

**From "Mesenger" – April 1, 1950
Hawthorn (Vic.) Men's Sacred Heart Confraternity**

A visitor to the Church of the Immaculate Conception at Hawthorn (Vic.) on any first Sunday of the month at the eight o'clock Mass cannot fail to be impressed by the sight that will meet his eyes.

For half an hour or so, from every corner of the Parish, men and boys have been hurrying to one focal point marked by a high stone spire. In the great gothic church he will see a full congregation of between seven and eight hundred at Mass - but he will look in vain for a woman. He might think that all the men and boys of the Hawthorn parish have been collected to the exclusion of their women-folk. And that is just what happens.



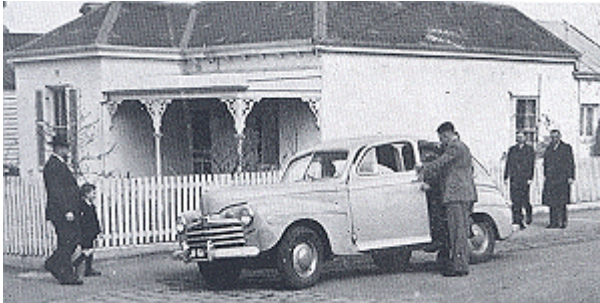
It is the monthly dialogue Mass of the Men's Sacred Heart Confraternity. Led by a prefect at the microphone hundreds of voices are raised in unison in the responses to the priest. The epistle and gospel are read in English by the prefect at the microphone. Other prefects stand at appointed places - to see that the almost military discipline of the Men's Dialogue Mass is carried through smoothly, and the pulpit is backed by a great red banner of the Sacred Heart. The picture shows only about half of the congregation.

Each month sees new enrolments at the altar rails after the sermon, and after the June meeting there is a Communion breakfast. On Holy Thursday night the members of the Confraternity watch before the Blessed Sacrament in "watches" of about eighty men, and recite the Stations of the Cross every hour.



These men are bound to one duty - the monthly Mass - and any absentee needs a good excuse to satisfy the Director and his Council. Most of those in the Church receive Holy Communion, but this is not a rule of the Confraternity.

The notices reminding the congregation that "next Sunday is the first Sunday of the month" and that every man and boy in the Parish is expected to attend the Dialogue Mass are as familiar to parishioners as the Church spire itself. But what is more important is that almost every man and boy turns up.



A common sight in the distant corners of the Parish on a First Sunday, is to see members with cars waiting at assembly points to give a lift to other members of their section. Men come from as far away as a mile and a half. Hail, rain or shine, they turn up in their hundreds.

At the Dialogue Mass, the Confraternity is on parade, but if anyone were to think that its work ended there he would be greatly mistaken. Behind that Mass there is a carefully organized body of men who labour unceasingly for souls in the Parish of Hawthorn, impelled by the force of the central devotion of the Confraternity towards the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The Hawthorn Parish is divided into forty sections, each worked by a Prefect and Sub-Prefect as a two-man team. Average number of members in each section is 20-30. Each Prefect has a list, compiled from Parish Census, of every Catholic man and boy in his section. This list is divided into members and non-members. Even those who are only nominal Catholics are on this list. The Prefect's job is to reduce, and even eliminate, his non-member's list: to secure one hundred per cent attendance of members at the Dialogue Mass. The picture shows a Prefect and Sub-Prefect recruiting a new member before the monthly Dialogue Mass.



During the week after the Dialogue Mass, the Prefects complete their month's task and take their roll cards and reports on the Second Sunday to the Councillor for their area. The report shows why members were absent, tells of progress made and difficulties encountered with non-members, and gives the Spiritual Director valuable leads on cases needing the attention of a Priest.



Often, marriages have been rectified, children baptized and enrolled at Catholic schools and spiritual tragedies averted solely because of the information garnered by Prefects and passed on to the Priest. Prefects also report movements of people in and out of the Parish and other details to keep the Parish Census up to date. He also collects donations from his members to the Loyola Burse, a Confraternity effort to assist in the education of a priest. In this picture the Prefect is discussing his report with his Councillor, who will pass it in at the Council meeting that night.

Some of the larger sections are further sub-divided for the Block Collection, which the Confraternity directs to reduce the Parish debt. The forty-five Block Collectors are responsible to six District Collectors in the same way as the fifty-six Prefects are responsible to their nine Councillors. Though the Collectors have gathered £10,000 in eight years, money is only one - even a minor one - of their objectives. Their reports have greatly helped to keep the Parish Census constantly revised.

They concentrate too, like the Prefects, on keeping alive in faint or careless hearts the flickering flame of faith. There are many homes where the custom of contributing to "The Block" has outlasted attendance at Mass; but the Collector's monthly visit keeps ajar the doors that will later swing wide open again. The Collector shown here is welcoming a new family to the Parish and collecting Census details. Before the month is out, the Prefect will be calling on the menfolk listed on the Census Card.





By 2.00 pm. on the Second Sunday, the Block Collectors have handed in reports and money collected to their District Collectors. At 7.00 pm., the District Collectors meet. Here they are seen preparing the money for banking and discussing the month's business. One Councillor who is also a Block Collector effects liaison with the Council, which meets the same night. Later during the month, every Collector's report is checked in detail by the Spiritual Director and two of the District Collectors.

But Collectors are encouraged to concentrate on spiritual rather than financial values. They all know that whatever leads to a careless Catholic returning to his religious duties is worth far more than the whole year's collection of money. Collectors are also advised to confer with and advise the Prefect of their area. The cycle of the month's work is completed at the Council meeting on the night of the Second Sunday. The nine Councillors meet with the Spiritual Director, the President and Secretary, to review the month's work and plan future activities. Each Councillor is the leader of a group of Prefects and Sub-Prefects covering an area of the Parish. The Spiritual Director takes part in the discussions, and, though he has the right of veto of any resolution, rarely exercises it. Prefects reports are later examined in detail by the Spiritual Director and two members of the Council, Roll Cards adjusted, and the reports with comments returned to Prefects before the next month's round begins.

The driving force behind it all is, after the love of the Sacred Heart Himself, the Spiritual Director, Rev. J. Fitzgerald, S.J. There are 130 office-bearers in the Confraternity, each with a defined useful job to do. Nothing encourages them more than the personal message penned on their reports by Fr. Fitzgerald - sometimes urging, occasionally gently reproofing, more often than not commending. In commending, he reminds them at times of a passage from the epistle of St. James the Apostle: "He who causeth a sinner to be converted from the error of his way shall save his soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins." The thought of those words, inspired by the Holy Ghost and having the force of a Divine promise of salvation, is the greatest spur of all.



Well, there is the working of a very successful Sacred Heart Confraternity. Centred around the most sublime of all devotions: providing the barest minimum of obligation for the great mass of men in the parish, but offering scope for the most heroic sacrifice and the best of all Catholic Action for those who will do that

little more. It is the League of the Sacred Heart - or the Apostleship of Prayer in full glory as a Parish Confraternity.

However, before closing the story of the Men's Sacred Heart Confraternity let us record one of its best remembered stories.

Father Fitzgerald has a very forgiving heart. But if there is any "sin" which approaches the "unforgivable" in his code, it is for any woman to appear at the Dialogue Mass. Of course some few attend in the Shrine of Our Lady of the Way which forms a separate unit of the Church. They are wives of those who drive some distance to Mass, or who cannot possibly attend another Mass. Father Fitzgerald looks in the other direction. However, some time ago a lady of great piety being told that she had 'but a short time to live sent for Father Fitzgerald. She would have no other priest. When the Director of the Men's Confraternity had administered the Last Sacraments to her she looked up to him with tears in her eyes and said. "Father, I know that I have but a short time to live; and coming to this hour of my life, if there is one thing which gives me more consolation than anything else, it is this; I have never missed a Dialogue Mass on the First Sunday!"

And for once, Father Fitzgerald said nothing.