

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 2

Father John E Boll, Diocesan Archivist

No 94

Diocese of Memphis to Give General Absolution

This article was printed in the August 5, 1976 issue of the *Catholic Herald*

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (NC)



Bishop Carroll T Dozier

General absolution is included in a diocesan campaign here to bring “religiously inactive” Catholics back to the Church. The campaign was launched by Bishop Carroll T. Dozier of Memphis during a “Mini-Eucharistic Congress.”

In a homily to over 1700 persons gathered for the Congress Bishop Dozier said it was his responsibility to take the first step toward inactive Catholics by “extending healing and reconciliation to them if they will but accept.”

He said the use of general absolution is “the proper approach to the religiously inactive person.” The congress was held to enable those not attending the 41st International Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia to “in some way actively participate in the congress in the religious spirit of the historic occasion,” a diocesan spokesman said.

Bishop Dozier explained general absolution as the “absolving of sin without a personal confession by the individual at that precise time. “If you have experienced it, perhaps it was during war when there was an attack and time was an element,” the bishop said. “The confession of individual sins was delayed until some other moment less hurried or tense.”

Noting that people “tend to shy away from the ministry of reconciliation,” the bishop said “we must understand our call to this ministry of reconciliation and we must understand that it involves us personally in this ministry in our words and in our actions.”

Bishop Dozier said religiously inactive and active Catholics would be invited to participate in a liturgical celebration of reconciliation during which a general absolution is planned.

Two locations, one in Memphis and one in Jackson, will be used for the liturgies, scheduled for late November and early December, he said.

The bishop did not estimate the number of religiously inactive men and women in the diocese other than to say there were “many.” He said that success of the reconciliation campaign will require the efforts of every Catholic in the diocese.

“I cannot do this alone,” Bishop Dozier said. “Neither can the priests nor the Religious. We must do it together with and through Him who is our head.”

The bishop told those gathered that the religiously inactive “may be members of our families, our children, our friends, our neighbors, our casual acquaintances. All of us know someone who is no longer a religiously active Catholic.”

Bishop Dozier said the campaign will be followed by programs on religious education. Sites will be established as “confessional stations” for those who benefit from the general absolution and later wish to follow through with individual confessions, he said.

Details of the follow-up program, the bishop said, will be spelled out “in orderly fashion” in the weeks and months ahead in sermons, special bulletins, through efforts of church organizations, the public mass media and the diocesan newspaper.

Background on Bishop Carroll Thomas Dozier by the Diocesan Archivist – 2014

Carroll Dozier was born on August 18, 1911 in Richmond, Virginia, one of five children of Curtis Merry Dozier and Rosa Ann Conaty. After graduating from Benedictine High School in Richmond in 1928, he attended the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts where he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1932. He then went to Rome, lived at the Pontifical North American College and attended the Pontifical Gregorian University where he earned a Bachelor of Sacred Theology. He was ordained a priest in Rome on March 19, 1937.

After ordination, he returned to Virginia and served as a curate at St Vincent Church in Newport News until 1941. In 1954 he was named pastor of Christ the King Church in Norfolk where he served until 1971.

On November 12, 1970, Dozier was appointed the first bishop of the newly created Diocese of Memphis, Tennessee by Pope Paul VI. He was ordained a bishop on January 6, 1971 by Cardinal John Joseph Wright, with co-consecrators Archbishops Luigi Raimondi and Thomas Joseph McDonough.

During his tenure as bishop of Memphis, Dozier implemented the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. A self-described “progressive,” he was an early opponent of the Vietnam War and offered support to draft dodgers. He also called for busing to achieve desegregation in public schools, opposed capital punishment and supported ecumenism and women’s rights.

In 1976, Bishop Dozier celebrated Masses to bring back to the church Catholics who had left the faith because of divorce or other disagreements with church rules. The Masses drew capacity crowds to municipal auditoriums in Memphis and Jackson. Estranged Catholics were offered counseling and urged to look for ways to return to the church.

Bishop Dozier offered general absolution to those in attendance, rather than requiring the normal confession of sins. Under church law, such an action is considered appropriate only under unusual conditions such as the absence of enough priests to hear confession in time of war.

Pope Paul VI and the head of the church's liturgical affairs, Cardinal James Knox, personally expressed their displeasure to Bishop Dozier, but he refused to back down.

After eleven years as serving as the bishop of Memphis, Bishop Dozier resigned his post due to poor health on July 27, 1982. He died at the age of 74 from a stroke on December 7, 1985. His successor of the Diocese of Memphis was Bishop James Francis Stafford who was with the Dozier family at the bedside of Bishop Dozier when he died.

Bishop Stafford stated that "Bishop Dozier was a prophet of the peace of Jesus Christ for his diocese, his nation and the world as a man of the Gospel. His powerful voice of conscience and reason will be sorely missed. His contributions to the causes of justice, peace and particularly racial harmony are immeasurable."

Bishop Dozier put into effect the vision of the Second Vatican Council. He was willing to open wide the doors of Christ's Church in order to welcome a bruised and broken humanity to the healing embrace of God's love and mercy.