

Springtime events bring awareness of God's presence

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

The May-June period is a busy time of the year. Routine work goes on, but added to it are the variety of special events that crowd our calendars in these hectic weeks. I think of first Communions, weddings, ordinations, confirmations, commencements, anniversary celebrations and other end-of-the-year observances. It is an exciting and happy time because such events celebrate achievement, growing maturity, new freedom, growing capacity for service, and the renewed strength that happy memories can bring.

You may well have one or more such occasions on your calendar these days. If you do, I think you will agree that while they are important to the immediate participants, these events are also significant and life-giving to all of us who are fortunate enough to be a part of them.

I think, for example, of the joy of grandparents who are invited to stand with their grandchildren at confirmation. There is something about that moment that brings a change of life to both of them — and to all of us who share in the experience.

I think also of the thrill experienced by

parents when their daughters and sons cross the stage to receive their diplomas at graduation. In them is the joy of the moment. But there is also the joy of the years. And that joy is born of memories of love and birth, growth and maturing. Such moments ripple out to and touch many members of the community. They also draw into the present, memories of the people, events and experiences by which lives are shaped and communities are built.

Last Sunday, Sister Jean Marie Kearsé completed eight years as superior general of our Sisters of Mercy, and Sister Ann Miller was installed as her successor. The congregation and many of their friends celebrated that moment of transition with great joy. Giving special life to the celebration were a deep gratitude for Jean Marie's extraordinary service, and a strong hope that God will bless and guide Ann as she offers herself in her new ministry.

On Monday I visited Notre Dame Retreat House to celebrate the Eucharist and to share a meal with 35 of our priests who are making their annual retreat. Father Ben Ehmann preached the homily. It was faith-filled and enthusiastic and, I believe, a

great help to us all. This Sunday Ben celebrates the 60th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood. There we experienced the joy of the moment. But Ben's lively presence made us very much aware of the past and charged us with hope for the future.

It would be easy for me to multiply these springtime examples of how such occasions speak to us, not only about the present, but about the past and the future. I have been privileged to participate in many of them these days. But my hope is that these brief reflections will invite you to take a moment to do the same. If you have participated in or are about to participate in such a celebration, treat yourself to the pleasure of a leisurely reflection on what it says to you about life. What memories does this event evoke of events, people and relationships? What dreams and hopes for the future does it give?

Moments such as these can be privileged ones because they touch deep currents of life within us. And, when that happens, we are given a new awareness of God's abiding presence within us and among us.

Peace to all.



Along The Way

Rochester's school consolidation parallels 'DeSales experiment'

To the editor:

As one reads and listens to the controversy surrounding the proposed consolidation of Rochester's parochial school system, it brings to mind the similarities between it and the "DeSales Experiment" in Geneva. Prior to this an explanation of the input for these decisions.

The Catholic School System was the poor man's private school until the reduction in vocations forced the hiring of lay teachers increasing the expenses beyond the means of a parish. The request for more funds and the imposition of tuition showed many Catholics were unwilling to make sacrifices. This, despite the fact smaller membered Christian Schools are being opened daily at much higher cost and

hardship to their members. Or, bluntly, many Catholics are unwilling to support their beliefs with their pocketbooks. The above lead to decreased monies and enrollment making the school economically unsound.

Of equal influence was the lack of support from some clergy and church leaders. Some felt the drain on church finances too severe despite the fact school closure does not reduce the financial burden on the parish. Parochial schools will not survive without pulpit and parental leadership to help run the school. The above reasons were part of the "DeSales Experience"

These hard facts of declining enrollment, finances, and lack of leadership is becoming part of the "Rochester Experience."

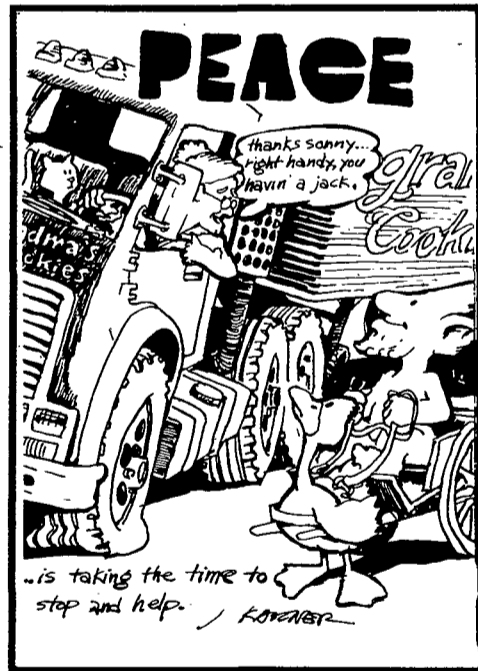
Proponents and antagonists will blame the other, collections will decline and clergy will be blamed for inadequate leadership. The basic decisions are correct unless sufficient support can be generated to maintain the schools for a period of time. Years of neglect by all factions dictate a major realignment in order to save the system. Thanks to the devotion of many people the "DeSales Experience" showed regionalization was the most valid avenue for restructuring.

Into the above emotions stepped Father (John) Mulligan and his successors in Geneva. Most probably were not aware of the deep animosity and divisiveness in the community. They had to rebuild the parish communities torn asunder by the

threatened closure. Now they, along with the former members of the DeSales School Board who voted first to close then reversed themselves, recognize the intense emotional and economic consequences that ensued.

The feelings listed above must not be allowed to destroy a parish community. They should work to make the realignment work otherwise the parochial system will disappear from the American scene. That would be a tremendous victory for those opposed to religious teachings and a tragedy for the religious communities of our country.

Robert L. Lanschoot
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Finds comments on religious education to be wrong

To the editor:

A recent *Catholic Courier* has Cardinal Ratzinger faulting the U.S. Bishops for turning Religious Education "over to the so-called professional," resulting in "a confusion of voices, making it all the more difficult to recognize that of the Gospel" (April 13: "Bishop calls cardinal's view of catechesis 'devastating'"). Cardinal O'Connor of New York added that "years of confusion and diversity have left an entire generation in a state of ambiguity."

Bishop Raymond Lucker of New Ulm, Minn., called these remarks "devastating." I add that they are also incorrect. In the middle seventies, the National Council of Catholic Bishops asked the National Catholic Education Association to design a survey to assess the religious knowledge and attitude of the Catholic school and par-

ish religious programs at the junior high level. The religious knowledge component and the confidential attitude measure would report in the following five areas:

1. God: Father, Son, Spirit; 2. Church: Community of Believers; 3. Sacraments: Initiation, Community, Reconciliation; 4. Christian Life: Witness and Service; 5. Scripture: Living Word of God.

We, at the parish level were concerned about the "years of confusion and diversity" and administered the tests knowing that they could be an indictment of our programs. Since I am writing this letter, you have already suspected that the results were very positive. They showed that professionally designed curricula and professionally administered religious education programs had indeed accomplished their goals. We were pleasantly surprised

that our public school students scored at the same level as the parochial schools, and in a few areas were a couple points higher.

Bishop Lucker suggests that we have an enormous communications problem with our bishops and with many others who would probably agree with the assessments of Cardinals Ratzinger and O'Connor.

I hope this communication will correct the misunderstanding and add to the outstanding work of our Religious Educators.

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Parishioner questions nature of shared leadership in diocese

To the editor:

According to a letter to me from Father John Mulligan (vicar general), parishes have moved toward a shared form of leadership since the Second Vatican Council. I would like to know if this shared leadership is only to involve robots who give of their labor and their pocketbooks? Our Parish Council (of St. Anne's Church, Rochester) made up of people voted in by all parish members has been repeatedly ignored. When finally Father Mulligan met to discuss all issues of concern as formerly agreed upon, he walked out of the meeting when the issue of church leadership was mentioned. Was his attendance a political move just to show he made an appearance to appease those concerned?

Also when I questioned the drop in membership of our parish, he responded

that this was not untypical of many urban parishes. However a telephone survey revealed that our neighboring — more urban parishes — St. Boniface, Old St. Mary's and nearby Corpus Christi indicated an increase in membership as well as a number of converts as compared to 0 at our parish.

And last but not most important, why was our school not allowed to remain open until the quadrant study? The diocese has never answered this question. We met all the criteria as directed by Buffalo Road. Even the latest proposal submitted by Principal Bob Edelman, staff and parents was rejected. This in actuality would have saved our parish money. They say our parish may have to dip into its reserve funds to meet the quota for the Thanks Giving Appeal because of expenses — BOILER replacement, etc. However this reserve could

not be touched to help us keep our school going. We parents along with others who helped build our school and church are SICK. We are called un-Christian by those in power for speaking out. Is our hierarchy Christian? Are they shepherds of our church reaching out to the stray, loving and guiding our children? The church has a vocational crisis. It's no wonder. Our role models have been replaced by money changers.

And I will add that anyone interested in hiring a dedicated professional administrator should call on Mr. Bob Edelman. I am sure he put his career on the line by following his heart and his principles. I am publicly stating a thank you to him our children's role model.

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