

Diocesan Mass for Peace Invokes Healing Power of Christ

By Teresa A. Parsons

A crowd of more than 300 people braved sweltering temperatures to join Bishop Matthew H. Clark in celebrating a diocesan Mass for Peace on Friday evening, August 9, at St. Francis DeSales Church in Geneva. The occasion honored the 40th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan.

In an expression of unity in diversity, 20 parishes sent representatives to walk in the Mass's opening procession, each carrying a written description of the community's work for peace.

Most parishes offered spiritual bouquets. St. Anne's in Rochester gave a beautifully wrapped scroll including 159 fasts, 211 daily rosaries and 62 daily Masses for peace and reconciliation. St. Hyacinth in Auburn offered special novena prayers in honor of St. Maximilian Kolbe, martyr of World War II and founder of the City of the Immaculate in Nagasaki, Japan. The 120 children of the Honeoye Falls Vacation Bible School, plus staff and parents offered prayers, plus the trip to Washington for Pentagon Sunday by two parishioners. St. Gregory's Church in Marion brought a list of their peace celebrations, complete with a flower-bedecked purple ribbon.

In his homily, Bishop Clark admitted that the present situation could be discouraging. "We stand in real danger of a cataclysmic

tragedy," he said. "We need to remember the reality of the Lord's power ... that his power can feed all the hungry; that his power can heal even the most forlorn of relationships, that there is nothing that can't be healed by the power of Christ."

Planning for the Mass began back in April with the diocesan Challenge of Peace steering committee, which includes Jim Lund, Mary Heidkamp, Lourdes Perez-Albuern and Giovina Caroscio.

"Issues so often divide us," Lund pointed out. "It's important to come together in prayer, which transcends all political differences."

The committee decided on a Mass, he said, because it would provide an opportunity for a distinctly Catholic expression. "Our own tradition offers points of reflection we need to build on," Lund said.

Linda Clark and Janet Mlinar of Rochester said they appreciated the liturgy's recognition that peace in the world can't be achieved without inner peace. "You can't have one without the other," Linda said. "Peace is a gift from God — it takes courage on our part."

An Avon resident, Andrea Whitcomb, 25, was impressed by the turnout. "It's nice to see so many people working for peace in a peaceful way," she said. "It's good not to waste this tragedy, but to use it as a lesson. War is war — it doesn't matter who starts it. It has to stop."



Deacon Carlos Vargas assists Bishop Matthew H. Clark with the Eucharistic preparations.



Sister Nancy Burkin, SSJ, leads the congregation as cantor during the peace Mass held at St. Francis DeSales parish on Friday evening, August 9.



Bishop Clark greets parishioners during the recessional.

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"It shows that the movement is still here. It's not a dead issue like President Reagan would like to believe," said Phil Sweeney, a therapist from Phelps, who came with a group called Phelps People For Peace. "Things like this keep you going and committed. When my kids grow up, I hope there's a world that's not so frightening and unstable for them."

Another theme sounded throughout the day was that one person can make a difference. In her speech during the rally at the park, Elizabeth Holtzman quoted former President Dwight D. Eisenhower, saying "People want peace so badly, some day governments are going to have to get out of their way and let them have it."

"I believe we must recognize the power in each one of ourselves to make a difference," she said. "I have seen, even in my short time in government, the power of the people's moral outrage work. I saw the Vietnam War ended by the millions who protested," she added to thunderous applause.

Ruth and Ed Cummins also remember the Vietnam War as a victory of the people over government — one they helped to create. So although they are now aged 70 and 71, the Cortland physician and his wife made more than half of the 10-mile hike. "I'm here out of concern about the destiny of our world," Ed said. "We've got to get the peace movement going again." Recalling a remark by Kurt Vonnegut, Ruth added "It's not the bomb that keeps me awake at night — it's the quiescence of the peace movement."

As did the rally in 1983, this demonstration brought together people whose ideologies more often drive them apart. Colleen O'Halloran and Debbie Pankiw, members of Prolifers for Survival, joined the walk for peace dressed in "Choose Life" T-shirts.

"It's my obligation as a parent to be here," O'Halloran said as she struggled to push a stroller through the soft tar of the roadside.

Hibakusha Tour

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Thanks to the kindness of a stranger who took the boy in off the streets and fed and bathed him, Maruoka miraculously survived the initial effects of the blast. Within several weeks, however, subcutaneous hemorrhages developed and he was once again taken with high fever. "Boiling such medical herbs as *thunbergii* and *Houttuynia cordata* or preparing blood of living carp, chickens, and snakes for me to drink, my parents continued to take care of my health for a year," he continues.

The following spring, dandelions and clover began to mushroom out of the debris on city streets, defying a prediction that no plants would grow in Hiroshima for 70 years. "I resumed going to school a year later. Out of 300 students, only about 40 were found alive," says Maruoka. "But soon they died one after another. Every morning I went to school, I found a vacant seat. As days passed, the number of vacant seats increased like teeth coming out one by one. Wondering whether we would be an addition to the number tomorrow, we stared at one another. Only by doing so did we recognize that we were still alive."

The radiation sickness that finished off his classmates struck Maruoka some 18 years later, when he fell unconscious and had to be hospitalized. "Residual radioactivity in my spinal cord, resulting from the atomic bombing, gave rise to acute myelitis," he recalls. "I could neither see nor eat anything. I suffered from aphasia, being unable to utter a word ... Since I was a living corpse, the doctor pronounced me incurable and doomed to die."

But Maruoka's wife, also a *hibakusha*, continued to care for him in the hospital for four years, and "a miracle happened again." Although, like Teru Morimoto,

he continues to suffer from a number of illnesses and chronic conditions, Maruoka is again able to walk, with the help of a cane, quite well enough to march into Sampson State Park behind the Hibakusha Peace Tour banner.

Morimoto tells a similarly harrowing story of lingering, debilitating illness augmented by the additional heartbreak of having given birth to two stillborn children. "I think many of you, especially women, will understand what it means to a mother to lose children in that way," she said in her address to the large crowd later Saturday afternoon.

The *hibakusha* have also had to contend with the apathy of the Japanese government toward A-bomb survivors and the discrimination of many of their compatriots. "We could not get a job simply because we were *hibakusha*," says Maruoka. "We could not be married simply because we were *hibakusha*. This kind of discrimination was more terrible

than the atomic bombing itself."

With the passing of the generations, that type of oppression is perhaps not so pronounced as in the early years, according to Maruoka, but it persists nevertheless among some Japanese. Maruoka's cane caused "the door to employment" to once again be closed to him, even 19 years after the bombs fell.

"Let us walk together to eliminate all nuclear weapons from this planet," he concluded at the end of his brief speech to the recently returned peace walkers who rested on the grass at Sampson State Park.

"Let us preserve this blue planet for our children," echoed Misoko Ishiguro.

The *hibakusha* left the stage to prolonged applause, and Fumimaro Maruoka, with great dignity, hobbled painfully off, leaning heavily on the cane that serves as the cross he will bear for the remainder of his natural life on this blue planet.



Fumimaro Maruoka



Teru Morimoto

Bruce Wang