

Iowa Catholicism Today

The Roman Catholic population of Iowa, according to the *Official Catholic Directory* of 1953, is 366,037 or about 14 per cent of the state's inhabitants. Just what is the impact of the faith of this Church's members on the course of public life in Iowa? In the political field, measured by elections, it has been slight. Iowa's first two United States Senators, Augustus Caesar Dodge and George Wallace Jones, became Catholics after retiring from the Senate. Richard Louis Murphy was the only Catholic to be elected by popular vote to that body, and a tragic automobile accident cut down his senatorial term (1933-1936) to a little over three years. Of the members of the federal judiciary there have been a few distinguished men like Judge Martin J. Wade of Iowa City, and, today, Judge William F. Riley of Des Moines. There have been no governors, few judges of the district or state supreme courts, and pitifully few members of the General Assembly through the years. A partial explanation is, of course, the fact that Iowa is and has been a strong Republican state, and the Irish Catholics in particular have been wedded by a peculiar tradition to the Democratic party. Few as they have been in the ranks

of legislators, Catholics have, however, been numerically strong in the ranks of the army, navy, and marines, and even in the nurses' corps — and this by voluntary enlistment, as the figures will show, as well as by selective service. In agriculture, labor, business, industry, and the professions, Iowa's Catholic population has abundantly contributed to the upbuilding of the state and the development of the nation.

A more detailed history would include reference to confraternities, sodalities, organizations, and clubs, either in the parishes or as coordinated and regulated on a diocesan basis. Suffice it to say here, that every parish in Iowa has its distinctly religious societies to induce and encourage young and old to live and practice the more devout Catholic life. Those distinctly for the male members are integrated usually in the all-embracing Holy Name Society. For the women and girls of the Catholic faith in Iowa the all-inclusive society is the four diocesan branches of the National Council of Catholic Women, which includes, besides the various parish Sodalitys of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Holy Rosary Societies, several state-wide organizations.

In addition to the above, Iowa Catholics have evinced an interest in the fraternal orders open to them since 1891, when the Catholic Order of Foresters chartered Sherman Court No. 191 at Clinton. The Knights of Columbus started its first

Iowa Council at Dubuque in 1900. Four years later the Catholic Daughters of America organized its first Iowa Court at Carroll. In 1921 the National Circle Daughters of Isabella granted the first Iowa charter to the Lady of Lourdes Circle at Davenport. By 1953, the membership of these organizations in Iowa had reached:

Knights of Columbus	21,464
Catholic Daughters of America.....	12,000
Catholic Order of Foresters.....	10,414
Daughters of Isabella.....	3,015

The largest Knights of Columbus chapter is located at Dubuque, with 1,042 members. Dubuque also has the largest Order of Foresters Subordinate Court, with 573 members in Marquette Court No. 811. The Davenport chapter of the Daughters of Isabella has 497, making it the largest in Iowa.

Several Iowans have held national offices with these orders. Mrs. Mary Phelan of Fort Madison is a past National Chancellor of the Daughters of Isabella, and Mrs. Marie Shadwell of Davenport was chosen as the 1952-1953 National Chancellor at the 1952 Toronto convention. From 1928 to 1933 the late William H. Meuser of Dubuque was High Treasurer of the Order of Foresters. George C. Iekel of Independence is now a national High Court Trustee with the same order.

Not necessarily for benevolent but certainly for

welfare purposes there is the Iowa branch of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, founded in 1923 by Bishop Edwin V. O'Hara of Kansas City, Missouri. In 1939 the Conference issued an important *Manifesto on Rural Life*, "a concise statement on agricultural and rural problems from the viewpoint of eminent leaders in the field of Catholic rural thought." There for the first time were stated principles and policies with respect to Catholic rural life affecting such vital questions as farm ownership, land tenancy, rural church expansion, rural health, farm labor, cooperatives, taxation, and credit. As far as Iowa Catholics are concerned, therefore, the Rural Life Conference is of primary importance. The national secretary and one of the moving spirits of this great rural organization is Monsignor Luigi G. Ligutti of Des Moines. For his tireless labors in this field not only local prominence but international fame has come to him. His book (with Rev. John C. Rawe, S. J.), *Rural Roads to Security*, is a pioneer work in the area of rural sociology. In a paper on "The Catholic and the American Solution of the Farm Labor Problem," Monsignor Ligutti stated:

There should be reestablished the American tradition which is thoroughly Catholic, viz., a partnership in a modified form between the operator and the laborer. It might take a different form than dividends and profit-sharing but it would be more valuable to the worker. A cow, some chickens, some pigs, a good garden spot for the farm help, and the laborer could eventually step up to tenancy and

proprietorship. Such arrangements have helped in the past; they have helped the community; they have social advantages. That which helps one family helps the whole world and helps the very ones who do the helping. We never lose or suffer by doing good to others.

A notable feature of the Catholic Church's guidance program for young men and young women has been the erection and maintenance of Newman Clubs and Catholic Student Centers at the State University of Iowa in Iowa City, at Iowa State College in Ames, and at Iowa State Teachers College in Cedar Falls. More and more this work with college students becomes significant as the world demands capable leadership grounded in Christian principles of living.

All four dioceses in Iowa have their weekly newspaper organs. Dubuque and Davenport have well-edited weeklies of their own, the *Witness* and the *Catholic Messenger*, respectively, while Sioux City and Des Moines join their local news columns with national Catholic weeklies. At one time Dubuque had the only Catholic daily newspaper in English in the entire United States — the *Catholic Daily Tribune*, published from 1920 to 1941.

The Church's vitality is not measured by its hospitals, its schools, and its church buildings, nor merely by the size of its membership. The Christian doctrine heard in the early catacombs is taught unchanged from the pulpits today, and the

filial faith of Catholic Iowans in the divine Christ is certainly as firm in 1953 as ever it was of yore among their ancestors.

An honest criterion of their contemporary zeal is the erection of the new Mount St. Bernard's Seminary at Dubuque. Iowa candidates for the priesthood had hitherto been sent to the theological seminaries of other states, of Canada, of Louvain and Innsbruck and Rome in Europe. Under the chairmanship of the archbishop of Dubuque and with the wholehearted cooperation of the bishops and people of the four dioceses of Iowa, the goal of \$2,500,000 for the building of this needed institution has been oversubscribed, and from now on Iowa's priestly vocations can be trained, nurtured, and educated in their own provincial seminary. Travelers returning to Iowa from the Holy Year pilgrimages have well stated: "The Church on the banks of the Mississippi is as strong as that on the banks of the St. Lawrence and as zealous as that on the banks of the Tiber!"

M. M. HOFFMAN