

The Catholic League in 1994

As most of you know, I started in July as president of the Catholic League. In my six months as president, many changes have taken place, both internally and externally. Those changes, I am convinced, will only make the League stronger. Let me share them with you.

Internally, we have moved from salaried regional and local offices to a base of volunteer chapters. The cost of maintaining a national office and a publications office is central to the operations of the Catholic League, and that is why few changes have been forthcoming in those areas. But the situation with chapters is different. Most national organizations have no chapters at all. That, however, is not the way to build a truly national, grassroots organization. But it is also true that grassroots organizations need not be staffed by persons funded by the national office: they can be staffed quite effectively through a base of dedicated and talented volunteers.

Long Island is a case in point. Through the work of Bill Lindner, a board member of the Catholic League, the Long Island chapter has prospered very well. Bill is a volunteer. He not only heads up the Long Island office, he contributes his time – free of charge – to the national office. Fortunately for Bill, and for the Catholic League, he has found a great ally in Brother Syriac of Chaminade High School in Mineola, Long Island.

Brother Syriac has played an indispensable role in organizing a highly energized chapter at Chaminade; similarly, the work of Mrs. Chojnacki in organizing a chapter at Sacred Heart in West Hempstead is exemplary. Bill, Brother Syriac and Mrs. Chojnacki are living proof that a volunteer model can be a model of excellence. And under the tutelage of Joe Doyle of Boston, the future of the volunteer chapters looks very bright

indeed.

Externally, the Catholic League has made its mark.

Our media coverage, together with our impact on national and local issues, has clearly been felt. Cited increasingly in the press, and called on for interviews by radio and television, the Catholic League has positioned itself as the premier Catholic civil rights organization in the country. Having won the good will of persons like Cardinal O'Connor of New York, we are poised to increase our effectiveness in 1994.

Perhaps the best news of all is the dramatic growth in membership. As a result of our heightened media profile and our direct mail campaign, the unprecedented growth. One of the nice problems we have had lately is trying to keep up with the processing of all the new members we have been attracting. It is a problem that will happily endure in 1994 as well.

Why all the action now? You already know the answer.

Catholics have had it. They've had it with the ridicule, the snide remarks, the bigoted portrayals in the media and the jokes that would never be told of Jews, blacks or homosexuals. Most of all, they've had it with the lackadaisical response that their fellow lay Catholics have heretofore shown when their Church comes under attack.

The Catholic League is experiencing a resurgence precisely because we are not willing to acquiesce.

Our stance is explicitly combative. We are not an organization 'for the faint-hearted, nor are we at all defensive about our posture. Always responsible but never timid, the Catholic League will move in 1994 to let everyone know – friend and foe alike – that Catholic- bashing will trigger a vigorous response. We don't expect to win all the battles but we do expect to win the respect of everyone, including, importantly, the bigots.

