



PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

On Generations and Tradition

While sitting toward the back of the room at the American Catholic Council in Detroit last June, it struck me that the dominant color in the room was gray. The average age of those gathered was definitely well above the mean. Naturally, this should come as a surprise to no one. Those of us who experienced the changes of Vatican II are much more likely to be concerned about the restorationist trend of the past 30 years. Where we were once thrilled at the changes in the church and the genuine encounter with *aggiornamento* after the Council, we have since been disappointed with the push back to an authoritarian style of leadership. We, who experienced the opening up of so many opportunities for lay people and witnessed liturgy that was able to express the community itself, are deeply concerned that a church of clericalism will resume. We know what it is like to live in a church where the only voice that mattered was "Father's." Quite frankly, we do not want to go back to that.

Unfortunately, since most of us recognize that any change in the church occurs at glacial speed, we also must acknowledge that the reforms we advocate may not happen in our lifetime. That means, quite simply, that we must rely on those generations that follow us to see through meaningful reforms. Which presents us with a huge question: are those younger than us prepared to carry such an agenda forth? Even more to the point, do they care? We saw little evidence of the concerns of younger Catholics in Detroit. There were some present, of course, but the numbers were bleak. If this is representative of the actual support of reform among the younger church, then we must conclude that as we pass on, so will our dreams of reform. I, for one, do not believe that this is the case. I am convinced that there is a desire for a church that is alive, and even more importantly, relevant.

As one who has been working with young people for a very long time now, as an educator and volunteer, I have certainly observed the changing generations. There is considerable literature available that describes the various generations. While labels are not entirely appropriate, they can be useful in describing aggregate trends. The oldest generation, frequently called: "The Silent Generation" are those born before 1946. These are also referred to as the "Pre-Vatican II" generation.

They have seen the changes better than anyone. They lived in a very different church. Their response to the changes has been rather diffuse. Many resented the changes as taking away pieces of the Catholic culture that they valued. Many others celebrated the changes as liberating. Since they grew up in a church that expected their compliance, they were mostly silent.

The giant bulge in our demographics is found in the "Baby Boomer Generation" or those born between 1946 and 1965. As a member of that generation, I can say that for the most part we embraced the Vatican II reforms. Those of us that experienced the changes in our adolescent or early adult years found value in liturgy that was relevant and opportunities for greater participation. Unfortunately, this generation was also poorly catechized with respect to the teachings of Vatican II. Consequently, generally speaking, we did not pass this on to our children as well as we might have. Particularly with the American Church, we tended to take liberties with many aspects of church life. This was not so much because we were being rebellious but that we were not educated well in theology and ecclesiology. This was also a reflection of the major cultural shifts that were occurring around us. As we aged, we certainly mellowed but remained quite independent minded.

The rise of Generation X (Born 1965 -- 1976) brought with it unique challenges. This generation is fiercely independent and resists the notion of conformity. They grew up in a world of much higher divorce rates and blended families. Their church experience was one that was incredibly diverse. They became accustomed to liturgies that were as varied as there were parishes. While they are somewhat aware of Vatican II, it is not seen as a major influence in their spiritual lives. Instead, they rely more on individualized spirituality. At the same time, the likelihood of them remaining fervently Catholic is much lower than the generations before them. They generally mistrust institutions of any kind, so they are not particularly committed to the institution of the church. There is a strong strain of pragmatism in Generation X, which allows them to see the church as a spiritual vehicle when it is needed. As long as the ecclesial experience works for them they will remain. When it no longer works or conflicts with their values they will drift away.

The Millennial Generation (Born 1977 - 1999) also referred to as Generation Y by some, tends to

be also individualist but can also tend to favor structure. They are not as likely to ignore the rules as they are to re-write them. This is the generation that is now giving us the "retro priests." Because

Ironically, they tend to consider institutions as irrelevant. They are technologically connected but not as personally. They celebrate diversity as those who have grown up in a world that has always

BISHOP THOMAS GUMBLETON TO RECEIVE ARCC'S 2011 HANS KÜNG AWARD

On Friday, November 11, 2011, at 7:30 P.M., at the Best Western Hotel, 6755 Dorsey Road, Elkridge, Maryland, 21075-6206, ARCC will present its 2011 Hans Küng Rights of Catholics in the Church Award to Bishop Thomas Gumbleton.

The Award was named after Father Hans Küng (its first recipient in 2005), who was removed by the Vatican from his position as Professor of Catholic Theology at the University of Tübingen, Germany, in 1979. This was the culmination of a year-long series of silencing actions taken by the Vatican. One consequence of these actions was the formation of the Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church in the United States, which is now an international organization of Catholics working for structural reform of the Church.

Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, a retired auxiliary bishop of the Detroit archdiocese, is a leading voice for peace, justice, and civil rights in the United States. He is a co-author of the 1983 U.S. Catholic Bishops' Conference Pastoral Letter, "The Challenge of Peace." One of the first bishops to speak out against the Vietnam War, he is a founding member and past president of Pax Christi USA, the American Catholic peace movement. He is also a founder and former president of Bread for the World.

Since becoming a bishop in 1968, he has traveled throughout the world calling for an end to war and the abolition of nuclear weapons. He has spoken out courageously on behalf the victims of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church, and he has advocated for the full participation and the rights of women and homosexuals in the Catholic Church. He has met with victims of war in Iraq, Afghanistan, Vietnam, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Israel, Palestine, Colombia, Haiti, and Peru. He led a delegation to visit the American hostages in Iran in 1979. Among his many awards and honorary degrees are the 2007 Detroit Spirit of MLK Award and numerous lifetime achievement awards for peacemaking. His homilies are read by thousands each week in the *National Catholic Reporter*. From 1983-2007 he was the pastor of St. Leo Parish, a vibrant church in inner-city Detroit. In January of 2007 he was forced by the archdiocese of Detroit to leave his post and his home at St. Leo's. He continues to serve the people of Detroit as a priest and bishop, and to travel the world speaking and working on behalf of victims of war, violence, and prejudice.

The public is welcome. Donation at the door is \$10.00.
Information: Tel. 877-700-ARCC ; e-mail: arcc@arccsites.org



Bishop Thomas Gumbleton with Sr. Christine Schenk and Bishop Geoffrey Robinson three years ago at Temple University in Philadelphia when Bishop Robinson received the same award Bishop Gumbleton will receive on November 11.

they favor setting their own rules, these young priests believe what they are imposing on parishes is actually the way things were. It is less a matter of wanting to go back to the Pre-Vatican II period as a complete ignorance of it. The Millennials are committed to the idea of the church in many ways but not as much to its theology or ecclesiology.

presented it. The amazing thing for us to remember about Millennials is that they have never lived in a world without internet, cell phones, or satellite television.

The significance of the generational changes is very critical for ARCC. One of the board members asked me if we were about to become irrelevant. I

have to respond in two ways. First, we will not be irrelevant because rights will always be relevant. So our mission will always exist. Recent events have shown that our *raison d'être* is even more important than ever before. The aggressive actions of the hierarchy have become more and more pronounced. On the other hand, unless we can reach those who have come after us, we are in danger of extinction. The average age of the members and board of ARCC is quite high. At 60, I am one of the youngest members of the board. We have invited some younger individuals to join but really not having much success. This is even more significant in terms of membership. Our membership numbers have been in steady decline. Now is the time to act.

So, I ask you, our loyal members, for your help. I know that the collective wisdom of ARCC is immense, so we should be able to meet this challenge. I welcome any ideas that may help us reach a younger audience. Naturally, I am not for one minute, turning away from our mature membership. Quite the contrary, I want to develop an intergenerational association which will wield a more effective voice on behalf of the rights of Catholics in the church. I also welcome any other suggestions you may have to strengthen ARCC. I know we can make a difference. We just need to re-focus our attention and broaden our base. If you want to write directly to me with suggestions or comments, I would be grateful. I may be reached by e-mail at patedgar_2005@yahoo.com or by mail at 20 Columbia 464, Magnolia, AR 71753.

Patrick B. Edgar, DPA

Update on the article on the courageous Austrian priests we published in the previous issue of *ARCC Light*

During the August 10 meeting of the board of the Parish Priest Initiative with Cardinal Schönborn I mentioned in the previous article, Archbishop Schönborn had asked them to clarify whether they would now agree in good conscience to follow the guidelines of the Church and the magisterium. Clarifying that he was not speaking as chairman of the Austrian Bishops' Conference but as their bishop, he handed the board members from the Archdiocese of Vienna a questionnaire, asking them to return it within a reasonable time.

On September 20 they published their response. They could not recant in good conscience because they continued to believe in the cause, because for years disobeying certain rigid church laws and rules had been the way they cared for their people. Openly to act contrary to their conviction and to confess what they did not believe would only sharpen the dissonance that separates the (official)

Church and being a parish priest—"a pastor of souls" (*Seelsorger*). They practice obedience in stages, listening first to God, then, their conscience, and finally, the Church.

They also noted that at the beginning of October representatives of the movement were going to attend the annual meeting of an Irish Catholic priest association in Dublin where they will have a chance to meet reform-minded priests from the USA.

Ingrid Shafer

A Review of *The Grace of Everyday Saints: How a Band of Believers Lost Their Church and Found Their Faith*, by Julian Guthrie, New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011

St. Anselm of Canterbury wrote that theology was "faith seeking understanding." In the 21st Century, we find ourselves engaged in such theology on many fronts. Some seek this understanding in a scholarly pursuit. Others seek the divine through spiritual exercises. For most, theology has been intertwined with their faith tradition, regardless of religion or denomination. Those of us who were raised in the Roman Catholic Church have sought it in the sacraments and especially in our traditions. These traditions have been tightly bound with our relationship with the institution, usually through our parish. Julian Guthrie tells the story of one such parish in San Francisco—St. Brigid's. In 1994, their Archdiocese of San Francisco announced that this parish was to be closed. The reasons given for this closure were the need to streamline the Archdiocese and to save the cost of retrofitting the structure after the 1989 earthquake. The story that follows is one of courage, frustration, and, most of all, faith. The people of St. Brigid held on to the faith that their church could be reopened. What they encounter is a hierarchy that uses subterfuge and obstruction to resist their pleas to keep their church. Nevertheless, the various participants in the Committee to Save St. Brigid, develop a deep faith that they never expected. They learned the true meaning of being followers of Christ.

Every Catholic, every person of faith for that matter, will benefit from reading this book. On the darker side, the reader learns of an institution bound in practices that were the trappings of the Medieval age. The primary tool of power is silence. If the hierarchy does not like what the people ask of it, it simply does not respond. If that does not succeed, it turns to deflection and archaic pre-bureaucratic rules. By "pre-bureaucratic" I mean that it only applies the rules that it chooses for its own benefit. In an actual bureaucracy, the rules take precedence, not the rulers. If all else fails, the hierarchy turns to disinformation, what anyone else would call lies.

On the brighter side, the reader learns of what it means to be a true faith community. The main figures become stronger in their faith despite the hierarchy not because of it. This community is an incredible mixture of faithful Catholics. There are those who cling to the sacramentals of the rosary and icons. There are also those who are dedicated to prayer and still others who rely on the liturgical process. They are conservative in their faith alongside of the more progressive. They learn not to label one another and to recognize the dignity of the other. These "everyday saints" give us a clear example of what it means to be a Catholic Christian.

Julian Guthrie captures the nature of being an authentic Christian in relaying this story of tragedy and triumph. One cannot help but love the people of St. Brigid. For those of us dedicated to a Roman Catholic Church that lives up to its values, it should be inspiring as well as challenging. This is not a story that pits liberal against conservative. It is one that declares the common human experience of faith seeking understanding.

Patrick B. Edgar, DPA

ARCC Light is published by the Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church. For membership information, contact ARCC, 3150 Newgate Drive, Florissant, MO 63033, send email to ARCC@ARCCsites.org, or visit our website, <http://www.arcc-catholic-rights.net/>
Editors: Ingrid H. Shafer, PhD. ih@ionet.net
Richard Lebrun, Ph.D. lebrun@umanitoba.ca