands of Latinos to the United States. According to the U.S. Census the Latino population has grown from 22.4 million persons in 1990 to 35.3 million in 2000, an increase of 58 percent. This large influx of Latinos has presented a special challenge for the Catholic church since the majority of Latinos, about 70 percent, are Catholic. Even though Latino Catholics have been present in the United States since colonial times, the twentieth century, and most

especially the past forty years, has witnessed unparalleled growth in this community. It is estimated that 71 percent of the growth of the Catholic population in the U.S. since 1960 was due to this increase in the Hispanic population. As a result of this expansion and because of the initiative of both lay and clerical leaders, Latino Catholics have formed a church within a church. In many ways they resemble the German Catholics of the late nineteenth century. Like the Germans they have their own national gatherings, lobby for their own Latino bishops, have their own parishes where they celebrate their liturgies in a uniquely Latino style, and seek to maintain their Latino heritage.

Recent surveys indicate that they are now the largest minority group in the nation. The favorite destination of these immigrants has been the states of California, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. Comparatively speaking relatively few Latinos have settled in the Midwest. Only about three million Latinos have settled in the eleven states that comprise the Midwest region. In fact, more Latinos, 4.2 million, live in just one county, Los Angeles, than in the entire Midwest region.

Latinos first arrived in the Midwest in the early part of the twentieth century. As elsewhere this presence has blossomed in the past forty years. As a result Latinos are now the largest minority group in Iowa, Kansas and Nebraska. But it is in Illinois where the largest number of Latinos have settled -1,530,262. The next largest concentration is in Michigan where 323,877 Latinos lived in 2000. In Illinois the Latino population is concentrated in the Chicago area. In terms of county population, Cook County has the fourth largest Latino population in the United States, 1,071,740. This represents 70 percent of the entire Latino population in Illinois. Chicago with 753,644 Latinos has the third largest city population, outdistanced only by New York and Los Angeles. This represents a 38 percent increase since 1990 with the result that today approximately one of every four people who live in Chicago is Latino(26 percent).

One striking example of the growth of the Latino population in this area is in the Chicago suburb of Cicero. In the past ten years there has been a 40 percent increase in the town's Latino population with the result that today 77 percent of the community is Latino. This remarkable growth is due primarily to immigration and higher-than-average birth rates. Such growth is expected in the future. In fact, "the Census bureau projects that the Latino population in Illinois will double in size between 1995 and 2025" reaching an estimated 2,275,000.

The move to the suburb of Cicero underscores an important point. The current growth in the Latino community is taking place primarily in the suburbs and this pattern is sure to remain constant in the near future.

In the Chicago archdiocese which comprises Cook and Lake Counties there are 878,000 Latino Catholics; this represents 36 percent of the total Catholic population in the archdiocese. About 10 percent of the parishes in the archdiocese(57)are designated as Latino parishes. On any given Sunday the Catholic Mass is celebrated in 44 different languages in the archdiocese. The language in the vast majority of these liturgies is English, but Spanish is the language of choice in 13 percent of all Sunday Masses. It is worth noting that the next most popular language after English and Spanish is Polish. Five percent of the Sunday Masses in the archdiocese are celebrated in Polish. Such a large number of Polish language Masses is principally due to the immigration of significant numbers of Polish immigrants in recent years.

The Asian Catholic population in the Chicago archdiocese totals 80,000 and is expected to grow by about 10 percent in the next few years. A new ethnic group within the Midwest Catholic mosaic, Asian Catholics are a very ethnically diverse population. Because of such diversity as well as the lack of a native clergy, they will present a formidable challenge to the church's pastoral ministry in the years ahead. Presently only one parish and three missions serve this growing population.

## **African Americans**

In the Midwest region there are approximately 5.8 million African Americans or about 16.7 percent of the nation's African-American population. Three states in the region, Illinois, Michigan, and Ohio, have the largest concentration. In fact, they account for 79 percent of the region's African American population. Nationwide the number of African American Catholics is relatively small, an estimated two million, or only about three percent of the total Catholic population in the United States. The majority live in the South and Mid-Atlantic regions. In the Midwest the cities of Chicago and Detroit are major centers for African American Catholics. In fact, it is safe to say that the bulk of African American Catholics in the Midwest live in these two cities. The Archdiocese of Chicago has an estimated 99,000 African American Catholics; this represents only four percent of the total Catholic population. Thirty-nine parishes in the archdiocese are designated as African American parishes.

In Detroit, Michigan 82 percent of the city's population is African American. This makes Detroit one of the most African-American cities in the nation. About nine percent of Detroit's African Americans, 70,000, are Catholic. As was true in the Chicago archdiocese, this represents about four percent of the total Catholic population. Within the archdiocese there are thirty-six parishes designated as African American.

## **Native Americans**

The last ethnic group that deserves mention is the Native American. Their presence in the Midwest region, especially in the Plains states, gives the Midwest a very distinctive quality that is not found in those regions east of the Mississippi. Catholic missionaries first evangelized the Native Americans in the Midwest region during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but this endeavor came to an end with the British takeover of Canada and the suppression of the Jesuits in France. Then, in the nineteenth century Catholic missionaries once again sought to evangelize the Native Americans in this region. Many of these nineteenth century missions still exist today in South Dakota, Minnesota, and Michigan. Yet, they remain an invisible to most Americans in the Midwest.

In the Midwest region there are 374,414 Native Americans, representing about 15 percent of the total Native American population in the United States (2.4 million). South Dakota, Michigan and Minnesota are the three states in the region with the largest number of Native Americans. The estimated number of baptized Native American Catholics in the United States is 493,614 or about 21 percent of the nation's Native American population. There are 87,897 Native American Catholics in the Midwest region or 18 percent of the total number of Catholic Native Americans.

There is a vibrant evangelization program at many of the Midwest Catholic missions. Of the 101 parishes in the region designated as serving Native American communities, 74 of them are located in the three states of North and South Dakota and Minnesota where they serve an estimated Catholic population of 15,305. Most of these parish communities are quite small. One of the most dynamic centers of this missionary apostolate is in the Diocese of Rapid City, South Dakota. This diocese includes the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations. Catholic priests, brothers and women religious have ministered to the Lakota Sioux on these reservations since 1886. There are three other reservations in the diocese- Lower Brule, Standing Rock and Cheyenne River. Catholic parishes are also located in these communities of Lakota Sioux. In the Diocese of Marquette, Michigan there are six Native American Catholic missions ministering to the Ottawa and Ojibway who were first evangelized by Jesuit missionaries in the seventeenth century at places like St. Ignace and Sault Ste. Marie.

Many Native American Catholics have moved off the reservations and into the cities. "However, being urban dwellers and likely scattered among many neighborhoods, these and many other Native Americans may be invisible to the pastoral eye."

The pastoral care of Native Americans continues to be a major challenge for the Catholic church. This has



become even more acute in recent years as the number of clergy has declined. Such a declension has not only negatively impacted the pastoral care of Native Americans, but it has revolutionized the practice of ministry in the church.

### The Catholic Priest- A Tale of Decline and Scandal

“The Roman Catholic church faces a staggering loss of diocesan priests in the United States as it moves into the 21st century.” That was the opening line in a book written in 1993 by Richard A. Schoenherr and Lawrence A. Young, *Full Pews Empty Altars*. This study projected a 40 percent loss in the priest population from 1966 to 2005. This decline, evident since the 1960s, has remained constant down to the present day. In the Midwest there has been a 16 percent decline in the priest population over the past twelve years (1990-2002). This is somewhat worse than the national decline (13 percent). During this period the Midwest Catholic population increased five percent. This pattern has been present for many years- as the Catholic population increases, the number of priests decline. In the Archdiocese of Chicago, for example, from 1990-2002 the Catholic population increased four percent while the priest population decreased 24 percent. In the Archdiocese of St. Paul-Minneapolis the population increased 22 percent and the number of priests declined six percent. Every state in the Midwest but one had fewer priests and more Catholics in 2002 than in 1990. The lone exception was North Dakota. It had 31 more priests in 2002 than in 1990 while its Catholic population declined by 5,649 during this period.

Why has there been such a significant decline in the number of priests? Without question a major factor is the large number of resignations from the priesthood. From 1966 to 1984 6938 diocesan priests resigned. It was projected that the rate of resignations would continue resulting in an additional 2840 resignations between 1985 and 2004. The principal reason for such resignations, according to numerous studies done over the past 30 years or so, is the high cost of celibacy. As long as the church maintains its commitment to celibacy as a requirement for the priesthood, priests will continue to resign.

Another key reason for the declining number of priests is the decrease in the number of men who are studying to become priests. In the 10 year period, 1992–2002, the number of seminarians in the United States declined 29 percent. As a result each year fewer men are ordained as priests. The Archdiocese of Chicago ordained 20 priests in 1990 and only 11 in 2002. St. Paul-Minneapolis ordained nine in 1990 and four in 2002. This pattern is fairly consistent throughout the region. As these figures suggest and as several studies indicate, a vocation to the Catholic priesthood is no longer as popular a choice for young men as it was in the 1940s and 50s when seminaries were overflowing with record numbers of students.

In addition to the decline in the number of diocesan priests and seminarians, the median age of the clergy is rising each year. In 1999 it was 62. Indicative of this trend, more priests are over 90 years of age than under 30.

Because of an aging and declining priesthood, parishes either had to close or survive without a resident pastor. This was unheard of in the 1950s and 60s, but the closing of parishes and the emergence of the priestless parish has now become commonplace in the Midwest.

A study issued in 2000 reported that 2334 parishes in the United States did not have a resident priest. This is a significant number and it is on the rise. The Archdiocese of Chicago reported that in 2002 of the 378 parishes in the archdiocese 27 parishes were without a resident priest. In 2004 it is projected that there will most likely be eight parishes without a priest though it is very possible that there could be an additional 35 priestless parishes. In the Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa lay people run 100 of 350 parishes. One priest said, “When I was ordained 18 years ago, there were almost 300 of us, and now there are about 120. In five to ten years, they project it will be 75. And we still have 200 parishes.”

As the number of clergy decline, the number of lay people involved in parish ministry has increased

dramatically. They have taken on roles previously reserved to the priest, such as ministers of the Eucharist at Mass, readers of the scriptures, and directors of worship. By 1999 as many as 29,146 laypeople and religious were working as paid parish ministers in the nation's Catholic parishes. The vast majority of them (82 percent) were women. Such a development has been described as "a virtual revolution in pastoral ministry." In many of the parishes without a resident priest a lay person, often a woman, is the designated pastor. One such parish is located in Saginaw, Michigan where Sister Honora Remes is the woman pastor of St. Mary's Cathedral. She "does everything a pastor does except say Mass and administer the sacraments. She hires the staff, manages the finances and budget, provides counseling and advice to parishioners, oversees the liturgies and supervises the religious, social and educational programs." Such an arrangement where the priest is "a special guest star, a visiting shaman who does his routine and is gone," has become quite common throughout the Midwest, most especially in the more rural areas of the Great Plains region.

Recently the reputation of the Catholic priesthood has been severely tarnished because of the revelations of widespread sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests. This issue first gained notoriety in Louisiana in the 1980s with the conviction of Rev. Gilbert Gauthe who was sentenced to 20 years in prison for molesting more than 100 boys. Hardly an isolated instance, similar accusations of sex abuse by priests came to light in Texas, Minnesota, New Mexico and Massachusetts. For the first time in their history American Catholics had to acknowledge the scandalous and criminal behavior of abusive priests. Nothing like this had even happened before. Then, in January 2002 came the revelation that for years the leadership of the Archdiocese of Boston had been covering up the criminal behavior of abusive priests who preyed upon innocent children. These priests were quietly reassigned, millions of dollars of hush money was paid to their victims, and the Boston faithful were kept in the dark about these abusive priests, many of whom continued to minister in parishes where they still had contact with young children. This scandal left Catholics shocked and angry. Reporters from the Boston Globe first broke the story. They continued their investigation for several months and each new revelation of the abusive behavior of priests only increased the people's feeling of betrayal. By the end of the year 94 priests had been accused, 27 of whom had been removed or suspended from the ministry. Eventually, because of his complicity in the cover up of abusive priests, the Cardinal Archbishop of Boston resigned. But what happened in Boston was not an isolated phenomenon. Across the entire nation victims began to come forth and level accusations against abusive priests. In Florida the Bishop of the Palm Beach Diocese was forced to resign after admitting he sexually abused a seminarian more than 25 years ago. A bishop in Kentucky also resigned after accusations of sexual abuse. The Cardinal Archbishop of Los Angeles was accused of covering up numerous instances of sexual abuse by priests. The scandal appeared to know no boundaries. First surfacing in Boston, accusations of sexual abuse spread across the country. Boston was but the epicenter of a scandal that rocked the church from Maine to California. A New York Times study (Jan. 12, 2003) found that in the United States as many as 1205 priests were accused of sexual abuse in 2002; of these 432 have resigned, retired or been removed from ministry. The Midwest was scarcely immune.

During the course of 2002 308 priests in the Midwest region were accused of sexual abuse. The largest numbers were in the major dioceses of Chicago(30), Cleveland(33), and Detroit(26). In Cleveland a priest accused of molesting a girl committed suicide. The archbishop of Cleveland, Anthony Pila and his auxiliary, A. James Quinn, were both accused of obstruction of justice and forced to testify before the Grand Jury which decided not to indict the bishops. The prosecutor for Cuyhoga County claimed that 145 priests in the Cleveland archdiocese had been accused of sexual abuse, but only a handful would come to trial because of the statute of limitations.(Cleveland Plain Dealer, Dec. 5, 2002) Four priests in the Cincinnati archdiocese have been suspended because of the charges of sexual abuse. In addition, the local prosecutor has accused the archdiocese of Cincinnati of "withholding documents" that were supposed to have been turned over as part of an investigation into sexual abuse allegations. (Cincinnati Enquirer, May 21, 2003) Milwaukee, Wisconsin was the scene of one of the most improbable and shocking revelations. Rembert Weakland, the well known and highly respected archbishop of Milwaukee, publicly acknowledged that he paid \$450,000 to a man who claimed he had been sexually abused by Weakland. The archbishop resigned shortly thereafter. More

shocking news came from the rural, monastic environment of Collegeville, Minnesota when it was revealed that as many as 13 monks at the Benedictine Abbey of St. John were suspended and put on restriction by the Abbey after credible evidence of sexual misconduct involving 24 victims. Among the accused was the monk who in 1971 was elected as the seventh abbot of St. John's, the largest Benedictine institution in the world.

The list of accusations appeared to be endless. Some of these may well be bogus. Too many, however, are well founded. Such scandalous behavior has done immense harm to the church. In terms of public opinion the church has reached its nadir. Never before, even in the days of rabid anti-Catholicism when the Ku Klux Klan was riding high in popularity, has the prestige of the church descended to such a low ebb. Because of the complicity of numerous bishops in covering up the charges of sexual abuse by priests their prestige and authority as moral and spiritual leaders has diminished considerably. The Catholic hierarchy has been challenged to become more open and honest in how they deal with this scandal. How they respond may well determine what future the church has in this country.

### **Education- The Parochial School, Vouchers, and the Fighting Irish**

The national scandal of sexually abusive priests has commanded so much media attention that the press has ignored the good that the church has done and continues to do. As understandable as this is, it does indeed diminish the attention that the good work of the church deserves. One area deserving of recognition is education. The Catholic Church has one of the largest elementary school systems in the country, second only to the public school system. Like its public counterpart the Catholic educational enterprise has helped to shape an educated populace which is the foundation of a free, democratic society. In providing such an education it has also stressed the necessity of a moral and religious perspective as the foundation stone for building a just society. Equally significant it has stressed the need for a good society where the welfare of the community balances the needs of the individual. These are values intrinsic to the Catholic educational enterprise that have helped to shape the public life of the nation in general and the Midwest in particular.

The concept of a private parochial school transformed the American educational enterprise. In fact, it may be argued that in terms of shaping public policy this is the one area where Catholics have had the most decisive influence. This all began in the nineteenth century when the idea of the public school, a free education for all children, gained acceptance. Catholics were the first to challenge this idea. Since Protestant culture and religion shaped the public school in those days, Catholics were reluctant to have their children attend such schools. Not only did they establish their own parochial schools, but they also sought to gain public funds to support these schools. Catholics waged this battle throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This has precipitated a public debate over the issue of public funds for private schools that has continued to the present day.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century the Catholic parochial school remains very much alive. In the Midwest region in 2002 there were 2255 elementary schools educating 596,998 children. This represented close to one-third of all the parochial schools in the nation. Even though this is a major commitment on the part of the church in the Midwest, not every parish has a school. In fact, in the Midwest only one in three parishes has a school. Ohio leads the region with close to half of the state's parishes supporting a parochial school. Illinois, Wisconsin, and Indiana also have a sizable elementary school population. In the far west region of the Midwest the church in the Dakotas is able to support very few parochial schools. Only 10 percent of the parishes in this region have such a school. Such disparity underscores the vast differences in this Midwestern region. Those states that border the Great Lakes are the heartland of Midwest Catholicism whereas the Plains States such as the Dakotas resemble mission territory. A similar pattern is evident as regards secondary schools. There are only four Catholic high schools in the two states of North and South Dakota. Ohio retains its prominence as a leader in Catholic education with the most Catholic high schools, 79. Illinois is close behind with 76 schools. The entire region supports 355 secondary schools.

This snapshot of Catholic education can be very misleading. Hidden behind this data is the chilling reality of a shrinking educational enterprise.

Since the 1960s the number of Catholic schools has been in decline. The reasons for this are complex—declining birth rate, doubts about the value of a parochial school education, declining number of women religious teachers and the rising number of lay teachers with a corresponding increase in the financial cost of operating an elementary or secondary school. As a result between 1964 and 1984 40 percent of the nation's Catholic high schools and 27 percent of its elementary schools closed their doors. This trend has continued into the twenty-first century.

In 1990 Catholics supported 7395 parochial schools; by 2002 this number had declined to 6886. In the Midwest a similar decline has taken place. In 1992 there were 2465 elementary schools in the region; by 2002 the number had declined to 2255. The Archdiocese of Chicago, which has the largest Catholic school system in the country, is typical of this shift. In 1965 Chicago was supporting 429 parochial schools; by 2001 the number had declined to 261, a 39 percent decline. The same pattern was true of secondary schools. Their numbers declined from 95 in 1965 to 43 in 2001. As in other dioceses the Chicago archdiocese had recorded a decline in the Catholic school population in every year since 1965. As bad as the decline has been in the past, it has moderated in recent years. In fact, in some regions enrollment is up to a modest degree. According to one report “more than 40 percent of all Catholic elementary and secondary schools have waiting lists for admission.”(New York Times, Aug. 6, 2000)

A key transformation in the educational enterprise has been the disappearance of the women religious teacher. Books and plays have lampooned the strict nun who ruled the classroom with an iron fist. This may have been true in the 1940s and 50s, but in 2002 that image is as out-of-date as the dinosaur. The teaching sister is a vanishing breed principally because of the catastrophic decline in the numbers of women religious. Since 1966 the number of women religious has declined by 58 percent (from 181,421 to 75,500 in 2002). Even these numbers are deceiving since many sisters are retired and not at all actively involved in any type of ministry. In Chicago, for example, one-third of the 2847 sisters in the archdiocese are retired. This decline has transformed the parochial school classroom. In 1960 three out of every four teachers in the parochial schools was a women religious. The Catholic sister in her medieval-looking religious garb was an icon that represented everything the parochial school stood for—religion, discipline, tradition, education. Over the course of the next few decades this icon disappeared. By the year 2000 only seven percent of the teachers in the nation's Catholic schools was a sister. Young laymen and women have replaced the sisters in the classroom.

The financial implications of this shift in personnel have been quite significant. In years past the financial survival of the parish school was never an issue. The sisters who taught in these schools worked for just about nothing. They were free labor in many respects. Some would even say slave labor! With their demise and the arrival of lay teachers, salaries had to become more realistic and indeed competitive. This raised the cost of operating the schools and as a result tuition rose substantially. A Catholic education was no longer a bargain, most especially in comparison with a free, public school education. Increased labor costs and the refusal of parents to pay substantial tuition fees forced many schools to close. Financially they were just too much of a drain on the parish budget. In addition, as the landscape of urban America changed many Catholics moved from the city to the suburbs. This depopulation of urban Catholic neighborhoods forced many parish schools to close. In fact, it was in these inner city neighborhoods where much of the decline in the Catholic school population took place.

Because of the financial demands associated with operating and maintaining an elementary school Catholics have once again looked to the public sector for financial assistance. In recent years such assistance has become more feasible with the introduction of tuition vouchers. The voucher system “provides parents with a portion of the public educational funding allotted for their child... and allows them to use these funds to

attend the school of their choice.” In 1990 “the Wisconsin state legislature authorized the first state funded urban school voucher initiative.” This law allowed Milwaukee children from low income families to attend private schools, both religious and non-religious, using state vouchers. Such a radical change in the state’s educational policy caused a fire storm of controversy. It was not long before the law was challenged in the courts. In 1998 the Wisconsin Supreme Court decided in a 4-2 decision that a school voucher program that included religious schools was constitutional. By 2002 enrollment in the voucher program in Milwaukee exceeded 10,000 students in about 100 schools, nearly 40 of which are Catholic schools . A similar program began in Cleveland, Ohio in 1995. Opponents to this voucher program challenged it in the courts. As in Wisconsin the main objection was that public money should not be used in religious schools. In 2002 the U.S. Supreme Court in a 5-4 decision upheld the constitutionality of the Cleveland program. The three Catholic members of the court voted with the majority.

Catholic schools in the inner cities have benefited from these school choice programs. Many of these schools were faced with declining enrollments. Now they have waiting lists. One such school is Messmer High School located near a freeway in one of Milwaukee’s poorest neighborhoods. Like other inner city schools many of its students are not Catholic. At Messmer about 80 percent of its 400 students are non-Catholic. “More than half are there because of the voucher program.”(New York Times Aug. 6, 2000) In Cleveland it is much the same. At St. Francis, an elementary school founded in 1887 to serve German immigrants, the enrollment is 97 percent African-American and 98 percent non-Catholic. Three out of four students are living at or below the poverty level. The voucher program has been essential for these children and has kept the school open. In 2003 there were 155 students on vouchers out of a school population of 250. As the assistant principal said, the voucher program “has changed the mission of who we serve. We now serve the poor.”(National Catholic Reporter March 21,2003)

Although the voucher program was initially promoted by civil rights groups and conservative republicans, Catholics have become strong supporters of this version of school choice. At the national level the Catholic Educational Association and the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops have given strong support to the voucher concept. At the state level the Catholic church through its state Catholic conferences has become an active advocate of voucher programs. In Wisconsin, for example, the Wisconsin Catholic Conference, a lobbying organization, monitors the activity of the state legislature. Not surprisingly it is an avid supporter of the Milwaukee voucher program and issues press releases to that effect whenever the opportunity arises.

Surveys indicate that as many as 60 percent of Americans express support for vouchers. These same surveys found that as many as 72 percent of Catholics support vouchers. Together with born-again Christians they are “especially supportive of vouchers.” Religion clearly seems to have an influential role in shaping people’s attitude toward vouchers. The National Survey of Religion and Politics conducted by the Bliss Institute reached similar conclusions with better than half of those who were highly committed Catholics favoring school vouchers. Yet, it is worth noting that in the same group close to one-third opposed the idea. So the Catholic laity is divided on the issue. This is even more apparent when low committed Catholics were surveyed. Only 39 percent favored school vouchers while 44 percent oppose them. Among Midwest Catholics the percentage of those supporting and those opposing vouchers are almost identical to the national figures. Black Protestants and Hispanic Christians, those groups most likely to benefit from the voucher programs, match the Catholics in terms of support for school vouchers.

The success of the school voucher program has clearly reshaped the educational landscape in the United States. Though the program still has many powerful opponents, the U.S. Supreme Court decision in 2002 suggests that school vouchers will become a permanent fixture in American society. The Catholic church and its school system has not only profited from this program, but it remains a major supporter of this program.

Catholic colleges have long been beneficiaries of public funding. Such funding, most often in the form of

research grants, has enabled many colleges to achieve a degree of excellence unimagined in the pioneer days of the nineteenth century. These schools represent the capstone of the Catholic educational system.

The most authoritative source lists 212 Catholic colleges in the United States. This represents about 40 percent of the church related colleges in the country. Sixty-eight of the nation's Catholic colleges are located in the Midwest. Traditionally Catholic colleges were mainly located in the cities where the bulk of the Catholic population lived. These colleges- DePaul and Loyola in Chicago, University of Detroit in the Motor City, Xavier in Cincinnati, Marquette in Milwaukee, John Carroll in Cleveland, and Creighton in Omaha- educated scores of professionals- lawyers, doctors, accountants, teachers, and businessmen- who lived and worked in these cities. Many of the political power brokers in these cities were educated in Catholic colleges. The most notable perhaps was Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago who was a graduate of De Paul University. His son, Richard M. Daley, the current Mayor of Chicago, was also a graduate of DePaul.

The University of Notre Dame, located in South Bend, Indiana is clearly the most well known and most highly ranked Catholic college in the Midwest as well as the country. Its impact on public affairs in the nation can be measured by the participation of its graduates in the political arena. Condoleezza Rice is President George W. Bush's National Security Advisor. Another graduate, Richard Allen, served in the same capacity for President Ronald Reagan. Peter King is a noted Congressional leader from New York. Bruce Babbitt was Secretary of the Interior in the Clinton administration. Many more have held elected offices at the state and local level.

"Notre Dame," in the words of its most well-known President, Theodore Hesburgh, "is where the church does its thinking." This boast is well founded since the University has become a major center for the study of religion and American life. One reason for this is the close relationship that the University has established with the Lilly Foundation. Located in Indianapolis, this foundation has been a major supporter of research endeavors related to the study of religion. The Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism, founded in 1975, was one of the first Notre Dame enterprises to benefit from the largesse of the Lilly Foundation. Through its newsletter, publications, seminars, research grants and conferences it has established itself as the leading center in the country for the study of American Catholicism.

As a national center for liturgical studies, Notre Dame has annually sponsored national gatherings where Catholics from across the country discuss various aspects of the liturgy. It was also a major center for the Charismatic Movement which was quite popular in the 1970s and 80s. The Institute for Latino Studies, recently established at Notre Dame, has emerged as a major research center. The Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies has become a key resource in helping church leaders to understand issues of peace and justice as they pertain to American society. The University has also sponsored debates on such controversial public issues as abortion, the death penalty, and war. These discussions have influenced the policy makers of the church as they seek to articulate their response to such critical issues.

Without a doubt Notre Dame is best known for its football team. The ghosts of Knute Rockne, the Gipper, and Frank Leahy still haunt the stadium. In the 1920s, 30s and 40s Catholics across the country took pride in the Fighting Irish when they defeated such powerhouses as Southern California, Southern Methodist, or Army. These fans became known as the subway alumni, men and some women, who never had the opportunity to attend Notre Dame, but became loyal supporters of the school and its football team. Its achievements on the gridiron gained Notre Dame immeasurable popularity. Immigrant Catholics took pride in Notre Dame's accomplishments on the gridiron. Even those who were not Catholic learn to root for the Fighting Irish. Such recognition has continued to the present day. Catholics and Protestants alike look upon Notre Dame as the embodiment of the Catholic success story. Catholics especially take pride in its achievements, both on the gridiron and in the classroom. Indeed, they visit the campus by the thousands every year. In fact, Notre Dame is one of the most popular tourist sites in Indiana, second only to the

Indianapolis Speedway. For many people it is more than a university. It is a shrine where one can personally experience an appreciation of the Catholic story as they walk around the huge campus.

## **The Quest for a Good Society**

In the course of the twentieth century Catholic church leaders increasingly began to articulate moral and political positions that they believed would benefit the welfare of American society. This concern for the public square took on a renewed vigor as a result of the Second Vatican Council. As one observer noted, the council “moved the church into far greater participation in social and political affairs. The council stressed that the church as an institution and Catholics in general had a positive obligation to involved themselves in the problems of the world.” The council document, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, provided Catholics with a theological rationale for a public Catholicism. It not only recognized the importance of culture shaping religion, but it also underscored the need for religion to transform culture.

One major initiative in the post-Vatican II era was the establishment of episcopal conferences. These conferences would allow the bishops of a particular nation to exercise their pastoral office jointly for the welfare of their respective countries. In the United States this resulted in the formation of what is now known as the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. This conference has been very active in issuing statements and lobbying on a wide range of issues, many of which related to social justice. In fact, between 1966 and 1988 the American hierarchy issued 188 official statements and letters and more than half of these addressed issues of social justice. Such activity persuaded one commentator to write that “through the unprecedented activism of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops during the 1980s, American Catholic bishops assumed a position as chief religious commentators on American politics.”

One of the most important pastoral letters was the 1983 letter on nuclear war, *The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response*. One commentator claimed that it was the “most significant event in the American Catholic Church, and perhaps in the international church, since the Second Vatican Council.” The driving force behind this letter was the Archbishop of Chicago, Joseph Bernardin. Appointed archbishop of the most prestigious diocese in the Midwest in 1982, Bernardin quickly established himself as the recognized leader of the American hierarchy. Known as a moderate, he envisioned himself as a major actor in the public arena, seeking to influence public policy through lobbying Congress as well as the White House and the State House. In a series of lectures he crafted what he described as a “consistent ethic of life” urging Americans to protect human life in the womb as well as in the face of nuclear war. He soon “extended his consistent ethic beyond abortion and war” to such life issues as capital punishment and poverty.

Another key pastoral letter in the 1980s addressed the state of the national economy. Published in 1986 after two years of consultation, *Economic Justice for All* was able to draw on a rich tradition of Catholic social teaching. One commentator described it as the “most detailed, systematic, and thorough application of Catholic social thought to a concrete, particular economy.” The principal architect of this pastoral letter was another Midwesterner, Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee. A Benedictine monk, he was elected the Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Order in 1967 at the age of 40. Ten years later the Pope appointed him as the Archbishop of Milwaukee. He soon became identified with the more liberal wing of American Catholicism. Other dioceses even began to copy some of his “innovative policies” such as “placing women in senior positions, streamlining the bureaucracy, assuring pensions for lay employees and higher pay for teachers, establishing a program for spritual renewal for parishes and mandating that each parish have a lay council” With the death of Bernardin in 1996 and the resignation of Weakland in 2002 Midwest Catholicism has lost two charismatic leaders. No one has been able to replace either one of them in terms of national prestige.

As active as church leaders are at the federal level through the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, it is at the state level that the church is having a most significant influence. Every state in the Midwest has a

Catholic conference that serves as the official voice of the church on matters of public policy. These conferences came into vogue in the post Vatican II era when Catholics began to think more about shaping the public life of the nation. Even though very little has been written about these conferences, they are most influential. They represent the church as lobbyists in the state legislatures keeping track of proposed legislation. In Minnesota, for example, the conference has recently been tracking legislation dealing with special education, partial birth abortion, increasing the minimum wage, prescription drug rebates, gun control and the death penalty. The Michigan conference outlines its public policy initiatives in the following manner:

Through the Michigan Catholic Conference, the official Catholic position on public policy matters is presented with one voice to the legislative and executive branches of government at both the state and federal level. ... Guided by the biblical imperative for a commitment to justice, MCC advocates on such wide ranging matters as education, health care, economics, assisted suicide, capital punishment, abortion, immigration and the environment. Issues are viewed in light of their effect on the well-being of all persons, the significance of their impact on public policy, and their implications for the Catholic community.

These conferences help to shape the public policy of the states. In North Dakota, for example, each year the conference publishes a report card on its achievements and its defeats. In 2003 the conference director listed the two best bills passed in the legislature. One ensured conscience protection for adoption agencies and the other was a ban on human cloning.

North Dakota's concern about the conscience clause highlights an issue of public policy that worries Catholic church leaders. The conscience clause grants to Catholic institutions such as hospitals or social service agencies that receive federal or state funding an exemption from providing contraceptive and sterilization services that are contrary to Catholic ethical teaching. The conscience clause is not without opponents, however. Such organizations as Planned Parenthood oppose such a situation in which a Catholic hospital, receiving public funds, does not provide a full range of reproductive services because of the conscience clause exemption. The chief beneficiary of this exemption are hospitals. The Midwest has 238 Catholic hospitals serving over 31 million patients. A huge enterprise, it depends on state and federal support through the public Medicare and Medicaid programs. If these hospitals were to lose public funding, many would be forced to close. For this reason Catholic lobbyists at both the federal and state level are vigilant in protecting this exemption.

Human life issues are especially paramount with the state Catholic conferences. Taking their cue from the national conference of bishops, they focus on issues that both respect the dignity of the human person and serve the common good. For the most part their agenda does reflect the opinion of most Catholics. The one area where the official church position differs considerably from the people in the pew is sexual ethics. The Catholic laity is much more liberal on these issues. Abortion is a good example of this divergence of opinion.. All state conferences take a strong anti-abortion stance trying to halt any legislation that would enhance the status of abortion. Yet, the Catholic laity are divided on this issue. One recent poll found that two-thirds of Catholics believe abortion should be legal. If the woman's life was in danger, the percentage of Catholics approving abortion climbs to 83 percent. If the reason for the abortion is the likelihood of a birth defect, the rate of approval declines to 51 percent. Such differences of opinion based on different situations suggest that attitudes about abortion are quite complex. Yet, the official church position on this issue does not allow for much nuance. It has adopted a firm anti-abortion, pro-life stance. In doing so it has aligned itself with organizations in American society who seek to overturn the 1973 Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to say that the Catholic hierarchy is in the forefront of this movement to change the legal status of abortion in the United States. Nevertheless, a significant number of people in the pew refuse to support the bishops in this regard.

Another issue of human life is the death penalty. Along with Pope John Paul II, the Catholic hierarchy has



taken a strong anti-death penalty stance. State conferences in the Midwest have also taken strong stances against the death penalty. The personal journey of the Catholic sister, Helen Prejean, chronicled in her book, *Dead Man Walking*, has linked Catholicism with opposition to the death penalty. Such opposition has led to an increase in Catholic support for the abolition of the death penalty. Nonetheless, the majority of Catholics (62 percent), like most Americans, still favor the death penalty. Once again individual Catholics differ from the church's official stance on an issue of public policy. The same can be said about opposition to the war in Iraq. The Catholic church leadership, both John Paul II and the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, opposed the American act of war against Iraq. But the majority of Catholics, like most Americans, supported President Bush's decision to invade Iraq.

This difference of opinion between the church leadership and the people in the pew on such issues as abortion and the death penalty raises the question of just how effective the church is in shaping the public policy of American society. If it cannot persuade its own members on such key issues, how can it be expected to persuade the rest of the American public who are not Catholic. Nonetheless, its prophetic voice is still an important force in the public square.

The church is also actively lobbying on behalf of the poor. In this area there is much more agreement between the hierarchy and the Catholic laity. At the state level every state conference in the Midwest seeks to encourage legislation that will benefit the poor. According to one national survey, the majority of Catholics, 63 percent, believe that "society has a responsibility for helping poor people get out of poverty." Another poll found that three of four Catholics believed that more money should be provided for health care for poor children. Even more telling was the poll that indicated that 58 percent of Catholics believed charitable efforts toward helping the poor was essential to their faith. This element of faith was second only to the belief that God is present in the sacraments. All of this data suggest that Catholics "have a more communitarian ethic that emphasizes solidarity, interdependence, and the common good rather than the individualism, independence, and self-help characteristic of the Protestant ethic." This attitude has supported the efforts of church leaders at both the national and state level to shape public policy.

The Catholic effort to influence public policy does not end at the state level. Every diocese has its own departments that follow the lead of the state conferences on issues of concern. An office of Catholic Charities operates in every diocese. Such offices monitor legislation at the state and local level that affects the welfare of the underprivileged. Some dioceses sponsor offices of peace and justice. They too work on behalf of social justice. As the Chicago archdiocese office of peace and justice puts it, they promote "advocacy efforts to assist the poor and vulnerable in the Chicago area. Through education and advocacy, parishioners are encouraged to take informed action to influence public policy in line with the Catholic Conference of Illinois, and the U.S. Catholic Conference." Thus, at all levels- national, state, regional, and local-Catholics are linked together to form a powerful political lobby that seeks to shape public policy.

In spite of its late start Catholicism in the Midwest has caught up with the church in the Northeast in terms of prestige and significance. Even though Catholics in the different regions of the country may share many similarities in terms of belief, worship, devotional practices, and attitudes toward social policy, Catholicism in the Midwest still maintains a certain distinctiveness. This is due to its distinct historical tradition, its location in the rural heartland of the nation, its very diverse ethnic heritage, and an openness to innovation. Given the vastness of the nation and its very diverse geographical and cultural regions, this tension between uniformity and regional diversity will always remain a hallmark of Catholicism in the United States.