



Along the Way

Bishop Matthew H. Clark

When I use a funnel, I usually pour quickly and then need to stop so that the liquid that has accumulated in the reservoir can pass through the narrow tube into the receiving vessel. You may be from the pour-less-but-keep-the-stream-flowing school of funnel use.

Tonight, as I write these words, I think of the activities of this week as collected in me like water in the reservoir of a funnel. And I am grateful for the time to absorb them into the deeper levels of my being.

I think not so much of the number of activities and events, but of the intensity of human experience — joyful and sorrowful — to which they called me and so many others who were involved in them.

Father Charlie Lavery's Mass of Christian Burial was one such event. That beautiful rite was, to be sure, touched by a real sense of sadness and loss for a wide variety of persons in our community. But it was a rich source of meditation for the many who gathered there. For me, it was a time to reflect on the capacity each of us has to be an influence for good in the lives of others. It has also been a reminder of what a constant source of growth an openness to others can be in the lives of all of us. Charlie was an especially gifted person in many ways. I find myself wondering on this quiet evening if one of his greatest gifts was not his ability to bring out the very best in others.

This afternoon, our Sisters of Mercy along with many friends celebrated the 20th anniversary of their friendship and mission with the people of Chile.

Journey and growth, vision and sacrifice were themes woven deeply in the fabric of the joyful celebration.

Sister Janet Korn spoke in particular of Our Lord's identification with the poor, and of how in her many years of service in Chile the poor of that country revealed to her the wonderful face of Christ. Her references to Mary's words, "He has deposed the mighty from their thrones and raised the lowly to high places," makes me wonder what it means to be lowly in 20th century America. More specifically, it draws me to a bit of wrestling with that question in my own life.

I'll have a good time to deal with that issue in the days ahead when I travel to Chile with sisters Jean Marie Kearse, Judith Heberle and Janet Korn, to join in the 20th anniversary celebration there.

Saturday afternoon at Bishop Kearney, I heard six finalists in the oratorical contest cosponsored by our Diocesan Office of General Education and the Federation of Catholic School Parents.

Their theme was "Do You speak to God," and their responses, based on their experience of and through prayer, were thoughtful and challenging. I admired these six young women for their thinking and for the courage it took to share it with the several hundreds who enjoyed their excellent presentations. Thanks to all of the finalists, and congratulations to the winner of the first prize — Tricia DiMaggio, from St. Joseph's School in Penfield. Peace to all!

Bishop discusses diocesan ministries

The future challenges of church ministry in the diocese

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Among the great riches in our diocese is the level of commitment, talent and generosity of those who minister in the Church. Women and men in all parts of our diocese offer their personal gifts in service to the Church and — whether volunteer or paid, lay ministers or ordained — they generously contribute to our common mission to build up the Body of Christ.

That strain of servant leadership is a deep one in the history of our local Church, a history which is marked by courage, imagination and a wonderful depth of faith. The circumstances of our successive generations may have changed, and with them the shape of ministry, but it has been a constant commitment here that leadership in the Church be of the highest quality. If the local Church has maintained a commitment to excellence in ministry, that has borne fruit in the deep level of ability found in those who serve in her name.

During the past year we have engaged in widespread conversations about ministry. These conversations, held at my request, rose from a common awareness that Church ministry in our diocese is different from what it has been in the past and that it will continue to change as we move into the future.

In broadest terms, these changes find roots in the Church's renewed realization of herself as a People of God and in her ever deeper understanding of the Sacraments of Initiation as the radical call to and empowerment for service in the name of the Church. These have led to the emergence or renewal of a wonderful variety of ministries in the contemporary Church — namely, pastoral assistants, permanent deacons, directors of religious education, youth ministers and others.

A second reality which focuses our attention on ministerial questions is the decline we have experienced in the number of young men and women responding to vocations to priesthood and the religious life. Projections based on the patterns of recent years indicate that by the year 2000 we will have one half the number of diocesan priests we now have. Communities of women religious face a decline in number at least as serious. The plain fact is that both groups, our sisters and priests, are rapidly decreasing in number and growing older.

In addition to these broader themes which touch every diocese in the United States, other factors have made and will continue to make notable impact on our patterns of Church ministry. Exemplary of these are: changing demographic and social patterns, an increasing number of older Catholics, changes in and challenges to family life, the emergence of the Church as counter-cultural in its search for justice and peace, the growing Hispanic reality in the Church in the United States, and a renewed sensitivity to our black Catholic sisters and brothers. The shifting vocational and ministerial patterns and changing pastoral demands converge to make this a moment of special decision and commitment by all of us in our diocesan family.

I am confident about all of this, because I perceive as widespread among us 1) the desire under God to create the future rather than to sit back and watch it happen, and 2) the spirit of faith and generosity that will allow us to do that.

Because of the foresight and generosity of diocesan and parish staff members, consultative bodies, committees, task forces and many individuals, excellent homework around these questions has already been done. From their studies, we already have, or will soon have, reports, data, and recommendations on many aspects of our overall ministry — the needs and hopes of the laity in our Church; the experiences of lay ministers; the fruit of two substantial discussions held jointly by the Priests' Council and the Diocesan Sisters' Council; our ongoing Needs Assessment process; the future directions of our Catholic elementary schools; five-year strategic plans; the initial and continuing formation of programs and support systems available to ministers in our diocese; the processes for institutional and ministerial consultation; our several compensation studies; our ongoing reflection on the experience of the restored permanent diaconate; the work of the Commission on Women in the Church; the ongoing directors; the research of our diocesan departments; and the contributions and rich counsel offered by our Diocesan Pastoral Council, Priests' Council and Sisters' Council.

We have also been accumulating personnel statistics and financial data related to what we are currently doing, as well as demo-

graphic data on where our people are located now and where they will be in the next 10-20 years. In addition, we have available the data and experience of other local churches.

However, at the present time, much of our work on these matters has been unavoidably ad hoc and experimental, rising out of the felt needs of particular groups, and much of our understanding of our future ministerial needs and resources is contained in separate documents that address different aspects of the overall situation. These helpful efforts now need to be integrated, one with the other, if they are to bear fruit. Lest they be lost, the recommendations in all of these studies need to be coordinated and harmonized into a set of long-range plans for ministry in our diocese.

The task of carrying forward the work done to date and seeing that the most helpful recommendations are implemented is, in a sense, a task that falls to me because often it will involve decisions that only I can make, in my special role and responsibility as pastor of this diocese, to see the whole picture and to set directions. But, before I can proceed, the various recommendations made to me need to be set side by side so that we can see the effects a recommendation in one area of our ministerial work will have upon another recommendation in another area of our ministerial endeavor. Similarly, all of the recommendations need to be assessed in the light of our resources, both human and financial.

To help me harmonize and integrate the various recommendations, I need the assistance of a small group of people with whom I can reflect on this one issue: the future needs of ministry in this diocese and the resources to provide it.

For this reason, I have convened a small task force representing different perspectives within the diocese, to help me explore the future forms of our pastoral structures and services, and to help me sort through the various recommendations and research studies that have come to me on the broad topic of ministry in our diocese. I am asking this task force to study carefully all the reports and data I have received as well as all the suggestions now included in the minutes of our various working bodies, in order to discover the missing pieces in this research and to formulate additional recommendations as these appear necessary. Then I would

like them to help me integrate and advance the most compatible and useful of these recommendations so that we have a comprehensive draft of long-range plans for ministry in our diocese.

These members of the task force are Father Peter Bayer, Sister Clare Brown SSJ, Father Sebastian Falcone, Ms. Rebecca Gifford, Father Charles Latus, Father James Lawlor, Sister Ann Miller RSM, Sister Mary Sullivan RSM, Sister Roberta Tierney SSND, and Ms. Gloria Ulterino.

I have asked the task force to be very sensitive to the need we have to consult with others as we do our work, especially as we affirm recommendations that may affect particular groups of ministers in the local Church or particular groups of people to be served. Their task is to help us fill out, pull together and move on the data so many persons in our community have so generously provided.

It is my hope that we can put together a sequence of long-range plans that will enjoy the support and understanding of all in the diocese.

We have not as yet determined a detailed time line for the work of the task force, but I am convinced that we must soon begin to take concrete steps if we hope to continue our tradition of ministerial excellence in these changing times.

With this in mind, I have asked the task force to shape the components of a diocesan ministerial plan through the early months of 1986. My hope is to present some initial, concrete action steps for your consideration by June of 1986.

The questions relative to ministry in the diocese are simple, though answering them may be more difficult:

What are the ministerial needs?
What resources, human and financial, are available to meet them?

What do we need to change, develop, drop and create in our institutions and parochial structures to join our needs and resources for the best use of what we have and the best service of our people?

I welcome your suggestions and recommendations for the task force's consideration and I ask your continued prayer that the Holy Spirit will guide our efforts to carry forward work already begun on behalf of our people, both now and in the future.