

Meetings shed light on ministerial roles

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

In a short time I'll be on my way to the fifth of the 11 August/September regional meetings with our priests. For today's meeting, Father Bob Hammond has invited the priests from Steuben County to his cottage. I am looking forward to this gathering as I have to all of these sessions.

It's been 10 years since I met with all of our priests in exactly this manner. Certainly, we have had meetings of many sizes and for a wide variety of purposes. But this series — like the one 10 years ago — has no tight business agenda. These meetings were meant to be sessions in which we do two things: exchange information and ideas about what we are doing or might do better to recruit vocations to the priesthood of our diocese; and reflect on how we can help one another to offer the kind of leadership we are called to offer in the church of this age.

We spend an hour on each of these themes. That is a relatively short time, of course, but it is quite amazing how much can be shared in those brief minutes. I have found the meetings thus far to be most encouraging for several reasons.

First, I am increasingly convinced as time passes that it is good for us to gather. In our tradition, the bishop and his priests are regarded as people who form not merely a voluntary sociological associa-

tion, but also a college of friends made so by bonds of faith and love. Secondly, I find the faith of our priests to be edifying and most encouraging. The ministry of the ordained priest in today's church is not without its tensions and strain. Yet, our priests give themselves to it with a beautiful generosity. Finally, these meetings are gatherings of warm humor, creative ideas and loving support.

The regional meetings have been delightful for all of those reasons, but they also have helped me to clarify and, I hope, deepen my ongoing reflection on the leadership of the bishop and the ordained priest in today's church. It is clear to me that — because the church herself is going through a period of notable transition — the ministry of the ordained must also change and is changing.

The ordained minister is the servant of the community. He needs the wisdom to know the changing pastoral needs of the community, and the courage and flexibility to serve them. That is a difficult task under any circumstances, but it is impossible unless the priest remains open to the Holy Spirit alive in himself, in the community, in his bishop and in other ministerial colleagues.

Let me conclude these reflections with one example of what I believe is a fundamental point of tension — perhaps the term

"creative opportunity" would be better — in the life of a pastor. A good pastor wants to know the needs of his people and to benefit from their skills, commitment and expertise. He also wants to give these talents full play for the benefit of the community. He wants to be someone who recognizes and calls forth the gifts of the community, to coordinate and help give direction to them, to encourage their generous use. These are superb pastoral priorities, to be encouraged in all of us.

But these priorities are to be acted on not only in such a manner that they develop the internal life of the parish community. They also are to be enacted in a manner that does not isolate the parish from the communion of life which is the church. When and as these objectives are realized — and, since they are a function of human nature, this can happen in any parish — it is the duty of the pastor to call the community to an awareness of the larger church and the local community's relationship to that larger body of sisters and brothers.

In the abstract, issuing this call is relatively easy, because it is simple to talk about responsibility, duty, relationship, sharing, nourishment and participation. In the concrete, however, it is quite difficult to do so because the discussion shifts to pet ideas; particular priorities and choices ceding to general needs; and difficult changes



Along The Way

and general directions we would not choose if we judged them only by local preferences and needs.

Please pray for your pastor!
Please pray for your bishop!
Peace to all.

Faith in progress serves to preclude honest discourse

To the editor:

Corpus Christi's bulletin proudly announced that the parish had sent 82 names in response to Bishop Clark's Call to Priesthood. Five were single men; sixty of the rest, married women. Father Callan could not resist waxing prophetically on the implications of this "gender breakdown." He defended his parish's responses with the wrong-headed cliches, which resonate so well in modern American ears, that the Roman Catholic Church's prerequisites of manhood and celibacy for the priesthood are arbitrary and groundless. And that to run against the coming tide of women and married priests is "like being against November. It will come anyway."

... My point here is to expose the underlying error of Father Callan's position: an unreasonable and superstitious faith in progress, an arrogant confidence that the forward march of time will bring us more and more liberation from what he sees as the arbitrarily imposed authority of the Holy Father. Like November he says married and female priests will come. For him and many others of his mind, time and a will-to-power, not respectful and thoughtful discourse, will make it so. There is a determinism underlying this position that has nothing on Calvinism.

The immediate and practical casualty of Father Callan's determinism is honest discourse. If one is so sure that women and



married priests "will come" why bother hearing arguments against such ordinations. Of course progressives, like Father Callan, must at least keep up the facade of discourse; after all isn't "dialogue" among their favorite buzz words. But it is in fact just a facade. Those who argue against the progressive's coming order of women and married priests or any unorthodox practice are not taken seriously. They are in the progressive's scheme unenlightened, out of step with the lockstep march of history.

... Most often for progressives such as Father Callan the object of discourse is not thoughtful, honest, and charitable conversation but therapy, to make non-progressives "comfortable" with the inevitable. If you can't be made "comfortable," the progressives will be happy to open the door for you but not their minds. The many casualties among Corpus Christi's longtime parishioners from therapeutic and dishonest discussions lie hidden just beneath the glittery and shallow surface of its famous "social ministries."

... The authority of the Roman Catholic Church's teaching rests on Scripture and Tradition. The new foundation of Father Callan's and his disciples' "church" is neutered scripture and progress, a recipe for chaos. But it seems a fitting foundation; it goes along way toward explaining the banalities and muddled thinking that have recently poured forth ad nauseam from 80 Prince Street.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This letter was edited to comply with space restrictions.

Disputes criticism of public schools

To the editor:

I applaud Ms. Daly's decision to remove her children from a school she felt was academically and emotionally crippling them (*Courier*, July 20: "Kids didn't learn much in public school"). We all must do what we feel is best for our children and the opportunity to choose between public, parochial and private schools allows us to rectify unsatisfactory situations. Most educators would agree with Ms. Daly that overreliance on short answer tests and assignments do not require children to think critically and analytically, nor does it allow for long term retention; instead, it measures immediate recall and discourages comprehension.

... While I support Ms. Daly's decision and would probably do the same in her place, I object to the blanket accusation that all public schools operate in much the same way. Ms. Daly contends that "Those completing (public) high school are in most cases not prepared for anything, if they even manage to graduate from the public school system" and adds that she fears for her children's safety in a public school ... While I do not deny that there are problems that need to be solved in the public school system, her implication that all such schools are unsafe and do not prepare their students for anything is a false and hasty generalization.

Like most of my peers from our 600-plus (public-school) graduating class, I attended college. I graduated cum laude with a membership in two honor societies, and continued to graduate school. Nor am I — or my high school — an exception; indeed, there are many of us out here who are bright, capable, and productive members of society. We are doctors, lawyers, teachers — many of us good ones — and bankers.

Interestingly enough, I experienced the opposite of Ms. Daly's problem. Placed in the first grade in a Catholic school, I suf-

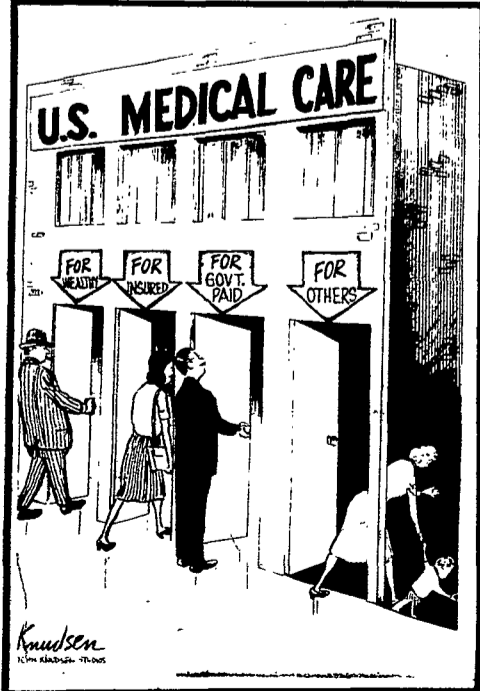
fered at the hands of one tyrannical nun. Not only was I made to stand in front of the classroom in disgrace because I spilled cookie crumbs on my navy blue uniform and ridiculed because I did not blend my syllables and therefore "could not read."

... I also witnessed a boy being slapped because he could not button a shirt cuff that had come undone and two girls being made to recite the alphabet from a corner when they displayed difficulty reading. Ultimately, I was removed from the class and placed in public school because my refusal to blend syllables "signalled a distinct reading problem." Ironically, I finished the first grade in public school with a third grade reading level and now teach Remedial and College Level Composition as well as Critical and Analytical Thinking to college freshmen.

In this position, I have failed to notice any distinct difference in preparation between Catholic and public high school students, nor have I noticed a greater number of public school graduates in remedial writing courses; in fact, the ratio is about even. Some Catholic high school graduates are better equipped for thinking and writing than their public school peers, but the opposite is also true. I have had just as many students complain of bad teaching in public schools as Catholic schools. Whether they are complaining of public school cruel teachers and their fascination with short answer tests or Catholic school cruel teachers and their insistence on conformity, the damage is the same. On the positive side, I have also had students from both sectors who were excellently prepared and who boasted with understandable pride of the encouragement, support and skill of their teachers.

Barbara Murray
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Elmira

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