

*Fr. Perozich comments —*

*Barbara Farrah makes some claims regarding the changing of the church. I wonder if priests and laity share her experience of the church, where the church once was for those of us a bit older, where she is now, and if it needs to return to what Farrah suggests in order to attain to the goals she sets out for the salvation of souls.*

*Pastoral councils were to guide the parish to pastoring the parish towards Jesus. While social events and outreach to the poor, and administration are a part of the parish, sometimes these take the place of evangelization.*

*When we priests are chastised for teaching the classic morality and faith because of the rival kingdoms of bishops in their realms of socialism, where all should feel good and do whatever one's feelings tell them to do falsely in the name of conscience, attacking priests for every complaint of the laity, something is not right.*

*Slogans and euphemisms like “rigid”, “divisive”, “clericalism”, “hour of the laity”, creating “sacramental ministers” of priests under lay parish leadership are attempts to serve the world rather than the salvation of souls.*

*Farrah writes,*

***“One thing we can do is seek to restore the proper and natural roles of those who make up the Church. We can urge our bishops to return to the mandate God gave them to preach the Gospel. We can urge priests to return their focus to sanctifying the laity through sacraments and prayer. And we, the laity, must return to our mission of sanctifying the world by reclaiming our role in the Public Square.”***

# Canceling Faithful Priests

BARBARA J. FARRAH



**It's fitting that the battle for our persecuted priests is raging in the Diocese of Rockford, Illinois.** It was here, one hundred years ago, that the diocese's first bishop, the Reverend Peter J. Muldoon, issued letters to his priests calling them to form what he called "parish councils." Muldoon had come of age in the aftermath of *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII's encyclical considered to be the first of the Church's "social teachings," and he sought a means whereby each parish could implement those teachings in their local communities. His vision was to use the parish councils to bring in members of the laity, teach them Leo's principles, and then send them out, "as spokes going outward from the center

of a wheel,” into the world to make it a better place for the poor and oppressed.

The idea was perfectly consistent with what were understood to be the proper roles of bishops and laity. As noted in Scripture, when the apostles created the office of deacon, the idea was to put others in charge of the congregation’s social needs so that the bishops “may be free to preach the Gospel.” The bishops’ role was to teach the laity the Faith. The laity’s role was to then bring that Faith into the world. Bishop Muldoon’s “parish councils” were designed to do just that: bishops would teach the laity Leo’s social principles, and the laity would then go forth and make them a reality in the world. Muldoon believed in the power that well-catechized Catholic warriors could affect in the world when they were armed with Truth and a proper understanding of the Church’s social teaching.

A reading of historian Michael Warner’s 1995 publication *Changing Witness: Catholic Bishops and Public Policy, 1917-1994*, gives insight into how the Church’s implementation of its social teachings was actually carried out in America. Warner traces how the bishops, throughout the course of the 20th century, grew more and more involved in the formation of public policy. Rather than teach the laity and then let them be the instruments of social change, they proceeded to usurp the laity’s role in the public square until, as Warner puts it, they had descended so far into the minutiae of public policy that they had become, by 1994, just one more of the country’s many “political interest groups.”

**Meanwhile, parish councils, rather than being a means, as Muldoon had envisioned,** for empowering the laity to bring the Church into the world, became instead a means for the laity to bring the world into the Church. As the

bishops focused more and more on improving society through government policy, they shifted the laity's role more and more to carrying out the ministries of the Church, within the Church. This shift culminated in the Rockford Diocese in 1986 when Bishop Arthur J. O'Neill established a new diocesan agency, one he called the "Office of Ministry Formation." By 2006, diocesan officials boasted of having trained more than one thousand Catholic men and women "to serve in a variety of parish and deanery ministries."

By the start of the 21st century, this complete reversal of the roles of bishops and laity had two primary impacts: one, a redefining of the very mission of the Church in America, and two, a redefining of the role and purpose of the priesthood. As bishops sought to influence public policy, they became more and more focused on saving society through changing social structures and less and less focused on the salvation of souls. As they became more enamored of governmental power, they went from witnessing to the Gospels to witnessing to the power of systemic change. They shifted from salvation through God to salvation through the State. Rather than the Church existing for the sanctification of souls, its mission evolved—if not officially, effectively—into bringing about the salvation of society through systemic change and increasing government power.

Along with that redefining of its mission came a new understanding of the role of the priesthood. A Church whose mission is systemic change rather than the sanctification of souls no longer has need of an ordained priesthood. A Church whose faith lay in worldly power has no need of the supernatural power inherent in sacraments. Just as the roles of both bishops and laity changed dramatically in the 20th century, so, too, did the very nature and role of the Church's

priests. As more and more of the Church's ministries were turned over to the laity, the priest's primary job became managing and overseeing all those ministries, usually in the form of attending one meeting after another. Their focus shifted from providing sacraments to make men holy, to providing pastoral leadership and administrative oversight to make lay ministers more effective.

**By 2020, Pope Francis was accusing priests focused on the sacraments as being "rigid" and accusing them of "clericalism," while declaring that the "hour of the laity" has arrived. He decried "a new clericalism, which may even at times be ably veiled behind appeals for deeper spirituality or for more orthodox theological positions." He called for priests to empower the laity for "greater access to positions in the Church."**

Thus, we have arrived at the current crisis in the Church, as bishops across the country have "canceled" those priests who continue to focus on the Church's true mission and refuse to step aside and allow sacraments to be overshadowed by social action. Thus, we have arrived at the point where 70 percent of the faithful no longer understand what a sacrament is and no longer even believe in the Real Presence. And thus, we have arrived at the final irony, that whereas the bishops usurped the role of the laity in formulating public policy, the politicians have now usurped the role of the bishops in formulating Church policy (e.g., who receives the Eucharist).

How should faithful Catholics respond to this total collapse of the Church from its God-given mission of sanctifying the world to its new mission of being just another non-profit seeking social change? What can we, the laity, do?

**One thing we can do is seek to restore the proper and natural roles of those who make up the Church.**

We can urge our bishops to return to the mandate God gave them to preach the Gospel. We can urge priests to return their focus to sanctifying the laity through sacraments and prayer. And we, the laity, must return to our mission of sanctifying the world by reclaiming our role in the Public Square.

It is fitting that a group seeking to restore this proper order has emerged from the Rockford Diocese itself, where the current bishop, Bishop David J. Malloy, has undertaken a veritable crusade to cancel faithful priests loyal to Church teaching. In less than a decade, Malloy has sidelined (effectively canceling) as many as a dozen good priests, all removed unjustly and “warehoused without sufficient cause” and in violation of canon law.

Endorsed by Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano and Fr. James Altman, The Coalition for Canceled Priests (CFCP) is a lay-led non-profit formed in the Spring of 2021 “to combat this abuse of power by errant bishops and to provide much needed financial support to innocent, faithful priestly servants of Holy Mother Church.” The Coalition affirms that the mission of the Church is the sanctity and ultimate salvation of individuals, not of society. It seeks to identify priests who preach and practice the Faith, to raise funds to provide both moral and material support to such faithful priests, and to identify and call out those priests, bishops, and other Catholics who either persecute or fail to defend such priests.

**The Coalition’s first fundraiser, called “Breaking the Silence,” sold out to a crowd of over one thousand** who came to hear three keynote speakers: Fr. John Lovell (one of those sidelined by Malloy in 2012), Fr. James Altman (currently being persecuted by his bishop in Wisconsin), and acclaimed lawyer Elizabeth Yore. The event raised \$20,000 to

help with the legal fees of Malloy's most recent victim, canceled priest Fr. James Parker.

Focusing on advocacy, awareness, and action to bring attention to the plight of those priests being persecuted, the Coalition encourages fasting, prayer, and fundraising, as well as the use of canon law, to rescue persecuted priests and restore the proper roles of bishops, priests, and laity in the Church. As one active member of the Coalition put it: "We seek to restore Christ as King, not as social worker." In other words, the Coalition seeks to reestablish the proper roles of those who make up the Mystical Body of Christ, beginning with restoring the faithful priests who have been sidelined by bishops who no longer understand their proper role in the Church, nor the proper roles of priests and laity.

It's time for Bishop Muldoon's vision to become a reality. Bishops, get back in your lane! Stop persecuting priests for being priests! Return to preaching the Gospel! And step aside as the laity reclaim our role in the Public Square!

*[Image Credit: Shutterstock]*



By [Barbara J. Farrah](#)

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