

“New Jersey and Vatican II: Perfect Together”
Reverend Monsignor Raymond J. Kupke, Ph.D.
October 24, 2007

Archbishop Peter L. Gerety Lecture Series
Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology
Seton Hall University

First, I would like to apologize for the title of my presentation this evening. When I first called Monsignor Wister with proposals for the title, I had a subtitle in mind, as well. But I only got to mention to Bob my first possibility of something like “New Jersey and Vatican II: Perfect Together,” when he said, “I like that, and Dianne will love it,” and that was it, and somehow the subtitle got lost in the shuffle. I apologize, because the title might have given the impression that my presentation is on the implementation and effect of the decrees of the Second Vatican Council on the life of the Church in New Jersey. In fact, my topic is exactly the opposite. My presentation is on the impact that the faith and life of the Church in the Garden State had on the debates at Vatican II, and, in particular, as that impact was realized through the activity of one of the council fathers, James J. Norris of Rumson, New Jersey. In the first half of my presentation, I would like to focus on Norris’ intense activity at Rome during the Council and afterwards, which resulted in his singular contribution to the life of the Catholic Church. Then, in the second half of my presentation, I would like to focus on the New Jersey roots that prepared Norris for this unique role.

I would like to begin my story by bringing you all down to Washington, to the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. There, on the lower level of the basilica, on a bridge connecting the Crypt Church with Memorial Hall, there sits a display case that attracts a lot of attention. Inside the case, prominently lit, is the coronation tiara of Pope Paul VI. Immediately opposite the tiara, and connected to it in more ways than one, is a

bronze portrait bust of James Norris. When Archbishop Giovanni Battista Montini of Milan was elected pope in June 1963, the Milanese quickly had fashioned a modernistic papal tiara of spun metal set with gold and precious stones, as a gift for their former archbishop.

Sixteen months later, on November 13, 1964, after presiding at a Mass in the Byzantine Rite in the conciliar aula, Pope Paul VI walked to the papal altar of Saint Peter's Basilica and laid this same tiara on the altar as a gift for the poor of the world. In the pontiff's own words, he made this gesture "in response to the many grave words spoken in this Ecumenical Council on the misery and hunger in the modern world."¹ The words that Pope Paul referred to had been spoken a week earlier in the conciliar hall by James Norris. Indeed, Norris and the pope exchanged letters attesting to that fact.² The pope's action was not just a one-time gesture but actually a permanent papal fashion statement; that day was the last time a pope has worn the tiara. Many people down through the ages have tried to remove the tiara from the pope's head. In the modern era alone, Napoleon tried, so did Garibaldi. Bismarck, Hitler and Mussolini all gave it a shot. The only one to succeed was James Norris, Jersey Boy!

In 1943, the American Catholic bishops, at the urging of the Holy See, established an entity known as War Relief Services to coordinate American Catholic charity to the needy people in post-war Europe. Originally set up as a temporary agency, it would become permanent in 1955, with a change of name to Catholic Relief Services. Today it is the largest private aid agency in the world. In 1945, CRS sent James Norris to Europe as its first on-site director. Norris coordinated the CRS efforts on behalf of refugees, displaced persons and the stateless individuals produced by the political and social changes following World War II. As part of this effort, Norris was asked by Pope Pius XII to cooperate with a young Vatican

¹ Ernest Sackler, "Pope Paul Gives Crown to the Poor," New York World Telegram (November 13, 1964).

² Paulus P.P. VI to *Al nostro diletto Figlio Giacomo Norris*, 6 November 1964, and James J. Norris to Your Holiness, 23 November 1964, both in Norris Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives (hereafter NC-UNDA).

official, Monsignor Montini, in forming the International Catholic Migration Commission, a group for which Norris served as first president for a quarter-century.

As the 1950s gave way to the 1960s, Norris found the direction of CRS moving away from its preoccupation with Europe and with refugees, and broadening its perspective to embrace the full scope of poverty and social development throughout the world. His friend, Monsignor Montini, later on as pope, would describe this transformation succinctly in his 1967 encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*, when he said, “development is the new name for peace.”³ In October, 1958, after the lengthy reign of Pope Pius XII, the Venetian patriarch, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, was elected Pope John XXIII. Just a few months earlier, Norris had returned, he thought permanently, to New York as assistant director of CRS. The new Pope John opened the Second Vatican Council in October 1962, and then eight months later he died. On June 21, 1963, Jim Norris’ old friend, Monsignor Montini, was elected Pope Paul VI. Pope John had lived long enough to launch the conciliar ship, but it was going to be up to his successor to guide the vessel through choppy waters safely into port.

At the first session of the Council, John XXIII had appointed the French philosopher Jean Guitton as a lay auditor at the Council. The appointment came after Guitton had written to the pope asking if he would have to leave the Church in order to come to the Council, since the only laity present were the non-Catholic observers. Several conciliar fathers lobbied to address this absence of laity, and on September 13, 1963, Pope Paul VI named ten laymen as conciliar auditors. When Norris’ name was suggested to the pope, he readily agreed that his old friend should be one of the ten.⁴ In the original group, Norris was the sole lay auditor from North America.

³ “On the Development of Peoples,” U.S. Catholic Conference edition, 4.

⁴ Andrew Landi to Jim Norris, 3 September 1963, NC-UNDA.

During the Council's Second Session, several lobbying groups emerged around issues that some felt needed to be addressed at the Council, but did not appear on the prepared agenda. Included among these issues were world poverty, world peace and the role of the laity. The "poverty group" had coalesced around a group of bishops, notably Cardinal Benjamin de Arriba y Castro of Tarragona, Spain who had delivered an intervention calling for a "poverty secretariat" in the Church. Norris had natural interests and connections among both the poverty and the laity groups. He was particularly concerned that the two areas remain clearly separate at the Council. He was afraid that social justice would no longer be viewed as a concern of the whole Church, but be reduced in some way as a particular field of lay activity.

On September 30, 1964, the English Mill Hill Father Arthur McCormack facilitated a strategy luncheon for several key members of the "poverty group" at the *Tre Scalini* restaurant in Rome's Piazza Navona. (Whenever I am in Rome, I myself always stop for a commemorative *tartuffo* at the *Tre Scalini* in honor of this seminal luncheon. That's Piazza Navona 30, by the way; ask for Fabrizio.) Present were McCormack and fellow English Mill Hill Father Gerald Mahon; Monsignor Joseph Gremillion, a Louisiana-born veteran of the American civil rights movement; the noted British economist, Barbara Ward, and James Norris. The group bonded immediately around a shared faith and a common sense of purpose. Later joined by Monsignor Luigi Ligutti, the American founder of the Catholic Rural Life Conference, they dubbed themselves, the *Cospiratori*, and that very afternoon they began to conspire on behalf of the poor of the world. By the end of that same day, they had drafted a *pro-memoria* to Archbishop Angelo Dell'Acqua, the *sostituto* of the Secretariat of State, outlining a request for a "poverty day" at the Council.

Originally this event was conceived as an “extracurricular day,” taking place at a nearby hall, with all the Council fathers invited. But as Norris expanded his ideas, the proposal grew to a formal address at the Council itself. Norris used all his substantial connections in the Church to press the idea, finally successfully lobbying Cardinal Franz Koenig of Vienna to bring the idea before Pope Paul VI directly. It was Norris’ original intention that Barbara Ward deliver the intervention. But some felt it would be inopportune to have a woman, especially one currently separated from her husband, deliver the speech, and the pope indicated that Norris was to speak himself.

On the morning of November 5, 1964, Norris came to Saint Peter’s. Significantly, the conciliar Mass that morning was offered by an African bishop from the British colony of Northern Rhodesia, which just the previous week had achieved its independence as the Republic of Zambia. Around 11:30 in the morning, Norris mounted the rostrum to introduce the discussion on Paragraph 24 of the Conciliar Schema “On the Church in the Modern World.” He brought with him seven half-pages, double-spaced in his own Latin composition. As soon as he opened his mouth, Norris made history, becoming the first layman to participate in a conciliar debate since Trent, and the only one to participate in the debates at Vatican II. After a brief introduction, Norris launched into his text, in New Jersey-accented Latin, which as we all know, is the purest form of Latin: “*In ultimis duobus decennis problema paupertatis . . .*” reaching a crescendo near the end, “*Audeo proponere . . . ut ex hoc concilio Oecumenico edatur vox clamans ad actionem. . .*”⁵

I make bold to propose that from this ecumenical council there come a clarion call for action which would involve the creation of a structure that would devise the kind of institutions, contacts, forms of cooperation and policy, which the Church can adopt, to secure full Catholic participation in the world-wide attack on

⁵ *Relatio Iacobi I. Norris De Paupertate Mundiali in Schemate de Ecclesia in Mundo Huius Temporis, Cap. IV, Par. 24* in NC-UNDA.

poverty.⁶

Immediately following the intervention, Norris was summoned by the Cardinal Secretary of State, Amleto Giovanni Cicognani. The pope had asked Cicognani to seek out more information about the proposal. Two days later, Norris presented a more detailed written proposal for submission to the pope.

The suggestion for a poverty secretariat was referred to a mixed conciliar commission entrusted with actually formulating the conciliar document. Norris, at his own request, was assigned to this commission's Subcommittee X, *De Pace*, concerned with the international dimensions of the schema. The work of this subcommittee eventually found its way into Paragraph 90 of the Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*, on the Church in the Modern World. On November 17, 1965, the paragraph was approved by the Council fathers by a vote of 2,122 *placet*, to 43 *non placet*, with the following call included in Paragraph 90:

The council . . . regards it as most opportune that an organism of the universal Church be set up in order that both the justice and love of Christ toward the poor might be developed everywhere.

The role of such an organism would be to stimulate the Catholic community to promote progress in needy regions and international social justice.⁷

Three weeks later, the Council came to a close.

But getting the wording into the conciliar document was merely the easy part of the effort. Now came the much more difficult task of translating the wording of the document into a reality. Within Rome itself there was serious opposition, grouped around three bases, to a new poverty/social justice secretariat. One group felt that the addition of the new organisms or dicasteries called for by the Council would be too costly – money always talks. Another group felt that the proposed new organisms caused too much confusion and

⁶ Floyd Anderson, ed. *Council Daybook*, vol. 3 (Washington: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1965), p. 221.

⁷ "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," par. 90.

dilution of power in the curial structure, and that the needs could be better addressed by redefining and beefing up existing structures, such as *Caritas Internationalis* – power also talks. Still a third group felt that the work of social justice should be a subtext in whatever new organism might be erected for the laity. The *conspiratori* felt the need to leave one of their number in post-conciliar Rome to spearhead the effort to bring the implementation of their vision to its full fruition. With his contacts in Rome, among international Church groups, and among other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) active in the cause of social justice, James Norris was seen as the obvious person to remain in Rome and conduct the campaign on the ground.

The time between December 1965 and January 1967 was the most intensive year of Norris' life. Norris had to battle the confusion of those who were not sure what *Gaudium et Spes* 90 was calling for, the turf wars among those who realized what it said but did not want to see it fully implemented, and the lethargy among many old Roman hands who were simply relieved that the Council was over. With the assistance of Monsignor Pio Laghi, a young official in the Secretariat of State, Norris lobbied Archbishop Dell'Acqua for an ad hoc working group to draft a proposal based on Paragraph 90. On April 7, 1966, twenty-three people, including Norris and the other *conspiratori*, received an invitation to participate in a "*Gaudium et Spes* 90 Working Group." By the end of that May, the working group submitted its report to the Holy See. In the same period a similar working group that had focused on Paragraph 26 of the conciliar decree *Apostolicam actuositatem*, "On the Apostolate of the Laity," also submitted their report. On July 8, Pope Paul VI announced the formation of a "provisional committee" to provide "organic execution" to the proposals of both these groups.

Now Norris and the other *conspiratori* were genuinely terrified. The provisional committee consisted of eight people under the chairmanship of Cardinal Maurice Roy of Quebec. Roy was an unknown figure to the *conspiratori*, and only two of the eight members of the provisional committee had been members of their working group. By comparison to the “poverty group,” the advocates for a “laity dicastery” in the Roman Curia had been around for a long time and were well-organized. Many had been pushing for this day since the early 1950s. Norris and his compatriots were fearful that, despite all their efforts to make their case, in the end, their cause might be swallowed up as a mere “dependent cause” of a new laity secretariat. The pace of the lobbying efforts in the last six months of 1966 included, among others, two lengthy visits with Cardinal Roy, a personal audience with the pope, and the securing of interventions from United Nations Secretary General U Thant, and World Council of Churches General Secretary Eugene Carson Blake. Norris lamented the intense pace of his life in a letter to Monsignor Theodore McCarrick, President of the Catholic University of Puerto Rico:

I had hoped greatly to spend some time with you but frankly it is absolutely impossible to take off this time of the year because of the fact that a tremendous amount of work has accumulated in my office and which must be taken care of.⁸

Around the time Norris was writing to McCarrick, word began to leak out that he and the *conspiratori* had actually been successful. This was confirmed by the Holy Father, himself, in his 1966 Christmas address to the College of Cardinals, in which he mentioned his intention to establish the two new bodies. On January 6, 1967, Pope Paul VI issued the Apostolic Letter *motu proprio, Catholicam Christi Ecclesiam*, in which he established the “Council on the Laity” and the “Pontifical Commission for Studies on Justice and Peace,” “to awaken

⁸ James J. Norris to Rt. Rev. Msgr. Theodore E. McCarrick, 7 April 1966, NC-UNDA.

in the People of God full awareness of their mission today.”⁹ The long struggle of Norris and the others had borne the desired fruit: an independent body, located within the Holy See, committed to study the needs of social justice and to animate the whole Church concerning those needs. Their victory was further sweetened five months later, when the membership of the two new bodies was announced. Of the twenty-three members of the Paragraph 90 Working Group, twelve were named to the new Justice and Peace Commission, including Norris and all the *conspiratori*. From Monsignor Pio Laghi came a simple acknowledgement of Norris’ accomplishment:

You are the first to be congratulated for the establishment of the Pontifical Commission *Iustitia et Pax*: you have been the pioneer and sponsor of the proposal in the Council and out, *in spem, contra spem*.¹⁰

Norris’ New Jersey credentials are impeccable. He was born on Sherman Avenue in the Borough of Roselle Park in Union County, just 100 years ago this past August. He grew up in Roselle Park, Union and Elizabeth. He graduated from the old Battin High School in Elizabeth in 1924, having switched mid-stream from the two-year commercial program to the four-year academic course. Because of that switch, Norris had to fill in humanities courses before going to college, and so he did a post-high school year at Seton Hall Prep here on the South Orange campus with the class of 1926. In 1940, Norris married Amanda Tisch, also of Elizabeth. Like thousands of other New Jersey couples, then and now, they met on the train while commuting to work in New York City. When they returned from to America from a European posting in 1958, they purchased a home on Avenue of Two Rivers in Rumson. And Norris had the quintessential New Jersey death, suffering a fatal attack in November 1976 while commuting on the Jersey Shore Line from Rumson to New

⁹ Original in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, LIX, I (30 January 1967): 25-28. English translation in *The Pope Speaks*, 12, 1: (1967), 103-106.

¹⁰ Pio Laghi to James J. Norris, 15 January 1967, Gremillion Collection, University of Notre Dame Archives.

York. But Norris did more than merely live in New Jersey. He was formed by lessons for the head and the heart, which he experienced within the vibrant life of New Jersey Catholicism. It was those same early lessons that would bear fruit on the world stage at Vatican II and afterwards.

Norris was able to identify with the poor and the refugees he encountered throughout the world because he had been a refugee himself. In 1916, when he was nine years old, Norris' father, more attracted to socializing than to domestic responsibilities, abandoned the family. His grandfather sold the home and moved his daughter-in-law and four grandchildren to Union to provide a stable life for the young family and, in the words of Norris' sister, to "escape the disgrace."¹¹ The example of the adults in this situation was not lost on Norris. He would spend a good deal of his adult life imitating his mother and grandfather in trying to provide stability for other families suddenly uprooted from their homes by difficult circumstances.

Still later, the family moved again to a much more modest home on Lafayette Street in Elizabeth. The home backed up on the railroad tracks, which made for an easy commute for Norris' grandfather, George, who worked in the nearby Elizabeth railyards. But living in proximity to the railyards during the depression era of the 1920s also produced a lot of visitors, homeless men riding the rails in desperate search for work. They would knock on the back doors along the tracks, looking for a handout. Despite her own very tight circumstances, Rose Norris, Jim's mother, would always find a way to provide at least a cup of soup and a sandwich on the back porch for the "clients" who came to her door. She was often assisted in this charitable effort by her oldest child, Jim. This was the same Jim Norris who forty years later, under the auspices of Catholic Relief Services, not only initiated the

¹¹ Claire Norris Toolan to author, 24 July 1991.

Thanksgiving Clothing Drive and the Lenten Rice Bowl Campaign, two of the American Church's largest outreach campaigns, but would also galvanize the universal Church to better serve and promote the needs of the poor.

Rose Norris did not like the home on Lafayette Street in Elizabeth. Driving past the still-standing house today, one can imagine the sense of defeat a single mother with four young children would have at being forced to move from the relative tranquility of suburban Roselle Park back to the city. But there was one feature of the move that did appeal to her; it meant that she could resume her practice of attending daily Mass at the Benedictine church of the Sacred Heart (now Our Lady of Fatima) just up the street. During the summer months, her son, Jim, began to join her for the daily 6:30 A.M. Mass. For the rest of his life, daily Mass and communion would be a regular feature of Norris' spirituality. His sacramental pilgrimage took him from daily Mass at basilicas and cathedrals, to refugee camp chapels on three continents, to the temporary altar set up in the aisle of Saint Peter's Basilica during the Council. The daily Mass pilgrimage took Norris, literally, around the world, but the journey began in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

The urban parishes of New Jersey in the early decades of the twentieth century were thriving centers of life striving to meet the religious, educational, charitable and social needs of their parishioners on every age level. Sacred Heart Parish, Elizabeth was no exception. Among the youth activities offered through the parish was the Columbus Cadets Corps, a youth-oriented offshoot of the Knights of Columbus. The organization had been founded in 1921 by the New Jersey Knights as a Catholic alternative to the Boy Scouts of America and the YMCA. Its stated purpose was "moulding [a boy's] life during the adolescent period,

helping him to live a clean life, and become a moral and useful citizen.”¹² That goal was certainly accomplished in the life of James Norris. Two single men, Edgar Fursman and Edward Rowe, both of whom would later enter religious life, were hired by the Knights to organize the Columbus Cadets. Jim Norris was an original member of the corps, and, recognizing his ability, the two men utilized him as an office boy in their headquarters on Broad Street in Newark. As Fursman and Rowe fanned out across the state, recruiting and organizing, they often took Norris and another cadet, John Agoa, with them. The two adults complemented each other perfectly. Fursman was an inspirational attractive figure, and Rowe, was the planner and organizer. From these two, Norris gleaned organizational and public relations skills, which would stand him in good stead four decades later when he was organizing and buttonholing on behalf of the poverty secretariat at Vatican II.

The Columbus Cadets ran a summer camp for their members on the shores of Culvers Lake, near Branchville, New Jersey. Jim Norris was one of the original staff members of the camp. It was there that Norris encountered bigotry and tyranny for the first time. The 1920s was a period when the Ku Klux Klan was active, even in rural New Jersey. On the Fourth of July, 1924, some Klansmen set up a fiery 35-foot cross on the camp parade ground at Camp Columbus. As the boys approached the cross, a volley of shots rang out above their heads from the nearby woods. Everyone hit the dirt, except Jim Norris. He was not afraid of tyrants, and to the cheers of 500 boys, he led a squad of camp staff in taking down the cross. Nearly a half-century later, Norris encountered another tyrant, this time in central Africa. In 1962, at the height of the civil strife in the African nation of Burundi between the ruling Tutsi tribe and the beleaguered Hutus, the President of Burundi, Michel Micombero, had made himself unavailable to foreign diplomats and government

¹² Supreme Council Archives, Knights of Columbus, New Haven, CT, Leaders Handbook of the Columbus Cadet Corps of New Jersey (Newark, N.J., Headquarters, 1928), 3.

officials lest they try to force him into a truce. The one who finally broke through to the president was James Norris, who found out that Micombero was a fellow daily communicant, and buttonholed him at 6:00 A.M. Mass in the Italian Embassy Chapel in Bujumbura. After sharing the Bread of Life, Norris, quoting Scripture, had a “Tony Soprano-like” talk with Micombero, making him an offer he could not refuse. Norris threatened to cut off vital CRS food shipments, forcing Micombero to end the massacres and declare a ceasefire.¹³

Like most New Jersey parishes of the period, Sacred Heart, Elizabeth fostered a strong devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, with a Miraculous Medal Novena every Tuesday night, a thriving Rosary Society, and robust Marian devotions during May and October. Despite all of his New Jersey connections, James Norris is not buried in New Jersey. After his premature death in 1976, Norris was buried, at his direction, in Saint Mary’s Cemetery on Lincoln Road in Washington, D.C. Although he had never lived in Washington, except as a college student, Norris picked this cemetery because it lay within site of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. Norris served as a member of the Shrine Board of Directors for over a quarter-century, and was a strong motivating force on the board in encouraging the American bishops to issue their 1973 Pastoral Letter on Marian devotion, “Behold Your Mother: Woman of Faith.”¹⁴ This was a strong and lifelong devotion to the Mother of God, which originated in the devotion of his own mother, and his home parish.

But New Jersey Catholic parish life in this period was not restricted solely to traditional and devotional groups, but was beginning to explore models that were more apostolic and evangelistic, involving lay men and women more actively in the Church’s

¹³ Lawrence Bourassa, former CRS director of the Burundi Program, interview with author, 15 September 1993.

¹⁴ Rev. Msgr. John J. Murphy, former Director of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, interview with author, 8 January 1993.

mission. These were the early days of the age of “Catholic Action” among the laity. Among these cutting edge groups was the Missionary Cenacle Movement, begun by a charismatic Vincentian priest, Father Thomas Augustine Judge, C.M. in 1909 in Brooklyn. Judge was convinced that the laity were a “sleeping giant” that the Church was under-utilizing. In particular, Judge was concerned about “leakage” from the Church, especially among immigrants, and was convinced that there were areas of evangelization that would be more readily accessible to the laity than to the clergy.

The movement spread quickly to northern New Jersey. One of the earliest of the cenacles was in the Italian parish of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Orange. Indeed, the remote origins of the Trinitarian Sisters are found in the Orange Cenacle, where some of the lay members began to live in community for the first time. An early local promoter of the Cenacle Movement was Father Felix O’Neill, the pastor of Saint Michael’s Parish in Newark, the home parish of Edgar Fursman, the “colonel” of the Columbus Cadets. Under the influence of the Cenacle Movement, Fursman and Rowe were anxious to provide a spirituality component to the Columbus Cadets. Beginning in October 1923, they organized a series of retreats for the high school boys in the corps at Holy Ghost Missionary Cenacle, a rural property the Trinitarian sisters had purchased at an idyllic spot in the Watchung Mountains at Stirling, New Jersey. During the 1923-1924 school year, the Columbus Cadets ran ten youth retreats at Stirling; James Norris was present at eight of them. Sometime over the course of those retreats James Norris was introduced to Father Judge.

Meeting Judge was always a life-altering experience as he fixed his gaze into your eyes and asked the blunt question, “What are you doing for God?” Some one hundred boy members of the Columbus Cadets of New Jersey wound up answering that question by joining the Trinitarians, including Jim Norris. Norris would spend a decade with the

Trinitarians in which he would never advance higher than a first year theologian. Because of his skill and talent, Father Judge used him extensively as a treasurer, promoter, fund raiser and trouble-shooter in the founding days when the lay Cenacle Movement gave birth to a religious order of men. The relationship between Judge and Norris was intense and deeply spiritual and personal. Later on, Norris would hardly ever avert to this period of his life, except to give testimony when the cause for Judge's canonization was opened. Even his own family had only sketchy knowledge of his time with the Trinitarians. But, surely no one ever succeeded in fulfilling Judge's prophecy of the power of the laity, once it is unleashed, more fully than Norris did at Vatican II. In November 1966, even as he was involved in the intense lobbying for the Justice and Peace Commission, Norris came home to New Jersey from Rome to address the New Jersey State Holy Name Society Convention. In words that seemed to echo Father Judge, he described Vatican II as "an act of faith in the laity's capacity to animate the temporal order in a Christian spirit."¹⁵ In his Council speech, Norris used the image of a family to drive home the need for action in the Church on the poverty issue: "A loving family does not permit its members to suffer in this way."¹⁶ Norris' concept of the Church as a family was founded in these years when he experienced the strong family bonds in the Columbus Cadets, in the Missionary Cenacle Movement among the Trinitarians and in Sacred Heart Parish.

At the Council, Norris was required to deliver his intervention in Latin. This was no problem for him. During his high school years, both at Battin High School and then at Seton Hall Prep, Norris had discovered a flair for languages. Eventually he would be fluent in seven languages, but his favorite, indeed practically his sole lifetime hobby, was Latin,

¹⁵ NC-UNDA, James J. Norris, "Lay Apostolate Vocation," New Jersey Holy Name Society Convention, notes, 5 November 1966.

¹⁶ Acta Apostolicae Sedis, 63.

especially Latin poetry. Norris wrote his intervention himself. The Council Secretary General, Archbishop Pericle Felici, himself a linguist, had previously made a caustic comment about the possibility of any American layman speaking in Latin. Norris waited to respond to Felici's comment until he was in the rostrum when, departing from his published text, he prefaced his remarks with a good-natured joke, in Latin, at the expense of Felici, "*Faveat Patres me excusatam habere . . .*"¹⁷

I beg the Fathers to excuse me, but I dare to speak in an ancient tongue about modern problems, not because of my knowledge of the Latin language, but on account of my great reverence for this sacred Council and because of the ardent desire of our most excellent and loveable Secretary General.¹⁸

When Norris was finished, Felici came up to congratulate him, and challenged him, "You didn't do this." And with true New Jersey street combativeness, Norris just as quickly shot back, "I certainly did."¹⁹ His New Jersey Catholic upbringing had endowed Norris not only with a spirit of charity but also with the words with which to express it.

I began my presentation on the lower level of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington. I would like to complete our journey there as well, but not in the crypt but rather in the soaring East Apse of the Upper Church above the altars dedicated to the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary. There in the apse is a monumental mosaic of Saint Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church. Included in the ensemble is the figure of Pope Paul VI at Vatican II, surrounded by a representative group of the Council fathers. Among the group, over the pope's left shoulder, is the figure of James Norris. In the entire vast shrine, amidst hundreds of saints and figures of American Catholic history, Norris is the sole representative from New Jersey, but what a marvelous representative he is. There were nineteen infants baptized in Saint Joseph's Church, Roselle in 1907. Most of them grew up,

¹⁷ NC-UNDA, original rostrum copy of Norris intervention.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Rev. Francis X. Murphy, C.Ss.R. (Xavier Rynne), interview with the author, 22-23 September 1993.

went to school, married and had families. But the eleventh of the nineteen was different. On him were visited unique gifts of opportunity and grace. He had the opportunity to fire the strong experience of his New Jersey faith in the crucible of Vatican II and to leave an enduring legacy in the universal Church through the ongoing work of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

In my study of Norris and his life and work, I had the privilege of interviewing many important and fascinating people around the world. One of the people I was directed to was the then Apostolic Nuncio to Israel, Archbishop Andrea Cordero Lanza di Montezemolo, now the Cardinal Archpriest of the Roman Basilica of Saint Paul-outside-the-Walls. When I contacted the archbishop, he told me that he had actually only met Norris briefly once or twice, and that he had no real substantive information. But at the same time, he told me that despite this he had a clear and strong impression of Norris, and he provided me with a charming vignette, which I will use to close this presentation. Although the archbishop was not present in any capacity at the Council, his mother was! The Princess Amalia Cordero Lanza di Montezemolo was herself one of the lay auditors appointed by Paul VI. When the archbishop, then a young priest, would meet his mother at home after a conciliar working session, she would, he recalled, constantly remark about this wonderful American gentlemen, Giacomo Norris, and what a truly impressive man he was.

Of course he was impressive. He was, after all, a Jersey boy, a marvelous expression of the life and the faith of the Catholic community in our state. And through the efforts of this Jersey boy, the Garden State had the opportunity to make a stirring contribution to Vatican II, and to the life of the Church in the world ever since.