

INTRODUCTION

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As the Sixth Anniversary of my Ordination as the Bishop of Rochester approaches, I have set aside some days removed from the pressures and pace of daily schedules to reflect and pray on the progress of our common pilgrimage. These pastoral directions are the fruit of this reflection.

I have on many former occasions in sermons, conferences and articles offered glimpses of my vision. This is an attempt to provide a composite of what heretofore has been piecemeal.

There has developed within me, too, a growing personal concern that we may easily succumb to the temptation to rely almost exclusively on human techniques of efficiency to promote the work of the Lord's Kingdom among us and fail to remember the spirit that gives us the vision and direction and strength we need. With a sense of privilege and responsibility I offer this expression of my vision for the Church of Rochester.

I. VISION OF THE CHURCH

A. Communion of believers

To be the Church is to join the pilgrimage of persons who have found communion with the Lord and who share a fellowship of faith, life and love for one another on the journey. As one charged to be the shepherd of a Diocesan Communion of Believers, I know that this union, symbolized in the bishop, is a gift of the Spirit of God poured out into our hearts.

We travel with great hope, not simply passing one another as ships in the night, but together reaching out in our ministries to reconcile, to comfort and to challenge, one another to greater generosity.

I address this pastoral letter to all persons in the Church of Rochester, but especially to those of you who share with me a leader's responsibility to foster a greater sharing of the gifts and charisms of the Holy Spirit. With me you are cultivators of gifts. Like wise stewards you know when to serve the good wine. You are the living stones that help build the Kingdom of God.

Leaders of the People of God have been guided on the journey from the beginning by the word of God. Out of Ur of the Chaldees came the promise of a communion of persons alive in faith under the leadership of Abraham. With stone tablets, manna and quail, pillars of fire and cloud, God enabled Moses to bring his people through the desert to a deeper appreciation of what communion with Him means. From the lips of the prophets came clarion calls to change of direction and regrouping. In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the depth of the mystery of

suffering as a condition for communion came to light, and the promise of full communion with God in eternity was made.

How do we recognize this deep communion of believers? It seems to me to be evident in a variety of ways. As we listen to the word of God ourselves, we learn to recognize its truth aflame in the eyes of the holy ones in our midst. And who has not felt that power of communion at work in the help we provide each other from resources we never knew existed? Then again, there are those who, by their demands, provide us with a continued reminder of the bond that holds us together.

In a phrase, the Church is a communion of love. Being in love with God and with the community of the faithful is a reality very much within the realm of human experience. It is intensely personal. It is enduring. It may begin with a startling realization of a brand new world full of promise. Once it takes over in our life, it shapes everything we do — how we spend our evenings, what we think about as we drive along in the car, what we are willing to risk. Its fruits are a deep-set peace, patience, gentleness, joy, hope, courage and zeal. It is a glimpse of all that life with God can provide.

B. Comprehensive in scope

This communion of persons makes its own the viewpoint of the Father of all who so loved this world — all persons, all societies — that He sent His only Son to give His life to all. Thus, there is **nothing** which lies beyond the concern of this community of persons. It is good to reflect upon this.

The communion of Church is called upon to rejoice with God at the great scientific discoveries which end the oppression of disease for millions. But our minds must not be too dazzled to understand and delight in the charming simplicity of a drawing by a handicapped child. We grieve at the tragedy of war spawned by hatred, and bringing a harvest of destruction. But, while mourning, we rejoice and celebrate the happiness of a newly married couple. All of us marvel at the complexities of the computer age, but the art of a well prepared meal results from the same loving intelligence. The family is the basic household of our society but we cannot proclaim this to the extent that we forget the "national household" — the economy, the political structures, the educational institutions — which nurture or stifle the life of families today. The Church must be leaven for the great and the small, the acts and deeds which require the collaboration of the whole society and the smaller acts of kindness or justice which make or break our days.

At every level of Church, I ask for a humble openness to the diversity of the world that humankind is building. We should not be overwhelmed or frightened by the many facets or the many cultures of modern life, for they

all need the gospel. Today it will not be one person, like Paul the Apostle, who will be "all things to all people"; rather the universal communion with its variety of gifts will face this challenge. Each local Church faces this full range of diversity of ministry. Do not withdraw from or flee this diversity. I recognize that, as a communion, we do not have the strength or talents to deal with the entire world effectively, but this fact underscores our dependence upon each other and our dependence upon God.

Let me share with you my pastoral stance in the face of the world today.

1. I urge that we remain committed to **persons as unique individuals**. Church people should try to know one another by name. We should not let ourselves become functionaries — "the usher" or "that person who sings." There are enough ID numbers around without our adding to it. And, as we try to be personally present to one another in the communion of Church, I think we can help the other very complicated service institutions in our society to do a little more of the same. The Spanish-speaking person at the Social Security desk may need someone who knows her well to stand beside her and help a nationwide bureaucracy get to know her needs a little better.

2. Our communion can be strengthened in its service by parishes working together. Teamwork will help us to deal with the complicated questions of today — questions ranging from the understanding and teaching of the latest papal encyclical, to the building of a town's community spirit in celebrating the Bicentennial, or to moral dialogue with legislators or hospital administrators. It may help us to bring the saving truth of the Gospel to persons in nursing homes, or a downtown high-rise, or county jails. We must be a flexible and inquiring communion of persons, leaving behind boundaries and divisions when they no longer help us, or institutions which are much broader than a parish or a diocese. **Our base should be whatever is needed for effective ministry**. I have offered some guidelines for doing this, but loving and alert, on-the-spot leaders will be most effective in creating these new patterns.

3. We can no longer pretend that as a communion we are basically concerned only with those people whom we can see with our own eyes or who live within a day's drive of us. We must face the question, "How big is your God?" The goal of our Church in service to the God of all is local, but it is also diocesan, statewide, nationwide, and even worldwide. The needs of the unchurched must be met at every level. The "common good" will be built by a common concern of many different people who, more than ever before in history, need each other's help. It could be asked how a local parish can face the massive questions of the arms race or of world hunger. But, what a single parish