

Bishop Airs Final 'Thornbush' Report

'I Believe It Needs to Be Read and Studied by All in the Diocese'

Bishop Matthew H. Clark recently received and published the final report of the diocesan task force on his pastoral letter, "The Fire in the Thornbush," on women in the Church.

In a letter dated Jan. 13, Bishop Clark indicated that he was disseminating the report across the diocese even before he had thoroughly

studied it, "because I believe it needs to be read and studied by all in the diocese who seek to fulfill our responsibilities to women in our local Church."

"In addition to its general presentation, the report contains specific recommendations which are addressed

to me. I will be studying these recommendations in the near future, but right now I am

eager to distribute this report as widely as possible in the diocese so that all will be aware of the full contents of the report, will reflect on what it has to teach us, and will seek ways to assist men in continuing and strengthening our responsiveness to the needs and hopes of women and men in our Church," he wrote.

The report follows nearly two years of discussion on the bishop's pastoral. It includes information on issues raised and questions asked at meetings in 60 parishes. Also included are suggested courses of action to carry out the message of the pastoral.

A diocesan news release said, "Parish discussion focused on such issues as the current experience of women in the Church, spirituality and women, women and the

mission of today's Church, the ministries of women, and Mary as model of discipleship."

In making 31 specific recommendations to the bishop, the task force asked for "inclusive language in all parish and diocesan communications and communicate with equity to both women and men, clergy and laity; -

"Make every effort to include equal numbers of men and women in all liturgical roles open to lay ministers, to expand and renew the parish lists of men and women who will serve in these ways, and to include lay ministers, men and women, in all liturgies;

"Provide, with the assistance of women, a clear and explicit program for seminarians, prior to their ordination to the priesthood, to develop their understanding and appreciation of women in the Catholic Church."

In addition, the report recommends the bishop advocate in national and international forums for the elimination of "exclusive" language in the Eucharistic Liturgy; "for a revision of translations of the Bible, especially those parts used in the liturgy, that without compromising the meaning of the sacred text, will eliminate exclusive language;" for a change in the liturgical norms "so that young girls and women will be welcomed" to act as acolytes and alter servers "equally with young boys and men;"

The report also includes the sentiments gathered on specific questions attendant to ordaining women: "Regarding the role of women in the Church, a great many groups supported the idea of women preachers,

women deacons and girl altar servers. Support was particularly evident for women preachers: 'Put qualified women forward to preach at every chance possible,' said one group. Lay ministers should be allowed to give the homily when the gospel speaks of the kind of ministry in which they are engaged, and priests should support lay preaching wherever possible.

"Support for women deacons was also very strong. Groups felt that parishes need to be educated to the value of having women deacons, including a clear explanation of women deacons in the early Church.

"Parish groups want more information in general on the 'whys' of the Church position that prevents women from full participation in the Church. One group prudently suggested that women be slowly assimilated into parish roles until the parish is comfortable with their leadership. Another group wanted to see more lay women as pastoral assistants.

"More caution was evident concerning the ordination of women to the priesthood. Some groups wanted women ordained but suggested that the faithful be sufficiently prepared. Others asserted that women must not back off from this issue even though it does stir up controversy. Another group said, 'Women should be doing something constructive with their time instead of making waves about the priesthood.' Another said we must only do as Church rules allow."

As did the bishop's pastoral, the task force report places a heavy stress on attitudinal change and on prayer:

"All of us in the diocese have a common journey to travel into into the present and the future to which God calls us individually and communally. The Task Force prays that its members and everyone else on this journey will take seriously all that is presented in this Report. It prays that each of us will realize his or her own personal responsibility as well as our common responsibility to build up the Christian honor, hope and joy of all men and women in the Church. The Task Force asks that Bishop Matthew Clark strongly urge all diocesan bodies, departments, institutions, parishes and their people and leaders as well as the National Conference of Catholic Bishops to pick up the many large and small tasks that remain and carry them forward, for the sake of the vitality, maturity and holiness of Christ's people."

The task force concluded its report:

Task Force Chair 'Confident' on Bishop's Response

The chairperson of the task force on the bishop's pastoral letter, Sister Mary Sullivan, dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Rochester Institute of Technology, said last week, "The task force is confident that Bishop Clark will do all in his power to implement all of the (task force) recommendations he accepts."

She also observed that of the original courses of action Bishop Clark proposed in his pastoral letter, "the diocese needs to be informed" about

"We pray for the faith community of our diocese that we may have the courage and love to follow through on the courses of action and recommendations that have arisen out of our diocesan-wide reflection and dialogue.

"We pray that the diocese will, with God's help, avoid what parish participants most feared: that their voices would not be heard, that dialogue on these matters would die, that their recommendations would not be treated seriously, that their reports and this Report would simply gather dust on diocesan and parish shelves. It is the responsibility of each of us in the diocese not to let that happen."

"May Christ who is with us and in us on this journey inspire and convert us and may his indefatigable Spirit impel us with his special encouragement and prompting — on behalf of the faith, hope and love of all women and men in our Church."

Sarah Child



All in the Family

Of Gremlins And Hats

A little of this and some of that.

The gremlins went to work on last week's column. Louisa May Alcott's "Little Women" was the FIRST full-length novel I ever read, not the FINEST. The typo sent me thinking, however, on what is the finest novel I'd ever read.

I couldn't come up with an answer. Different novels do different things for a reader. Some make you dwell upon the human truths propounded. Others impress you with their finely drawn characters. Some intrigue you with plotting while others delight you with the warmth they convey. And, of course, some confound you as to their lack of any of the above.

For pure fun and enjoyment, "Pride and Prejudice" wins hands down for me. I've read it about a half dozen times and Jane Austen's pompous clergyman Mr. Collins and the consequential Lady Catherine DeBourgh are as delicious a pair of fools as literature has to offer.

The phrase, "hat trick" which denotes three goals in a hockey or soccer game by one player, sent me to the bookshelves last summer. I found the origin of the phrase in John Ciardi's "A Brower's Dictionary." According to Ciardi, "hat trick" originated in Great Britain in the game of cricket for the feat of knocking over three wickets in three successive bowls. The feat was signified by passing the hat among the spectators for the benefit of the star athlete.

Thinking about it again the other day, it occurred that hat is a popular symbol in American folklore. Passing the hat, as

mentioned above, means to take up a collection. If someone is "high hat," they are snobbish. If you literally "take off your hat" to someone, it means admiration, possibly of the grudging sort.

"Throwing one's hat into the ring" is familiar terminology for announcing a political candidacy. It comes from the custom of a strong man in a boxing exhibition sparring with partners then challenging those in the audience to take him on. Throwing your hat in signified you had accepted the challenge.

In cowboy thrillers of old, it didn't take words for us to determine which was the hero and which the villain. The good guy wore a white hat, the bad one, a black.

I could be wrong but in other movies of the forties, men of consequence wore hats, working men and sporty, casual types wore caps. But a hat could also denote a fop or a buffoon, as well.

Then there is the phrase "mad as a hatter." At least one of our phrase-ology books refutes the following theory but it makes sense: Felt hats were made by treating furs with mercury. Prolonged exposure to the fumes damaged the nervous system.

To "hang up one's hat in a house" is to make yourself at home. One phrase which still defeats me is "to eat one's hat." According to Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, the Scots have a dish called hatted-kit made chiefly of new cream. Perhaps if a Scotsman was proved wrong, he had to eat his hatted-kit. If anybody has a better explanation, I'd like to hear from him.

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