

Pope's call for worship welcomed

By Mark Puls and Charles Hurt / The Detroit News

Maryann Schreiber, a devout Catholic, works the late, late shift Saturday night and Sunday morning at a hotel.

She has to make a living, but the Hamtramck woman does so at the cost of mounting guilt over missing church Sunday mornings.

"I want to go back to the old ways where Sunday was the Lord's day," Schreiber said. "I agree with the pope. I want that life again."

In a day when computer modems are never fast enough and no one seems to have enough time for a full night's rest, Pope John Paul II is issuing a stern warning to Catholics that they should set aside Sunday for worship -- not errands or their free time.

"This really is an extraordinary move," said Jay McNally, executive director of Call to Holiness, a Metro Detroit lay group that promotes traditional Catholic teachings. "This appears to be the strongest words the pope has issued. Period."

The pontiff used his weekly address Sunday from his window over St. Peter's Square to urge church members to make time to keep the Sabbath holy. And today, the Vatican is expected to issue an Apostolic letter from the pope further stressing the Third Commandment. Apostolic letters are incorporated into church rules.

Sundays have come to be "felt and lived only as a weekend," John Paul lamented Sunday. "It (should be) the weekly day in which the church celebrates the resurrection of Christ. In obedience to the Third Commandment, Sunday must be sanctified, above all, by participation in Holy Mass."

In his letter, the pope goes on to say a violator should be "punished as a heretic," said McNally, who read an unofficial English translation of the letter on a Vatican Web site.

"A lot of families are ruined by this Sunday stuff," McNally said, referring to the loss of spirituality on that day. "It really has fallen apart."

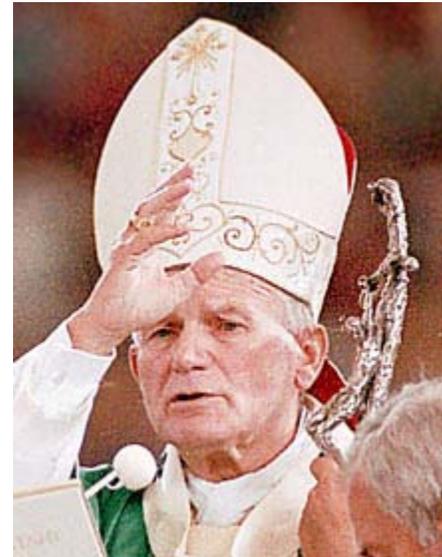
Family togetherness on Sundays, more and more, is giving way to soccer practice, globe trotting and going to the tanning salon.

"You have things you have to do," said Tina Mueller of Hamtramck. "You can't just set aside a day for prayer and reflection."

And when folks show up for church, they often forget to slow down enough to commune with God.

"Some people now are coming to church in shorts and can't wait to hit the pools after the service," Lillian Swierczyski of Hamtramck said. "That's wrong."

She supports a return to the days of the Blue Laws that closed bars, stores and amusement establishments Sundays.



Associated Press

Pope John Paul II reminds Catholics that Sunday is a day of worship.

"That would get people to church in a hurry."

Torn between loyalties

Though the pope's letter is directed at Catholics, his concerns reach beyond the Vatican and into other religions.

"We're seeing that pull in Sunday school," said Karen Hea, a member at Grosse Pointe Woods Presbyterian Church. "Kids today have to make a decision between Sunday school and hockey practice."

The result, she said, is that children are torn between two noble and honorable commitments: church and team loyalty.

But more than just reflecting upon God, attending church forges relationships with others who share your beliefs, Hea said.

"If Sunday is hockey time, how can you mold those relationships. I can't imagine going through a difficult time without your faith family to support you through it."

Rabbi Joe Klein of Temple Emanu-El in Oak Park said the Jewish Sabbath -- Saturday -- has long conflicted with modern day's weekend mentality.

"Anytime a religious community finds itself within a greater secular culture, there will be conflicts," he said.

As a reformed rabbi, he is reluctant to condemn people for how they spend Shabbot, but he's overall optimistic about the Jewish faith surviving today's rushed world.

"Is it what I would like? No," Klein said. "I think there is an increasing spirituality in our community."

'Rampant confusion'

McNally of Call to Holiness said local religious leaders could do a better job outlining expectations for Catholics.

"There's rampant confusion among ordinary Catholics. Even some of the schools and colleges are doing a horrible job today," he said.

The concept of guilt, for example, is foreign to many today.

"People used to say 'fallen away Catholics' 30 years ago," McNally said. "Now, people just think they can change the church."

Whatever your religion, the contemplative time worship sets aside is healthy, said Linda Pieczynski, president of the Chicago-based Call to Action, a Catholic reform group which claims a membership of 18,000.

"We refresh ourselves spiritually when we have time for reflection," she said. "When we can't find time for our values, we have to ask what our real values are."

St. Clair Shores resident Kathy Lozen agreed.

"I wouldn't miss it. You have to find it within yourself. Once you do, you can't do without it. The world would be a better place if everyone went to church."

Bouncing the Blue Laws

Laws that ensure moderate, "decent" living on Sundays -- commonly called "blue laws" as a synonym for rules promoting gloom or lack of cheer -- have closed businesses and limited drinking and hunting since the 1920s and '30s. While still prevalent in parts of the South and Canada, most Blue Laws have fallen by the wayside. Here are some high points and low points

for Blue Laws around Michigan:

1969: Detroit lifted Sunday ban on selling furniture (including televisions, radios and appliances).

1969: Crowley's department store began operating its suburban branches on Sundays, but kept the downtown Detroit store closed for the Christian Sabbath.

1970: Troy city commissioners made the most recent -- and unsuccessful -- bid to close all businesses on Sunday statewide.

1973: Hamtramck began allowing businesses to open during the heavy shopping Sundays before Christmas.

1973: Lawmakers considered banning automobile travel on Sundays, though that wasn't to keep the Sabbath holy, but to conserve gasoline during the fuel shortage.

1976: Michigan bars began serving liquor by the drink at noon on Sundays, instead of the previous 2 p.m. start, though some cities kept the restrictions in place. At the same time, ski lodges won permission to serve hard liquor on Sundays that fall on Christmas Day or Dec. 26.

1986: Canadian Supreme Court upheld Toronto's 1976 law shutting most Ontario stores on Sundays.

1995: Grosse Pointe allowed stores to open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Sundays, instead of the previous 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. laws.