Priests' Interests:
A Period of Confrontation,
1968–1972

INTRODUCTION

The NFPC was founded to mobilize local priests' councils in an effort to improve the quality of the clergy and speed the pace of reform in the church and society. The Federation signified the continuing demands by priests for more say within the church. Initially the Federation would deal with limited areas, such as career expectations, professional status, personnel questions, restrictions on personal freedom, and co-responsibility.

Uppermost in the minds of these priests was the crisis in the church resulting from changes wrought by Vatican II. Priests agonized over the problems of renewing the faith and ministry; collegiality; restrictions of priests' rights of conscience, speech, and assembly; leadership gaps; and the definition of the priest. The Federation had an immediate problem of legitimatizing itself to both the rank-and-file priests and the bishops. The president of the NFPC, Father O'Malley, said that the NFPC has a right to exist; it is within the spirit of Vatican II in the democratic sense of collegiality. He went on to say: 'The bishop is no longer king. We don't have to ask permission to undertake our [NFPC] projects' (Time, 1968). The tone was set. The NFPC was saying in effect that priests weren't hired hands but were partners with the bishops in the ministry. They expected and were to demand respect as professionals. Almost immediately the NFPC was embroiled in the controversy of due process with Cardinal O'Boyle. They bargained for the rights of priests. The leaders of the NFPC felt that the Council had let them down. They were the ones who were at the forefront of the ministry; yet they were being treated as second-class citizens. They were not anarchists, but serious professionals. While respecting their superiors, they would confront them with their injustices.

With the founding of the NFPC, democracy entered the priesthood. The organization expended a great deal of energy to insure
that the issues of the grassroots were heard. The business of the Federation was simply communication and representation. Through a series of twenty provincial meetings, topics were developed ranging from relations with the bishops and reform of canon law to social action and spirituality. These would constitute the agenda of the New Orleans meeting in 1969. One problem which did command much of the NFPC’s attention and action was the issue of due process mentioned above. In response to the situation that had arisen in Washington, D.C., and San Antonio, the Executive Board determined that the theme for the 1969 meeting would be due process and collegiality (Executive Board Minutes, 1968).

One of the NFPC’s top priorities was to establish an effective liaison with the bishops through the NCCB. In the fall of 1968, the Executive Board had several meetings with Cardinal Shehan to explain the purpose of the NFPC and to affirm the desire for a collegial relationship with the hierarchy. Finally, the Executive Board met in November with the NCCB Liaison Committee for the purpose of discussing the due process issue and to further talks about the kinds of relationships that might be possible between the two groups. The NFPC also petitioned to be heard at the November meeting of the NCCB, but was denied (President’s Newsletter, 1968). This reaction hardened the relationship for some time to come. The primary emphasis and direction of the NFPC concerned priests’ interests in terms of sharing in the decision making of the hierarchy, priests’ rights, and personnel policies. This emphasis, together with a militant approach, would continue through the Baltimore convention in 1971.

**New Orleans 1969: Freedom and Priests’ Rights**

The stock joke in priests’ circles concerning the rights of an assistant pastor is that the priest has one basic right: that of Christian burial. But the rights of priests were a serious concern to the 230 delegates at this convention. At the opening session, Father O’Donoghue, one of the Washington, D.C., suspended priests, had moved that the planned agenda of speeches and discussion of internal Church affairs be scrapped in favor of open debate on the Vatican stand on
birth control, world peace, and racial and poverty programs (Herman, 1969: 1). His motion was rejected. The delegates were determined to tackle what they considered the most necessary issues, not the most important—freedom of priests and participation in the power structure. If the obstacles to these interests weren’t removed, no amount of effort could solve the problems of the commonweal. Sharing the power was the guiding motif of the convention. To the NFPC, power meant a common voice, a coalesced energy, a unified initiative—not to force or coerce the bishops, but to cooperate with them in carrying out the renewal. Cardinal Shehan, speaking for himself, echoed this sentiment when he stated that he was speaking to the delegates as ‘a fellow priest who happens to be the archbishop of Baltimore’ (Sigur, 1969: 1).

In his address to the Federation, Father O’Malley emphasized this need for collegiality and collaboration; but with this was the need for professional autonomy, rights of priests, due process, and the democratic process within the Church. Throughout the speech was the spirit of freedom, with specific references to the revision of canon law, selection of bishops, priests’ life style, experimentation in the ministry, social action initiatives, and optional celibacy (O’Malley, 1969b).

Some, like Father O’Donoghue, felt that too much attention was to be devoted to the internal affairs of the priesthood, such as personnel matters and organizational guidelines for local councils. Because of his influence the regular agenda was shortened, leaving the last day for discussions on social justice and peace issues. And though crucial societal issues received attention, they were of secondary importance to the NFPC at this convention (National Catholic Reporter, 1969a).

**Resolutions**

There were thirty-two resolutions passed at this convention. Eight involved social action (justice and peace) issues, eleven were on the ministry and priestly life, eight involved personnel matters, two were on priests’ councils and laity, and three dealt with the internal affairs of the NFPC. (Refer to the end of this chapter for a
comparative analysis of these resolutions and those that were passed in the following two years.)

Most of the resolutions, eighteen in all, dealt with ‘interest’ issues. As shown elsewhere, ‘interests’ are related to power relations. They deal with rights and prerogatives attached to the status of an individual or group. ‘Value’-oriented persons or groups stir people to break away from the status quo to bring about a greater social good. See Sr. Augusta Neal (1965) for a further elaboration.

Although the NFPC was concerned with ‘value’ questions, the main emphasis was with these ‘interest’ issues. The issue that occupied most of the delegates’ attention was due process, which took the form of the following resolution. The resolution contained three points (Proceedings, 1969: 32):

1. The NFPC called on the National Conference of Catholic Bishops to appoint a fact-finding committee to resolve the San Antonio and Washington disputes.
2. If the conference does not, the NFPC itself will appoint a committee to take appropriate action.
3. Until due process is a functioning reality in the church, the NFPC will offer its services to appoint fact-finding boards to mediate similar disputes when no reasonable resolution is possible through ordinary channels.

The resolutions expressed the concern of the delegates for the individual priests involved in the disputes. One of the spokesmen, Father Bill Murphy of Detroit, said that one action might be for the NFPC to hire civil and canon lawyers to press civil rights suits in secular courts or to take an appeal directly to Rome (New Orleans States-Item, 1969: 1).

Other ‘interest’ resolutions dealt with personnel accountability and evaluation, priests’ life style, reform of canon law, laicization, optional celibacy, council structures, and the position and relationships of bishops. This last area had six resolutions dealing with various aspects of collegiality. The ‘value’ resolutions on social action and experimental ministries were not as strongly worded as the ‘interest’ resolutions.

It was clear from the very outset that the ‘interests’ of the priests would command the greatest priority and attention of the delegates. They rejected the charge that the prepared agenda was irrelevant.
The last day was rescheduled to reserve time for discussing these wider ‘value’ questions. As an observer at this meeting, it was obvious to me that these Wednesday discussions turned out to be dismal failures. The leadership of the NFPC felt, and probably rightly so, that it must pay urgent attention to those concerns that touch the priesthood directly before moving on to issues of the common good; otherwise, priests’ rights and powers might continue to be ignored. Above all, the New Orleans meeting was a call to action.

In sum, the NFPC initiated a policy that dealt with the ‘interest’ issues of the priests. Collegiality, due process, and professional standards were their main concern. Priests were fighting for a meaningful place in the Church. The NFPC articulated these desires. The tone was one of action, even of confrontation if necessary. As one priest-delegate said, in effect: if the NFPC has to die in the fight for priests’ right, it’s a fight worth dying for (New Orleans States-Item, 1969: 6).


As might be expected, due process and the Washington 19 remained the most crucial of NFPC issues. During the Executive Board meeting immediately following the convention it was determined that, if the NCCB took no action, the NFPC would provide for the preparation of the cases of the Washington, D.C., and San Antonio priests for presentation to Rome. Further, if no action was taken by Rome after three months, a special meeting of the House of Delegates would be called (Executive Board Minutes, 1969: 3). On May 7, 1969, the National Catholic Reporter (1969b) announced that the Executive Board had voted to take the cases of the Washington 19 to official Church courts in Rome, as the NCCB had failed to respond to its request.

Throughout 1969, then, the NFPC’s major concerns were due process and shared responsibility. In preparing these cases, the NFPC emphasized that its actions involved neither the substance of the *Humanae Vitae* nor the legitimacy of ecclesiastical authority, but the issue of protecting priests’ rights (Priests’ Forum, 1969a).
The tribunals of Washington and Cleveland rejected the petitions of the Washington 19. Finally, the NFPC and the Committee of Concerned Canon Lawyers petitioned directly to Rome for a review of the case.

Father O’Malley set the tone for the NFPC’s stand on shared responsibility in a discussion of the Synod of Bishops’ October meeting. He stated that the NFPC must be an instrument for systematic change within the Church and, as such, its top priority must be the sharing of decision making. With this in mind, he emphasized the need for structural links with the NCCB, democratic selection and limited tenure of bishops, and the need for effective leadership (O’Malley, 1969a).

Other resolutions were being implemented by the respective standing committees. Continuing Education was researching what types of educational programs were available to priests in the dioceses. The Role of the Priest Committee worked on researching new approaches to problems of priests. The Priests’ Councils and Laity Committee worked on developing models to examine the effectiveness of local councils. The Personnel Committee sponsored a workshop on personnel procedures and professional standards. The Social Action Committee worked on educating the councils on social justice issues. The Research Committee began working on a national study of celibacy and stress under the direction of John Koval and Richard Bell. Provincial meetings were held again in the fall to gather information on topics of needs of and services to the priesthood, which were to constitute the agenda for the next convention. The NFPC was encouraged by the attendance of non-affiliated councils, as well as of a number of bishops. The emphasis of these activities throughout the year was clearly directed to the ‘interest’ issues of the priests.

**The Bishops and the NFPC**

The NFPC sent letters to Archbishop Dearden, the president of the NCCB, and all the bishops, informing them of the House of Delegates’ resolutions regarding due process. The delegates were asked to contact their respective ordinaries for the purpose of
informing them of the local council’s stand on due process and to request representation at the NCCB’s national meetings. On April 13, 1969, the NFPC officers met with the Bishops’ Liaison Committee, requesting that the bishops take action on the due process resolutions; but no action was taken on these issues by the bishops at their April 16 meeting in Houston. Furthermore, the situations at Washington, D.C., and San Antonio were not discussed (Memorandum, 1969: 1).

While much of the NFPC-NCCB interaction was essentially an attempt by the NFPC to initiate NCCB action regarding the issues of due process, the NFPC’s primary concern was to gain recognition from the NCCB in order to achieve some sense of understanding and collaboration between the two organizations. Father O’Malley reported a ‘most positive’ meeting with Archbishop McDonough and the Liaison Committee, in which he discussed some of the bishops’ misgivings about the NFPC and attempted to dispel the notion that the NFPC is a pressure group (National Catholic Reporter, 1969c). To achieve this clarification with the NCCB, the NFPC requested that Father O’Malley be given the opportunity to address the NCCB at the Houston meeting. The request was refused on the basis that there was no precedent for any outsider to address the bishops’ assembly. Yet it was subsequently learned that three ‘outsiders’ did address the meeting (Priests’ Forum, 1969b).

Further contact with the NCCB was made in June when the NFPC sent a document containing the theological rationale for the NFPC to the NCCB Doctrinal Committee. In September, the NFPC polled all the councils for proposed topics for discussion at the forthcoming Synod of Bishops in Rome. The results were forwarded to Archbishop Dearden as NFPC recommendations (Priests’ Forum, 1969c: 2).

On October 16, the NFPC officers again met with the Bishops’ Liaison Committee in hopes of making some progress toward greater sharing of decision making. Specifically, the NFPC again requested that its president be allowed to address the NCCB’s November meeting and that each ordinary be accompanied at the spring, 1970, meeting of the NCCB by the president of the local senate or an elected delegate (Priests’ Forum, 1969b).

Although this latter request was rejected, O’Malley did address
the November NCCB meeting, calling for collaboration between the two groups on areas of concern to the Church; recognition by the NCCB that it needs the NFPC; and the development of a national policy-making board which would involve priests, religious, and laity with the hierarchy (O'Malley, 1969c).

While little headway was being made on the national level between the NFPC and NCCB during this year, much more communication and cooperation was in evidence at the provincial meetings.

**THE NFPC AND LOCAL COUNCILS**

During this period many local councils were restructuring themselves. Some were having difficulties with their bishops. The senates of Yakima, Washington, and Crookston, Minnesota, resigned en masse because the senate and the bishop were not able to work together successfully. Senates and associations reported the following problems facing their councils: (1) apathy of the priests in general, (2) lack of cooperation from the bishops, and (3) failure to resolve the problem of whether a council is merely representative and consultative or should exert leadership (*NFPC Newsletter*, 1968b: 3). In those dioceses where the senates weren't functioning well, many associations were formed and affiliated with the NFPC. The number of NFPC affiliates grew from 114 in May, 1968, to 134 by June, 1969. During this period, the NFPC changed its Executive Board membership from twenty-nine to twenty-seven members, representing the twenty-seven provinces of the country. The positions of religious orders and the Eastern Catholic community were dropped. The Social Action Committee’s name was changed to Human Resources and Development.

It was shown in the last two chapters that the 1969 delegates were in high agreement with the NFPC's work and goals. There was a great deal of cohesion and morale among these leaders. However, a great deal of effort was needed to integrate the NFPC into an effective, communicative, and collaborative organization. Its influence on the local councils was significant, but left much to be done. Its influence on the local bishop was modest, and regarding
the rank and file its influence was almost nil. The incipient provincial structures were viewed as potentially the most effective instrument to implement the NFPC's policies.

SAN DIEGO 1970: SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Over 250 delegates, representing 130 affiliated councils, came to San Diego to deliberate the crucial issue of co-responsibility. While the delegates were neither raucous nor radical, the tone was nevertheless serious and impatient, although tempered by the respect given to the five bishops present.

An important feature of the meeting was its openness. Reporters remarked about the complete availability of the leaders and about the open sessions. This was in marked contrast to the closed nature of the bishops' meetings. The NFPC understood the importance of bringing public opinion to bear on the decision makers (Dollen, 1970: 62-63). When the convention ended, the NFPC had a new president, Father Frank Bonnike of DeKalb, Illinois. Father Bonnike had been associated with the NFPC since its inception and had worked on the due process issue of the Washington 19 case.

In a keynote address, Bishop Alexander Carter (Carter, 1970: 12-13), president of the Canadian Catholic Conference, said:

You carry a terrible responsibility. The influence of your country is perhaps greater than you yourselves realize. The love-hate complex which seems at times to mark bishop-priests relations in your Church is somewhat similar to the love-hate affair that underlies apparent antagonism towards America in so many parts of the world. We pray for the Church of the United States. It will be a tragedy of cosmic dimension if the confrontations there erupt into division and shatter the basic unity and cohesion of the Church in America.

Father O'Malley (O'Malley, 1970: 15-17) addressed the delegates with no holds barred. He said: 'Our potential for preaching the good news of Christ—of freedom and responsibility—is limited not so much by the system but by our unwillingness to tackle the system and make it work to free men'. He went on to say 'that the institutionalized Church can be an instrument by which we are used,
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becoming nothing more than obedient automatons afraid to face the challenge to which the Son of Man has called us. We make that choice ourselves. We will push for shared responsibility because it is essential to the life of the Church'.

Father O'Malley's address on the 'State of the Federation' was essentially the same one that he delivered to the NCCB meeting in November, 1969. Explaining the major purpose of the NFPC in terms of across-the-board cooperation and collaboration between priests, laity, and the hierarchy on every level, he cited the momentum of frustration developing among the priests and laity. The tone of the speech was basically one of respectful confrontation, but confrontation nonetheless. He outlined three steps necessary to strengthen hope in the priests and in the church at large: (1) the NFPC and NCCB must work together on important issues, such as continuing education, personnel affairs, priestly spirituality, pastoral councils, and due process; (2) the NCCB must admit openly and effectively that it needs the NFPC; and (3) the NFPC and the NCCB must work to develop a national pastoral council. He also cited other internal problems of the Church, such as solutions to the problem of mandatory celibacy, change in the laicization procedures, selection and accountability of leadership, reform of canon law, and inter-cooperation among Church organizations. The third session was devoted to this last issue of organizational cooperation. Representatives from six lay, religious, and clergy organizations discussed ways of cooperating with the NFPC. The remainder of the convention dealt with committee reports and resolutions.

The policies of the NFPC continued to emphasize the 'interest' issues of the priest, especially the area of co-responsibility in decision making. The NFPC was talking tougher. The approach was increasingly militant and confrontative (see National Catholic Reporter, 1970a; America, 1970; and Christianity Today, 1970).

**Resolutions**

There were forty-eight resolutions passed at the San Diego meeting. There were thirteen dealing with the ministry and priestly life; fourteen regarding personnel questions; four dealing with priests' councils and laity; three regarding continuing education; four
related to social justice; and the remaining ten dealt with internal affairs. Thirty resolutions were 'interest' resolutions dealing with normative concerns of priests, personnel affairs, bishop-clergy relationships of power, priests' and pastoral councils, and continuing education. Eight resolutions were 'value'-oriented, dealing with experimental and specialized ministries to homosexuals and with social justice issues. It is clear that the NFPC was continuing its policy emphasis in the direction of priests' 'interests'. Refer to the end of the chapter for a description of these resolutions.

There were five 'interest' resolutions dealing with due process and four dealing with the question of optional celibacy. Seven resolutions dealt with personnel accountability and evaluation and three concerned the continuing education of priests. Three others regarded shared responsibility through the enactment of diocesan and national pastoral councils. Finally, eight resolutions dealt with the issue of co-responsibility with the bishops.

Continuing education of priests was given a top priority, and the committee urged that a House of Prayer and Study be established in every diocese. The Personnel Committee's resolutions covered in detail the issues of recruitment, training, forms of ministry, retirement, due process boards, salaries, rectory relationships, and the recommendation that assistant pastors be given some pastoral rights (Dollen, 1970: 62–63). However, the greatest attention was devoted to the NFPC-NCCB relationships and the due process issues.

The convention was a call to action. Born out of a situation of powerlessness, nurtured by militancy, and tempered by professional respect for one's superiors, the NFPC sowed the new seeds of hope for the church. One reporter (Dollen, 1970: 64) put it this way:

NFPC itself learned a much needed lesson in that it must take greater strides to implement its decisions. If the bishops of our country will enter into honest dialogue with NFPC, a new day will dawn for our Church . . . .

**Progress after the San Diego Convention**

The San Diego convention had voted to cable the Holy Father to grant a petition for an impartial hearing for the Washington 19. It
further voted to hold a special meeting of the House of Delegates on April 20 if no action had been taken by then. Father Bonnike stressed that the April 20 deadline was not to force the Pope, but rather was to allow time for the NFPC to decide what alternative actions might be taken. Suggestions ranged from a day of prayer to some form of a strike (Olmstead, 1970). The April 20 meeting was cancelled when, on April 18, a letter from the Apostolic Delegate announced that a reply to the NFPC's letter would be forthcoming (National Catholic Reporter, 1970b). By August 13, the case was before the Sacred Congregation of the Clergy in Rome. Nothing was heard of the case until March, 1971. Priests-USA (1971a), the new journal of the NFPC, reported that 'after two and one-half years the priests . . . are receiving an impartial hearing which they, along with the committee of Concerned Canon Lawyers and the NFPC, have been seeking'.

In the interest of strengthening the NFPC's work in the areas of social action, the Executive Board hired two part-time staff, Fathers Gene Boyle and Bob Kennedy, to work with the Human Resources and Development Committee (later called Justice and Peace). On the initiative of Boyle, the December Executive Board telegraphed the lettuce growers, urging them to accept the California clergymen as mediators (Executive Board Minutes, 1970b: 5).

Another area of concern to the NFPC at this time was the notion of a National Pastoral Council. Yet the National Advisory Council of the USCC had serious questions about the feasibility of such a council. It felt a more fruitful approach would be regional developments. From August 28 to 30, an open forum on the feasibility of a National Pastoral Council was sponsored by the NAC. The NFPC participated in the meeting and the NAC resolved to compile a booklet on these deliberations, secure grassroots reactions, and make a final presentation of the feasibility of such a council by September, 1971. The NFPC commissioned a special issue of Chicago Studies for September, 1970, to address the entire area of shared responsibility and pastoral councils (Executive Board Minutes, 1970a: 3).

Other efforts were directed to continuing education workshops, spiritual life symposia, and the development of 'Priests' Personnel Documentary Service'.
The NFPC and the NCCB

Father Bonnike presented seventeen topics for discussion at the August meeting of the NCCB's Liaison Committee. All but three of the issues concerned 'interest' concerns of the NFPC. In particular, Bonnike suggested that the NCCB and the NFPC should work together following the completion of the studies on the priesthood and celibacy. Bishop Bernardin said that the NCCB study 'stands on its own' and asked if the NFPC study was done because of suspicion of the NCCB. Father Graney of the NFPC staff said that there was no suspicion regarding the competence or honesty of the study, but only suspicion that the findings would be kept secret or only reported in part. The NFPC requested the release of the raw data, but this was denied (NFPC-NCCB Liaison Committee Meeting, 1970: 5).

Also during this period, the NFPC urged priest representation at the World Synod of Bishops and requested that the bishops of each region convoke an annual meeting of bishops and clergy to discuss the NCCB's agenda. The NCCB did decide to hold diocesan and provincial meetings with priests, religious, and laity to evaluate the NFPC's proposal and to prepare for the World Synod (Bonnike, 1970).

The NFPC took the initiative in attempting cooperation with the bishops through the NCCB. The NCCB's reaction during this year was a mixture of vacillation, suspicion, and begrudging cooperation. The relationship evidenced the love-hate syndrome referred to by Bishop Carter at the San Diego convention. If the interaction between the NFPC and the NCCB was now marked by tension, the relationship would become hardened and confrontative after the Baltimore meeting.

Baltimore 1971: The Moment of Truth

The NFPC was becoming a force with which to reckon. It had helped to win a fair hearing of the Washington 19. It was the only autonomous, deliberative, and representative body of priests in the world at that time. Many bishops, priests, and laity still expressed
fears about the NFPC’s ‘power and disloyalty’. The NFPC had dug its way into the still-under-construction area of shared responsibility—a principle that the bishops, during Vatican II, had agreed to implement. Since its founding, the NFPC had won a grudging acknowledgment of its existence from the hierarchy (Haughey, 1971: 341). In Baltimore, from March 14 to 18, 235 delegates and alternates, representing 132 affiliates, debated the key issue of the convention: optional celibacy. The resolution, adopted by a roll call vote—an unusual procedure—of 182 to 23, urgently requested from the bishops of the world a plan for the immediate change in the disciplinary laws leading to optional celibacy. The actual words of the resolution were: ‘We ask that the choice between celibacy and marriage for priests now active in the ministry be allowed and that the change begin immediately’ (Priests-USA, 1971c: 5).

Why such a radical decision? Several factors leading to this resolution were influential. One was the fact that the delegates had previously surveyed the climate of their councils before coming to the convention. All the councils had received a draft of the ‘Moment of Truth’ statement prior to the convention. The overwhelming vote for the resolution by the delegate-representatives presumably manifested the general sentiment of the rank and file. The NFPC also had the results of their study on celibacy (Koval and Bell, 1971). The findings showed that 73% of a national sample of priests favored ordination of married men. The study also reported that 56% of the priests favored optional celibacy for priests now active in the ministry, with 36% saying that they would consider marriage if the law changed. Lastly, the delegates were informed by Father Eugene Schallert that 25,000 priests had resigned in the past seven years (Haughey, 1971: 341).

The final text of the ‘Moment of Truth’ statement was brief and to the point. Father Bonnike, the president of the NFPC, told the delegates that it was to be a ‘political’ document aimed at the bishops and the Synod. The emotion and tone of the convention was centered on this issue. One of the significant things about the entire debate was that the question never became one of whether or why, but only of how and when, the relaxation of the present discipline should take place (Haughey, 1971: 342).
The proceedings also included a series of resolutions related to the military and the war in Southeast Asia. There were unanimous votes backing the United Farm Workers; the National Office of Black Catholics; and Project Amos, which concerned the plight of day laborers.

The mood of the convention was one of steadfastness and boldness. They felt that change in the Church was not a result of some blind uncontrollable force, but was in the hands of those courageous enough to take leadership. Monsignor John Egan (Egan, 1971: 102) put it this way:

They crave intelligent and shared leadership from their superiors, but, in its absence, refuse to allow the vacuum of leadership to daunt them any longer . . . [but] to manfully assume leadership, to speak and act boldly in the building of the Kingdom of God.

Many of the ‘interest’ issues which had been developed in New Orleans and San Diego reached a climax at the Baltimore convention. The House of Delegates, with an eye to the Synod of Bishops meeting in Rome in October, forged a statement which addressed the crucial internal problems of Church structure, leadership, rights of due process, priestly renewal, and celibacy. While celibacy was the most burning issue, the delegates identified the lack of leadership as the major problem confronting priests. The NFPC called for the implementation of the suggestions of the Canon Law Society for the selection of bishops. In addition, there was a demand for protection of human rights within the Church, and the development of new forms of ministry. (See Appendix C for the complete text of the ‘Moment of Truth’ statement. This statement was the ‘State of the Federation’ address delivered by Father Bonnike.)

The policies and directions of the NFPC from its inception through the Baltimore convention and up to the Denver convention were aimed primarily at solving the ‘interest’ issues of priests. Priests’ rights, shared power, and freedom in priests’ life style were the dominant themes. The talk was tough, the approach militant, and the demands straightforward, if not confrontative. Paradoxically, there was a great respect for the bishops and the NCCB. But the NFPC leaders saw themselves as professional men and, as such, they were not going to tolerate being treated as lackeys.
Resolutions

There were thirty-one resolutions passed at the Baltimore convention. There were fifteen ‘value’ resolutions dealing with social action (Justice and Peace). Eight of these dealt with one area, the military and war. The other ‘value’ resolutions concerned experimental ministries. There were twelve ‘interest’ resolutions dealing with personnel affairs, bishop-clergy relations, and normative interests of priests. Quantitatively, if the eight resolutions on the military and war are considered as one, the ‘interest’ resolutions predominated at the meeting. But, in any regard, the intensity of the meeting and the saliency of issues concerned the ‘interest’ issues of the priests in the United States.

Inspecting Table 6.1 it is clear that, from its inception, the NFPC’s policies were geared to the internal problems of the priesthood. Overall, there were sixty-one ‘interest’ resolutions dealing with normative interests of priests, such as due process, personnel affairs, bishop-clergy relations, priest’ councils, and continuing education. One-half of these resolutions were passed at the San Diego convention. On the other hand, there were only thirty-four ‘value’ resolutions during this time, dealing with social justice and peace issues and the pastoral ministry. There wasn’t a strong emphasis on social justice issues until Baltimore. Up to the Baltimore meeting there were only twelve resolutions dealing with the commonweal and six dealing with the pastoral ministry. Resolutions are carried out sometimes with great success like due process issue and the establishment of personnel boards, and sometimes with failure such as dialogue with the bishops concerning married priests. Some resolutions merely call for a statement from the NFPC such as condemning the Vietnam War. Others involve launching a national association such as the continuing education of clergy. While some resolutions are the responsibility of the national leadership or one of their task forces, many resolutions are implemented by the local councils. (See the summary table in Appendix IV for a comparative analysis of all the conventions’ resolutions.)

The NFPC felt, and rightly so, that it had to pay attention to the area undeveloped by Vatican II. It also realized that the forces of the secular world were contributing to the loss of meaning and functions
of the priesthood. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s made it clear to the NFPC that priests, especially assistant pastors, had neither human nor professional rights in the Church. These problems were of urgent concern because priests were resigning and young men weren’t entering the seminary. The NFPC responded to these crises of definition, rights, and powers with expertise and

Table 6.1 *Resolutions passed at NFPC Conventions, 1969–71*

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Table 6.1 *Resolutions passed at NFPC Conventions, 1969–71*
professionalism. Though criticized by the more liberal delegates, the leadership felt that it had to formulate policy and strategies to solve the internal problems of the priesthood before it could move on to wider 'value' concerns.

**After Baltimore**

Following the Baltimore meeting and the acceptance of the 'Moment of Truth' statement, the NFPC was charged with not being a representative organization. In June, 1971, two councils disaffiliated due to the Baltimore meeting. Father Bonnike responded to these charges, defending and explaining the concept of representative government (Bonnike, 1971a). In December, the Executive Board considered seven alternative structures for the NFPC, but decided to retain the existing one. However, constitutional provisions were proposed which would improve representation by allowing affiliation by supra-diocesan groups (Executive Board Minutes, 1971: 11).

By late summer one began to notice a transition in policy emphasis. In August, Father Bonnike suggested that the topic of top priority at the Synod meeting should be world justice rather than the priesthood. He hoped that the Synod would take up the topics of the specific duties of a Christian in opposing injustice and the causes of world injustice, as well as the issue of the married priesthood (Bonnike, 1971b). In January, 1972, the NFPC announced two important items that confirmed the transition from 'interest' emphasis to 'value' emphasis in policy direction. One was the announcement of hiring a full-time director of the Justice and Peace Committee; the other was the announcement of the theme for the forthcoming Denver convention: 'Ministry for Justice and Peace: Imperative for Priests-USA'. In essence, the policy and plans for the Denver meeting were to give substance to the directions given by the Third International Synod of Bishops (*Priests-USA*, 1972c).
Much of the NFPC-NCCB interaction centered around the NFPC’s attempt for greater priest representation both to the NCCB and the World Synod. The NCCB decided to hold regional meetings with priests, religious, and laity to prepare for their April meetings. Father Bonnike noted that, from the NFPC’s viewpoint, the meetings were extremely disappointing (Priests-USA, 1971d). But the NFPC’s request that priests be represented at the World Synod resulted in the appointment of two U.S. priests as observers at the Synod (Priests-USA, 1971b). The April meeting of the NCCB proved to be a big disappointment to the NFPC. The NFPC noted that little attempt was made toward improving relations between the two groups. Disappointment lay both with the NCCB’s choice of conservative bishops as representatives to the Synod, and with the NCCB’s failure to address the important issues contained in the “Moment of Truth” statement, as well as their attempt to dominate the lives of priests (Priests-USA, 1971e). Newsweek (1971a: 74) described the NCCB meeting in Detroit in the following way: ‘. . . [the bishops] spent much of their semiannual meeting in Detroit last week debating—and roundly criticizing—reports on the priesthood that they themselves had commissioned’.

Some of the bishops charged the NFPC as self-serving. Bonnike answered this charge by indicating the NCCB’s own narrowness in its complete failure to listen to priests. He went on to ask who had assisted priests in developing new models of prayer, developed programs of continuing education, and helped personnel chairmen to relate to the problems cited by the Greeley and Kennedy studies. It hadn’t been the NCCB. He also said that the NFPC was tired of being called divisive in its efforts to serve the Church. He warned the bishops that the military model must go (Bonnike, 1971c).

In August, Fathers Bonnike and Paul Boyle, head of the Leadership Conference of Religious Men, were selected as auditors to the World Synod. While in Rome, Bonnike stated that he found the bishops unwilling to deal realistically with those issues related to the shortage of priests, especially the issue of optional celibacy (McEoin, 1971).

Some progress in cooperation between the NFPC and the NCCB
was evident during the fall and winter. Some of the NFPC’s requests conveyed to the NCCB were put on the fall agenda. In addition, the NCCB asked Father Bonnike to serve on its Committee on Implementing the Priesthood Studies (Priests-USA, 1972b).

Accompanying a gradual shift of emphasis to justice and peace issues was the beginning of a shift in attitude toward the bishops. Of the two major topics at the December Executive Board meeting, one recommended that the NFPC stop sparring with bishops. It asked that priests work toward building more accountability and trust between bishops and priests; it called upon priests to abandon inertia and prod their own consciences, and to aim for basic concurrence between themselves and the bishops (Priests-USA, 1972a: 1). Thus, the NFPC was approaching a new threshold. Though not abandoning the ‘interest’ issues that commanded their attention over the past three years, it would begin to emphasize the pastoral and social ministry—thus becoming more ‘value’-oriented. What controversies the NFPC would take up would mainly lay outside the orbit of episcopal authority. The World Synod would provide NFPC with a stimulus for promoting an action-oriented convention on justice and peace. The NFPC would attempt to develop an awareness and involvement of grassroots priests in countering the pervasive injustice in our society (Millon, 1971). Denver would be a watershed for the NFPC.