

Features

# Informal moments with pope highlight ad limina

By Lee Strong

Every five years, a bishop who heads a diocese must submit to the Vatican an *ad limina* report about the state of his diocese. At least once every 10 years, the bishop himself must go to Rome.

Yet, according to Rochester's Auxiliary Bishop Dennis W. Hickey, these *ad limina* visits are intended to do more than just present progress reports to the pope.

"Spiritually, it symbolizes the unity of the Church, with the pope as a symbol of that unity," Bishop Hickey said. "Probably the high point is the Mass with the pope, which signifies better than anything else the unity of the Church as personified by the Holy Father."

Bishop Hickey accompanied Bishop Matthew H. Clark on his recent *ad limina* visit, October 10 to 15. The visit was Bishop Clark's second. For Bishop Hickey, who as an auxiliary is not required to attend, the visit marked his first such trip to Rome.

"Bishop Clark encouraged me to go because this may well be my last opportunity to go," Bishop Hickey explained. Next year, he will reach 75, the retirement age for bishops, and will probably not be able to participate in a future *ad limina* visit. "The more I thought about it, the more interested I became," Bishop Hickey remarked. "I missed an opportunity during the earlier *ad limina* (in 1983), and I'm glad Bishop Clark encouraged me to go to this one."

Both bishops were part of the New York state delegation. Their itinerary included not only the Mass with Pope John Paul II, but also short, individual talks with the pontiff; visits to the nine congregations that oversee Vatican affairs; Masses concelebrated at a side altar in St. Peter's Basilica and at the Basilica of St. Paul; and an informal lunch with the pope.

Bishop Hickey noted that these informal lunches are an innovation introduced by Pope John Paul II. The discussion during the lunch was likewise informal, covering a variety of topics. During their meal with the pope, the 20 New York bishops in attendance complimented the pontiff on his command of the English language, Bishop Hickey reported. The pope responded that he had learned two new words that day: unchurched and undocumented.

At the end of the lunch, each bishop was presented with an autographed copy of Pope John Paul II's most recent Pastoral letter, *On*



Pope John Paul II stands with a delegation of bishops — including Rochester Bishops Matthew H. Clark and Dennis W. Hickey — during their recent "ad limina" visit.

*the Dignity of Women.* Bishop Hickey noted, however, that the question of ordination of women was not one of the topics that came up for discussion during the lunch, "because it was pretty much accepted that Rome had decided and that discussion had ended."

The Vatican sojourn also included a group audience at which Pope John Paul II talked about the teaching authority of the Church, and the responsibility of Catholic educators to serve the Church and the faith by adhering to official teachings.

That the pope chose to talk on this particular topic to the bishops of New York state has led to speculation that the Holy Father may have been making a veiled reference to the case of Rochester's Father Charles Curran, who was stripped of his canonical right to teach theology at Catholic University because of his dissenting views on some Church teachings.

But Bishop Hickey believes the choice of topic was coincidental.

"I can't see any connection between the two," Bishop Hickey said, pointing out that the pope always addresses general topics of interest during his addresses to visiting bishops. "(Catholic education) is a hot topic. It's something which Catholics are struggling with all over the world. No one said this is formally directed to New York state or to Rochester."

In addition to the time spent with the pope, the visit included trips to the nine bodies that govern Church teachings and affairs, the congregations for: the Doctrine of the Faith; Bishops; Catholic Education; Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments; Clergy;

Religious and Secular Institutes; Evangelization of Peoples; Oriental Churches; and Causes of Saints. The prefects of each congregation preside at these hour-long gatherings during which visiting bishops are given overviews of congregational activity, then are invited to ask questions.

According to Bishop Hickey, the problems raised by the New York bishops included questions about baptism of infants whose parents don't attend church; marriage of couples who have been living together or who appear to have no faith commitment; and a question Bishop Clark raised about laicization of priests. In response, congregation officials told the bishops that baptism can be delayed but not denied; a couple can't be refused marriage because it is a natural right; and the current mode of dispensation for priests will remain in effect.

During a brief interview prior to his departure for his sabbatical in Mexico, Bishop Clark said he was interested by discussions he and Bishop Hickey had with the congregations on the subjects of auxiliary-bishops, the importance of *ad limina* reports and the roles of women.

"It was very interesting in that we (New York state bishops) spoke about the issues of ministries carried out by women," Bishop Clark noted. "The reaction was positive."

Bishop Hickey also reported that the bishops were able to see summaries of the discussions other groups of bishops had had with the congregations. "Most of the things brought up in our meetings were brought up in other meet-

ings," he said. "Our diocese is pretty much at the level of other dioceses. The Holy See was aware of the problems (we are facing) and is working on them, too. We are fighting the same problems."

Bishop Hickey noted that some of the congregations had obviously read the written *ad limina* report the Diocese of Rochester submitted in August. That report contained the answers to a set of standard questions about size of the diocese; the number of Catholics in it; the makeup of the pastoral office and the diocesan division structure; such consultative bodies as the Diocesan Pastoral Council and the Priests' Council; and various commissions such as the Commission on Women and the Commission on Young Adult Ministry. The purpose of this section of the report is to give the Vatican a general overview of the diocese, Bishop Hickey explained.

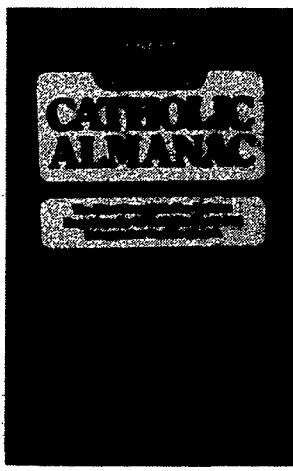
Added to the main document was an appendix containing nine documents: Bishop Clark's pastoral letter on AIDS, *The Lord Himself Taught Me to Have Compassion*; the summary report of the Five Year Financial Planning Task Force; the executive summary of the Oversight Committee of the Five Year Financial Planning Task Force; the most recent Price Waterhouse financial statement on the diocese; a history of the Thanks Giving Appeal; the covenant agreement between the Episcopal and Roman Catholic dioceses of Rochester; the statutes for the Diocesan Financial Council; an address by Bishop Clark to catechetical leaders on Sept. 28, 1987; and a list of the members of the diocesan Tribunal.

The addition of these documents was intended to give a more complete picture of the diocese, Bishop Hickey said. He pointed to the Five Year Financial Planning Task Force report as the most important of the group.

"It gives an idea of where we are going," the auxiliary bishop said. "I think Rochester is fairly unique in doing it — one of the first to appoint a blue ribbon panel to study the diocese and what directions it could take in the future."

A number of the other documents included with the report show how the diocese is dealing with such important issues as AIDS and Catholic education, Bishop Hickey noted. The appendices — in conjunction with discussions in the main body of the report on such topics as the sacraments and the Rite of Christian In-

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