



Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Along the Way

It is always a pleasure to go to Tabasco. The trip is demanding in its own way, but I never return without a renewed sense of hope and a deeper understanding of that communion of faith which is the Church.

In this column, let me share some memories and impressions of those days.

- I am happy to tell you that Father Paul Ryan is doing well. He is held in affection by the people he serves and by his colleagues in ministry. His persistent efforts to learn the Spanish language continue to pay dividends. Many of you fear that P.J. has lost his sense of humor; put the fear aside. If you can't see P.J. in a crowd, follow the sound of laughter and you will find him.

- We would dearly love to have some other missionaries to form a team with P.J. During the months ahead, we'll try to find ways to do more effective recruiting. In the meantime, let me plant a seed by asking you to pray that we'll be blessed by a few women and men willing to serve for two years among the beautiful people of Tabasco. One often hears that young people are leery of long-term commitments but are willing to make shorter ones. Let's see if that's true.

- Inflation is a devastating problem in Mexico just now. The small earnings of the average poor person purchase much less than what little the same amount purchased last year. Obviously, this aggravates existing nutrition and health problems. The people struggle mightily to cope with all of this but, under such circumstances, one needs more than ingenuity to stave off hunger and the lassitude that is hunger's companion.

- The government becomes more restrictive of the activities of Church people. Criticism of politicians or political parties subjects pastoral ministers to severe penalties and places them in danger of harassment. While we were there, Bishop Rafael Garcia Gonzales was falsely denounced for entering a public school in religious garb and for promoting religion. In fact, he was dressed in civilian garb and promoted good citizenship. Priests in Mexico are forbidden by the constitution to wear clerical clothing.

- The pastoral challenges in Tabasco are enormous, but so are the opportunities. I had a deep sense of each at a meeting in Frontera on the Sunday we were there. Representatives from the 38 villages that form the parish gathered at Frontera for a day of pastoral reflection with Bishop Rafael. The genuine struggle to develop Christian leadership and community in those villages is an exciting one, but the process is slow and requires great patience. You might be interested to know that this parish (20,000 people?) is served by two priests and two women-religious. How does that compare to your parish?

- Another bright spot is the number of vocations to the priesthood. There are now 75 students in the major seminary in Tabasco, and the faculty has been strengthened by the return of two priests who recently acquired graduate degrees in Rome. We have one quarter the number of candidates that they have.

- It was hot enough to melt your bones. I have always gone to Tabasco in January and never realized how much hotter it is in March. May is the hottest month of all. Now I have some greater sense of what people mean when they talk about the heat of those days.

- My mother came with us on this trip. I am still short of breath from trying to keep up with her. She has good energy and high spirit under any circumstances, but when she raced on her pink sneakers down there, we all had to go into overdrive to keep up with her.

The Editor's Desk

During a recent meeting of the Courier-Journal's editorial committee, the agenda focused on dissatisfaction with the tone of letters to the editor. Though we reached no solution to the problem, we concluded that, in many cases, these letters are not used as a means of exchanging opinion, but as a bandbox for a few people — both liberal and conservative — to shout their unshakable beliefs again, and again, and again. Simply put, each chronic letter writer yells so loudly that nobody listens to what others have to say.

My column of last week, in which I urged Catholics from all points on the ideological spectrum to stand up for their opinions, drew some feedback that sheds light on intra-Church squabbling, as evidenced in the C-J opinion page and beyond.

Last Friday, I got a phone call from Kathy Crane of Holy Rosary Church. She wanted to voice her opinions at the Rochester listening session, but wasn't sure that individuals — rather than parish representatives — were invited. To make a long story short, they were, and she attended. Her experience, which she related in a follow-up call this Monday, was most enlightening.

Ms. Crane said her parish is well-known for being "arch-conservative" and for operating more through "direct access to the pastor" than through such structures as committees. By contrast, she noted, most of the other participants in the session were from liberal parishes that rely upon representative structures to channel the opinions of parishioners.

Those circumstances might have deterred open exchanges of opinion, but as Ms. Crane reported, quite the opposite occurred. "What was really interesting was what happened when we broke up into small groups," she said. "It was amazing how much we had in common. We were going great guns until we ran out of time."

Did the small-group discussions employ some magical formula to bring about this liberal/conservative meeting of the minds? Definitely, Ms. Crane observed — none of the participants knew who was who.

"When we didn't know what parish everybody was from, we got along fine," Ms. Crane remarked. "When we did find out, all the little bells went off — the little warning signals. It's a good thing we didn't know," she continued. "It probably would have been a more adversarial role if we had known."

It seems a shame that people can get along so well — share thoughts, feelings and experiences — when labels are forgotten, but find it nearly impossible to be civil to each other when all the "facts" are disclosed. Perhaps in these remaining weeks of Lent, each of us can not only stand up and be counted, but also open our minds to honestly consider the views of those with whom we disagree.

Letters

Vicar for religious rebuts Murray's views

To the Editor:

In responding to Mr. Joseph Murray's letter (C-J Letters, March 19: "Concerned Catholics speak out"), I would like to begin with the scripture text with which he ends. It is one of many in which Jesus challenges his followers to continue his mission by witnessing to his words and deeds. "For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the Truth."

The statements made by Mr. Murray in his letter to the Courier-Journal deeply disturb me. He writes: "The canonical institutes of women religious continue to live rebelliously and repulsively in rejecting Church authority with constitutions that reject canon law, are incompatible with Catholic faith and unacceptable by the Holy See."

What is Mr. Murray's source of truth in making these assertions? In the Diocese of Rochester, the Sisters of St. Joseph, the School Sisters of

Notre Dame, the Religious of the Cenacle, the Daughters of Charity and others have received letters from Archbishop Vincent Fagioli and the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (CRIS) approving and accepting their constitutions and directories. Leaders of the Sisters of Mercy met with representatives of CRIS in October and are currently awaiting approval of their constitutions. Mr. Murray's use of such strong statements as "to live rebelliously and repulsively ... rejecting church authority ... and canon law ... incompatible with Catholic faith" is a serious cause for scandal and not grounded in truth.

If Mr. Murray can make such false accusations about women religious — statements which are so blatantly a distortion of truth — I have grave concern about the contents of the letter which he sent to Rome (Nov. 25, 1986) concerning Bishop Clark.

Mr. Murray's request to the Holy

See to appoint an ordinary (bishop) who "bears witness to the truth and will lead us to sanctity" has already been fulfilled. After six years of working with and closely observing Bishop Clark in his ministry as bishop, I see Pope John Paul II as prophetic in appointing Bishop Clark to serve as ordinary of the Diocese of Rochester in 1979, eight years before Mr. Murray stated his criteria for the bishop of this diocese.

In contacting Mr. Murray to set up an appointment to address the misinformation he has concerning canonical institutes of women religious in the Diocese of Rochester, I was told he had no time to meet with me.

"To bear witness to the truth," in justice, demands that we take responsibility for the statements we publicly proclaim.

Sister Muriel Curran, SSND
Vicar for Religious
Diocese of Rochester

Public school teacher's comments 'an affront'

To the Editor:

I consider Deanne Delehanty's comments (C-J letters, Feb. 12: "Catholic school salaries force teachers to juggle conflicting values") to be a personal affront and insult to every Catholic school teacher I know in the Diocese of Rochester.

"If they don't (match public school teachers' salaries), they should consider closing down. Otherwise, you're going to have unqualified teachers teaching" are remarks that ridicule and deny the very Christ-centered mission for which our schools exist. Our schools exist for the sake of the Church, the kingdom of God on earth, not for parity, even momentarily, with an educational system that allows no room for basic religious values, values upon which this nation was founded, but which cannot be taught in the government schools.

The U.S. Secretary of Education has increasingly decried the lack of values and content in the public schools; a recent government report concluded that "abstinence is the only guarantee against the spread of AIDS." It is the Catholic school system that can address these societal problems at the root of their cause.

applying the gospel values of our faith's heritage. Our schools stand at the forefront of what our children need, and have a right and obligation to learn.

I, and the teachers in our system whom I know, believe in the dedication to principle expressed by Martin LiCursi in that same article. Realistically, we accept the fact of the decline in religious personnel in our schools, the incredible increase in costs which that has brought about for every parish with a school, and the limits parish budgets can bear.

We look toward increased awareness among parents of the large sacrifice each parish with a school makes to provide that faith opportunity for its parishioners' children; increased awareness of the tax savings our schools provide for the general public; equity in federal and state funding.

I have the greatest confidence in our diocesan department of education. With expertise and foresight, that department will continue to maintain the excellent level of academic achievement our Catholic school system is known for, as continually reflected in our standardized

testing scores, and numerous government studies, also. Coupled with the values of the gospel, those efforts will be increasingly valuable to the Church of the future.

Grateful for the efforts the diocese has made in trying to upgrade salaries and benefits, I accept the fact that my belief in the value and benefit of a Catholic school system has a price that I, too, must pay. My 17 years in our diocesan school system have made me more aware of that than even Ms. Delehanty (is). Further, I have always been treated like a professional, and regard the love and achievements of my students, past and present, to be a guarantee of a Catholic school system that will flourish in this diocese, even without Ms. Delehanty.

"She had encouraged every Catholic school teacher she knows to follow in her footsteps," according to the article. I, for one, have no intention of doing so. If I wanted to be "public," I would have moved on long ago. "Public" we'll never be, but Catholic, always!

David Mulvey
Castle Street
Geneva

St. Mary's renovation fund might feed hungry, shelter homeless

To the Editor:

With sadness, I read about the proposal of extensive renovations planned for Old St. Mary's (C-J, March 5: "Downtown parish kicks off worship space renovation plan"). Perhaps it would be more Christian and worthwhile if the money were used to feed the hungry and shelter the homeless.

I don't understand this trend

toward butchering our Catholic churches into squeaky-clean auditoriums. The side altars and statues all but disappear. In their place are put grotesque wrought-iron figurines or modernistic replicas of saints.

We old-timers remember the church as a wonderful retreat for prayer and meditation. I will never forget the peaceful moments I spent

in beautiful churches like Holy Redeemer and St. George's on Hudson Avenue.

If all these changes help to keep our youth in the church, I say great. But I don't believe the youth are too interested. Witness the fact that many times altar boys are not available on a Sunday.

I believe that there are many Catholics out there who are saying, "What are they doing to my church?"

Edward F. Valeska
Miramar Road
Rochester

Elmira pastor laments dearth of 'good news' in Courier-Journal letters to the editor

To the Editor:

I am dismayed that three of the four letters in the March 19th Courier-Journal are critical of the paper, the columns or the diocese. It sounds as if there is no good news in our world, in the Church, the diocese or the Courier.

I offer two recommendations:

- 1) Have one issue a month in which all the letters praise good people and good things happening in our world, our Church and our diocese.

2) To those who are disturbed by a particular columnist: don't read the column! Several years ago, I decided

that a particular column did more harm than good — so I stopped reading the column. So simple. We do this with TV. Why not with a paper?

Years ago as a teen, I remember riding my bike down Rutgers Street in Rochester and hearing Jose Echaniz practicing and playing the piano, filling his little world with beautiful music. May we choose to do just that.

Father David Gramke, Pastor
St. John the Baptist, St. Cecilia
Lake Street
Elmira

Guidelines

The Courier-Journal welcomes your opinions. Letters must bear the writers' signatures, full addresses and telephone numbers. They must be brief, typed (double-spaced, please) and no longer than 1 1/2 pages.

Letters should be mailed to: Opinion, Courier-Journal, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624.

We routinely condense letters, edit offensive words and libelous statements, and reserve the right to reject letters. Generally speaking, however, only limited grammatical corrections will be made, and the letters will reflect the writers' own styles.