

Along The Way

With Bishop Matthew H. Clark



An ordination at Our Lady of the Genesee, the Trappist monastery at Piffard ... a meeting with a group of pastoral and administrative leaders of Catholic elementary schools in the city of Rochester ... the installation in Washington, D.C., of the first archbishop of the new archdiocese for the military ... a meeting in Skaneateles with the leadership of the congregations of religious women of New York state ... a two-day joint meeting of our Priests' Council and Sisters' Council at Notre Dame Retreat House, Canandaigua ... commencement at St. Bernard's Institute ... a meeting at St. Helen, Gates, of our Diocesan Pastoral Council ... the dedication of the Church of the Transfiguration, home of our newest parish community ... confirmation of 75 young persons at Christ the King, Irondequoit.

These are the events that shaped my week. These are the gatherings by and which the Lord and the people involved taught me something more about Easter life. As I think about all whom I met during these days, the mysteries of grace we

were celebrating, I find myself very much strengthened in faith and renewed in hope.

If you look back at the activities mentioned above, you'll note that some, like the ordination and dedication, collect rich experience and celebrate it with renewed hopes for the future. Others, like the meetings at Canandaigua, Skaneateles and St. Helen's, involve ongoing groups in a continuing reflection and response to the Lord's will for our local Church.

The confirmation is an experience of a community nourishing individuals and individuals, in turn, strengthening community.

All of these are examples of life in the Church; all reflect the fact that we are richly blessed but unfinished; all bespeak a journey that must continue. Most importantly, all remind of the presence of a loving Spirit giving further growth to a people already beloved.

If you have a pencil at hand and a moment to spare, why not pick it up and jot down the significant events and experiences of your week? And when you have done that, take

a moment to ask how each of those opened your relationship with God or taught you more about yourself and other people.

A prayerful and peaceful effort to do this can be a richly fruitful way of remembering that no aspect or dimension of our human experience — especially the painful and frustrating — is apart from the touch and love of God.

As a further step in this kind of prayerful reflection, you may wish to invite a family member or another friend to a sharing of his kind of faith memory. It can be a delightful, edifying experience.

Some notes on the coming week:

Meeting in New York of the bishops of the eight dioceses in our state ... a talk on women in the Church at Christ the King Seminary, East Aurora ... the ordination of Pat Sullivan to priesthood at St. Andrew's in Rochester ... Baccalaureate Liturgy at Nazareth College ... a quick trip to Waterford to celebrate Mothers' Day.

Happy Mothers' Day to you.
Peace to all.

A Changing Church Still Speaks to Its Older Members

By Teresa A. Parsons

Sister Helen Joseph Maloney, SSJ, remembers clearly the day she first walked into a school without wearing a veil.

"We thought we'd do it gradually, starting with the younger sisters like me," she recalled.

"So I started out that morning, and a group of girls was waiting because they knew this would be the day. And when they saw me, they ran over together and cried 'Oh Sister, you're beautiful!' It meant so much — the confidence that gave me."

Since 1964, the proclamation of Vatican Council II has dramatically reshaped the lives of all Catholics, but perhaps no group has felt its influence more profoundly than those over 65, and particularly those called to religious life.

Members of both categories, Sister Helen, 83, and Sister Margaret Joseph Margrett, SSJ, 77, both retired teachers, have spent most of their combined 105 years of service in elementary schools throughout the diocese. They agreed that the most apparent change for them — the adoption of secular clothing — was much more difficult for lay people to accept than it was for either of them.

"It meant we were not up on a pedestal anymore, but we never should have been there in the first place," said Sister Helen firmly, adding that "it was a much-needed change."

More important than changes of clothing to both sisters was the sense that they had rejoined the rest of the world.

"It was a breath of new life — like spring coming," said Sister Helen, noting that "before we were way out here on our own, but now all sorts of people come to the Motherhouse for programs and retreats."

Father Benedict Ehmman, 80, was pastor of St. Michael's Church in Rochester in 1964 and recalls his reaction to the actual announcement of the council's proclamation as "a pleasant thanks-be-to-God."

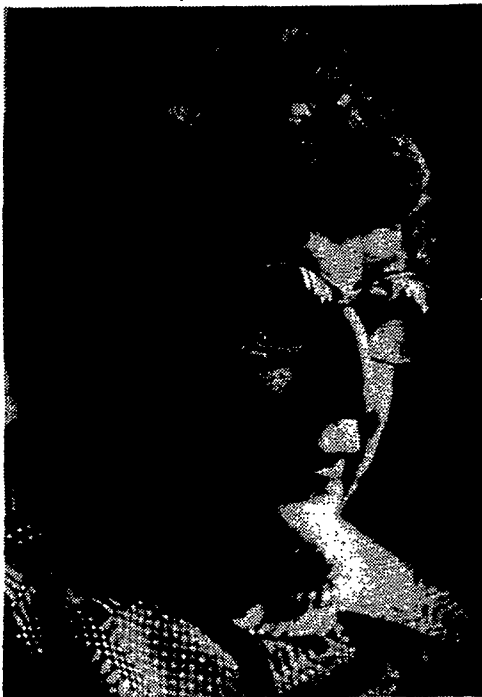
"As someone who pioneered these changes for more than 30 years, it was no surprise to me," he added.

Today Father Ehmman views the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults as the most profound and far-reaching implementation of Vatican II.

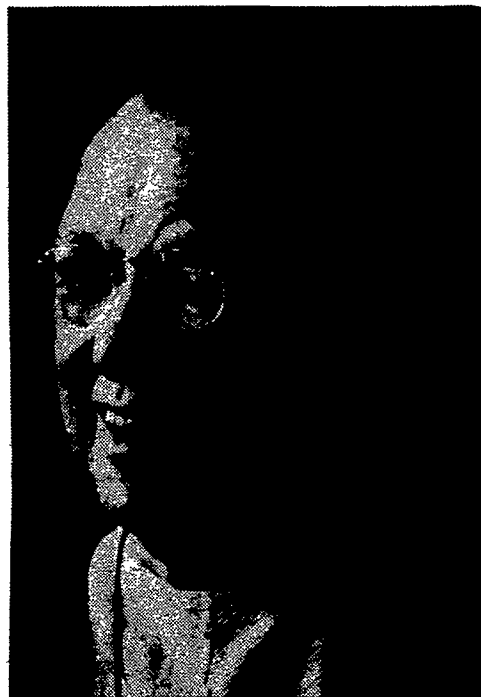
"It gets right to the root of what it means to be a Catholic," he said, adding that "to be received into the faith and enveloped by a team at the parish is at the heart of the meaning of 'Church.'"

More than 42,000 Catholics in the Rochester diocese are over 65 according to the office of the chancellor, Father Peter T. Bayer. Among the laity in many parishes, this age group remains the single most-active force.

"They are the strength of this parish, financially and spiritually," said Father Albert V. Ryan, pastor of St. Mary's Church



Sister Helen Joseph Maloney



Sister Margaret Joseph Margrett



Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

in Bath. "There just are not the numbers of younger people active here as older."

What has enabled Catholic lay persons to remain faithful to a church so changed from the one in which they were born and raised? Margaret Minichello, 73, attributes her ability to accept the changes she has experienced to her upbringing and a sense of what really matters.

"We grew up believing that, like it or not, in matters of religion, the church is the boss," she said. "Besides, your salvation doesn't depend only on what you do in church. It's your faith — nothing should make you quit."

Minichello serves as parish secretary for St. Mary's in Bath, and until last October was head of the school board. Over the years, she has worked closely with three pastors handling parish finances.

Increased participation by laity in functions like Eucharistic ministry, in her view, has been one of the most important developments of the past 20 years, particularly for parishes like St. Mary's where the pastor might have one assistant at best.

For M. Jan New, 65, of Dunn Towers, accepting change has been easier on an individual basis. She recalls at one time being very much against lay people giving Communion. But during a hospital stay, she found herself grateful for the service of those who visited her, and her attitude changed.

"When it's a person you respect, it makes a big difference," she added.

New doesn't believe that all changes have been positive, however. Most of all, she says church communities today lack warmth. "There's just not the feeling of belonging that used to make me want to go to Mass," she said, recalling that years ago, even when she didn't know anyone at a particular church, she felt at home.

"I wish I knew why, but I don't," she added.

Myrtle Gerew, also of Dunn Towers, cites today's catechism and other youth programs as the biggest improvement the church has made in her 81 years. And since she's raised four children of her own in addition to 36 foster children over the years, she could be considered a C.C.D. expert.

Gerew remains active as a lector, parish council member and Rosary Society president at St. Theodore's Church on Spencerport Road.

One change she has found too difficult to make personally is receiving the sacrament of reconciliation face-to-face.

During a recent retreat, she recalled going into what she thought was a traditional confessional, only to find the priest waiting at a table for her.

"I wanted to turn around and leave," she recalled with a smile, "but I went through with it — only because I didn't know him. I couldn't face someone I knew on the sidewalk after that," she added.