

Along The Way

With Bishop Matthew H. Clark



I hope you have been enjoying as much as I have the ways in which Karen Franz and the new staff of the Courier-Journal have brought their own fresh touch to this publication.

Among the many features that have caught and pleased this reader's eye are the organization of the Neighbors in the News section, the striking photographs, the development of stories about older Americans and the reappearance of reporting on youth activities.

As I thank our new staff, I also thank Anthony Costello and the outgoing staff for leaving such a solid foundation upon which to build. In addition, I thank Bishop Hickey and the other members of the Courier-Journal Board for their generous service through this time of transition.

I am committed to a strong Catholic newspaper for our diocese and am prepared to ask of all our parish communities the kind of sacrifice that will allow us to have one.

I had the opportunity recently to preside at a Eucharistic Liturgy and enjoy a luncheon with a group of lay persons,

religious men and women, and priests who are involved in the ministries of offering retreats and spiritual direction.

Last year, under the leadership of Sister Muriel Curran, they formed an association for mutual enrichment, coordination of activities and ongoing professional development.

Father Francis Blighton and Sister Rita Kaufman, RSM, are the newly elected co-chairpersons of the group which draws together women and men from several parts of our diocese.

The association is another reminder of the human resources with which our diocese is blessed. It is also indicative of the strong desire for spiritual growth manifest by so many of you in so many ways.

I am constantly intrigued by the deep spiritual life I encounter in people of all ages in our diocesan family. In so many men and women, boys and girls, there is not only bright evidence of life lived in awareness of God's love, but there are also among them beautiful signs of a thirst to live more deeply in the mystery of the Lord's risen life.

It is May 20. I am in the Rochester/Monroe County Airport writing this for publication in the Courier-Journal that will be dated Wednesday, May 29.

I'll ask you to suspend your reckoning of time and allow me to tell you that the trip I am making to Rome, I hope will be a time of prayer and renewal. I have made the intention to offer the total experience for the spiritual welfare of our family of faith.

My hope is to offer the Eucharist at Christ the King where I was ordained a priest, at St. Peter's where I was ordained a bishop, at the chapels at both the seminaries and graduate houses of the North American College where I spent so many happy years.

As always, I count on your love and prayers.

Thanks to all for more gifts and favors than I could possibly number.

Peace to all!

Diocesan

Appointments

Bishop Matthew H. Clark has announced the following diocesan appointments:

ASSOCIATE PASTORS

Father Philip Billotte from associate, St. Patrick's, Corning, to associate, Holy Trinity, Webster.

Father Robert Ring from assistant in internship, Church of the Assumption, Fairport, to associate, St. Mary Our Mother, Horseheads.

Father John Zimmerman from associate, St. Margaret Mary, Rochester, to associate, St. Rita's, West Webster.

SPECIAL WORKERS

Father Michael Schramel from associate,

Holy Trinity, Webster, to campus chaplain, SUNY at Brockport.

CLUSTER II — NORTHEAST QUADRANT

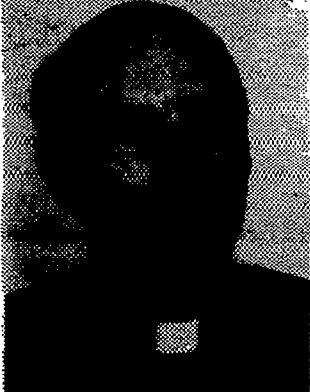
Father George Wiant, pastor of Cluster II — Northeast Quadrant (In addition to duties of pastor at St. Joseph's, Weedsport, will also serve as pastor for St. Patrick's, Cato; St. John's, Port Byron; St. Michael's, Montezuma).

PRIEST INTERNS Newly Ordained

Father David Faraone from Mother of Sorrows, Rochester, to St. Mary's, Auburn.

Father Stanley Kacprzak from St. Margaret Mary, Rochester, to Mother of Sorrows, Rochester.

Father Patrick Sullivan from St. Andrew's, Rochester, to St. Margaret Mary, Rochester.



Father Bruce Ritter

Hope Resurfaced -- Lives Regained

No girls, Bruce. There can't be any girls! The kid was deadly serious. He was an almost 18 year old kid -- one of 10 sitting around my office. They were painfully alert. A studied non-

chalance was their disguise.

Taken altogether they were a mean looking bunch of street kids.

My other guests were three prominent businessmen whom I had invited to meet some of my kids and to discuss the possibility of a new job training program.

Girls would wreck the program, Bruce. We couldn't concentrate. The other kids laughed. Put them in another building, Bruce.

We're only able to help about one-third of our kids make it back off the street. We lose the rest. They start from too far back, many already too damaged by what happens to a kid on the street.

The kids in my office were in the last two-thirds. They knew it. I think that explained their curiously watchful intensity.

They weren't anything special. You see, I had sent word to my staff that any 17, 18 or 19 year old kids who wanted to talk to me and some of my friends about their future could come to my office. This raggle-taggle bobtailed bunch of mavericks showed up. I didn't know any of them.

What they needed, of course, more than anything else in the world, was a place to live for 12 to 18 months until they could graduate from a first class job training program with marketable skills, a job -- and a chance to get married and have kids, and even, to pay taxes!

(Their other options are too painful to think about: a mind-warping loneliness, the endless tiny swallows of daily terror, the habitual 42nd street diet, and almost certainly, either prison or an early death -- or worse, a slow dragged-out one.)

So, they watched me. Their hard, careful eyes rarely leaving my face.

I can give you a place to live, I said, for a year, even longer. And the job training. But I have to know a few things. Can you handle it? Really? Do you want to, really? The kids knew what I meant. I didn't have to spell it out.

Try me, one kid said. I need it, Bruce. I can go downstairs and find ten more kids like me who need it too. And each of us could find ten more, another kid said.

Bruce, I'd do anything, Bruce...

Could you let me inside your head, I said? Would you let me inside your head and walk around there, I said? Would

Father Bruce Ritter, OFM Conv., is the founder and President of Covenant House, which operates crisis centers for homeless and runaway boys and girls all over the country.

you let me tell you how to walk and talk and act? Could you accept discipline and structure from me?

We could do that, a kid said. He had an old-young face. The intelligence burst out at me. (I have a weakness for really smart kids.) You could tell he was still a boy but you knew what he would look like at 30.

The counselors here say I have an alcohol problem, Bruce, but I could handle that if I had a chance. I mean, if I had a reason to.

And, quite suddenly, his face didn't care anymore that it stood naked in its pain and loneliness before me... He wanted me to see.

I spoke directly to him. Where do you want to live, I said? You can either live in an inexpensive hotel nearby -- I can get you a room -- and go to classes every day. You'd be pretty much on your own, though, I said.

Or you can live here, on the fourth floor. I could give you and 25 other kids the fourth floor. But, there would be plenty of structure, some rules, a curfew -- and I'd be inside your head. All the time, I said.

"His face didn't care anymore that it stood naked in its pain and loneliness before me..."

I wouldn't make it in the hotel, Bruce. I wish I could say I could. I can't make it on my own, Bruce. He didn't care that the other kids were listening.

None of us can, Bruce, another kid said. We know that -- we won't mind the rules. We know we need them.

We talked for almost two hours, the kids and I. My three friends, the businessmen who wanted to help, just listened and didn't say much.

After a while it got a little scary and I had to be careful.

I mean, one by one the kids began to understand what was happening. I mean, it didn't start out that way but it became clear what was really happening. They had been afraid to hope and now they were beginning to -- they hadn't wanted to. They didn't want to but they couldn't help it.

(You can't play around with hope. You can't play games with hope. It's a live hand grenade in the heart of a street kid.)

I got this stupid lump in my throat that wouldn't go away and my eyes began to sting and only long practice at being functional and grinding down on my teeth saved me.

I almost lost it again when the words from a haunting song by a group called Foreigner drifted up to the top of my mind and flicked across the back of my eyes:

"I want to know where love is.
I want you to show me.
I want to feel where love is.
I know you can show me..."

The kid with the old-young face, the ravaged face, look-

ed at me. Keep me in mind if you start this program, Bruce. I'll let you in my mind, he said. I wanted to say that I was already there but I think he knew that and I was embarrassed...

The meeting ended at that point. I didn't make any effort to hide what I felt. They didn't either.

One by one as they left, the kids reached out to shake my hand -- but it was really just so we could touch each other.

The three businessmen and I looked at each other. That was very moving, one of them said finally. Yes, I said.

This conversation took place a little over a week ago. At first I didn't want to write about it, or even talk about it. It was very personal and there was something very special about it. I learned all over again, for the thousandth time, how good these kids are and how easy it is to love them.

I need your help. I really do. It will take a lot of money to do this program and we're already hurting financially, but I do have to do it. (There are 10 more like me, Bruce, and each of us can find 10 more...)

It seems like I'm always asking you for money and I guess I am. I'm a rotten beggar and I really hate it even though St. Francis told us Friars that we should never be ashamed to beg. In fact, he said we had to.

But, he said, we could only beg for the love of God, and for the poor.

So, I beg you, for the love of God, help my kids. There's nobody much poorer. If you have a few extra bucks around this month I'd really appreciate it if you'd think of my kids.

Pray for us. We pray for you all the time.

Yes, I agree kids have run into far too many dead ends already. Enclosed is my gift of: \$ _____
please print:

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____

ZIP: _____ AP (LIM)

Please send this coupon with your donation to:

COVENANT HOUSE
Father Bruce Ritter
P.O. Box 2121
Times Square Station
New York, NY 10108



LIFE ON THE STREET IS A DEAD END