

# Local News

## Catholic, Episcopal dioceses forge covenant relationship

By Lee Strong

The Roman Catholic and Episcopal dioceses of Rochester have announced plans to enter into a covenant that affirms their shared heritage and that is intended "to foster the maturing relationship between (the) two Traditions on the basis of Jesus' prayer 'that all may be one...that the world may believe...'" (John 17:20-2).

Bishops Matthew H. Clark and William G. Burrill will sign the covenant during a 7:30 p.m. ceremony at St. Augustine's Catholic Church on Sunday, May 22, the feast of Pentecost.

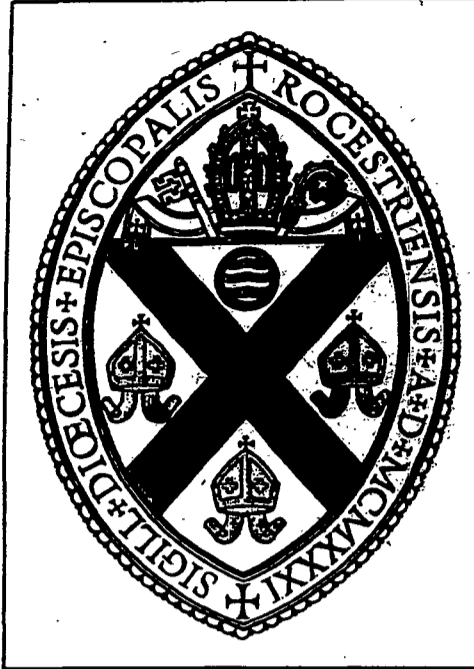
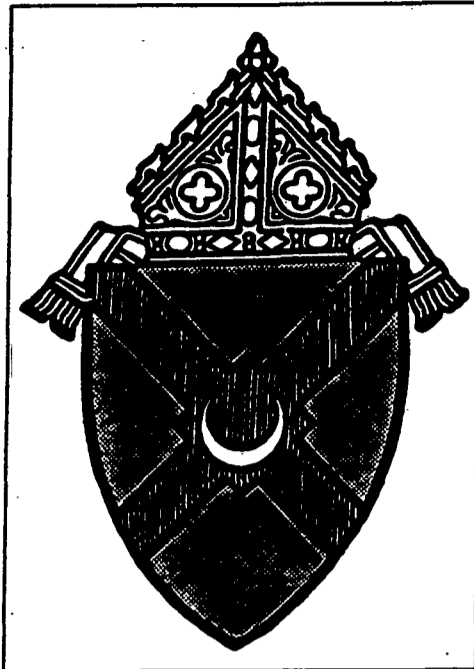
The ceremony will then carry over to a reception at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church. The two parishes were chosen as co-hosts of the covenant ceremony because they have maintained a covenantlike relationship for the last 13 years.

The covenant was prepared through the joint efforts of the Catholic diocese's Commission for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and the Episcopal diocese's Ecumenical Commission. The document acknowledges the special relationship that has existed between the two dioceses since 1976, when then Bishops Joseph L. Hogan and Robert R. Spears signed an agreement calling for their dioceses to move toward a closer understanding of one another through dialogue, prayer and study.

According to Bishop Clark, the covenant is the fruit of dialogue resulting from the 1976 agreement, and is a recognition of the wisdom of Bishops Hogan and Spears.

"The covenant relationship is not an ending of something," Bishop Clark noted. "It's a new beginning, a recommitment to witnessing to the oneness of Christ."

The covenant calls for the two dioceses to



establish discussion groups for scripture study and examination of theological issues; to give special preparation to Episcopal-Roman Catholic couples who seek to be married in the Church; to hold joint days of retreat and reflection; to share diocesan and parish resources; and to collaborate in activities promoting social justice.

One immediate impact of the covenant is that members of both dioceses will pray "for our bishops, Matthew and William, and for each other" during the liturgical Prayers of the Faithful.

Mary Ann Taylor, a spokeswoman for the Episcopal diocese, observed that the two denominations have been growing closer in recent years, stemming back to a joint declaration issued by Pope Paul VI and the then-Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, calling for dialogue that might lead to unity between the two traditions. That dialogue, she said, has produced documents addressing such issues as eucharistic doctrine, ministry and ordination, and authority in the church.

Taylor cited the cooperation between St. Stephen's and St. Augustine's parishes as an

example of how the two traditions can work together. The two parishes have held Pentecost vigils together; jointly support an emergency food program; have cooperated in operating St. Theresa's Center at St. Augustine's; and, for several years in the early 1980s, ran a united Christian education program. This year, the two parishes jointly celebrated the Easter vigil.

Such informal cooperation between parishes — and the formal covenants that already exist between a number of Roman/Episcopal dioceses across the country — will lead to growing understanding and unity between the two traditions, Taylor predicted.

"Ideally, down the road, what we are working for is visible unity," Taylor said. Currently, she acknowledged, the two denominations are achieving "unity by stages," and that full union will not be achieved for many years.

According to Taylor, the primary roadblocks to unity are differences over three issues: the question of the authority of the pope, the validity of Episcopal orders, and the ordination of women.

Bishop Clark acknowledged that these three issues will not be easily resolved — and certainly won't be resolved on a diocesan level. And, although the covenant "won't make (these) issues go away, it will help people to understand the differences," he remarked.

Union between the two traditions will not happen overnight, Bishop Clark noted, but through the covenant, the two Rochester dioceses "can make a significant contribution to this process."

Therefore, as Hilda Stebbins — who helped write the covenant — points out, the covenant acknowledges that differences between the two traditions do exist, but focuses instead on the points of unity.

"The document will enable us to recognize what it is that unites us," said Stebbins, an ecumenical commission member. "One of the things that the document states is that the unity is already there because we are baptized into Christ, and there is no division there."

### Sigl Center session set for ARC sitters' program

A training session for the Association for Retarded Citizen's Special Sitters Program will be held at the Al Sigl Center, 1000 Elmwood Ave., on April 23 and 26, and May 7. The classes teach individuals how to care for people with developmental disabilities. Upon completion of the training, the special sitters will work with families in need of respite services.

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