

Reunion stimulates thoughts about change

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

I returned yesterday from the 24th-annual reunion of the Bills family at Saratoga State Park. Helen and Nelson Bills, my maternal grandparents, brought 13 children into the world. Of that number, 10 lived to adulthood, and nine of them married and raised families. Three of them are still living. They are: Mary Bills Ryan Willard, who will celebrate her 90th birthday in October; Alfred Bills, who turned 86 on Sunday; and my mother who — being the 12th of the 13 — is a fair stretch behind Mary and Al. The senior member of the reunion was Margaret Mitchell Bills, who has been a loving gift to others for nearly 95 years.

Although I mention first our senior members, let me be quick to add that we did not lack for young people. I do not know their exact number, but I recall making a quick count of heads on the ball field when I arrived and came up with over 30 people in their teens or younger. And many other young people were engaged in other activities at the time. I never did get to count at the house, but I would be surprised if there were not nearly 200 people there on that beautiful summer Saturday.

At odd moments that day — and quite frequently since — I have thought about the relatives who were at the park that day, about the many who have died since the first reunion and about how those present — including myself — have changed those 24 years.

My father is among those who have died since, and we still miss his good humor, especially at such gatherings. It would be three years after that first reunion before Grace Elizabeth, the oldest and still the most exciting of my five nieces, came into the world. And between the birthing and the dying, during those years our extended family has certainly experienced the loss and gain, sorrow and joy, comings and the goings experienced by a broad cross section of American families.

It has been an exciting, if often tumultuous, time in which a new generation has come to accept change as an ordinary part of daily living, and in which at least some among the older generation have struggled with such changes wondering when, if ever, they are all going to end.

I'd like to invite you to pray and think about change in your own life if you have some leisure moments on Sunday or at any

time over the upcoming holiday weekend. And I suggest the following questions for starters:

- What is the most significant change which has occurred in my life in the past year?
- Why do I name this change as particularly significant?
- Is it a change I chose or would have chosen for myself?
- Or is it a change I experienced because of the decision of another person or because of circumstances beyond my control?
- How have I responded to this change?
- What have I learned from it about life?
- What have I learned about myself?
- If I should ever experience a similar change again, would I do, anything differently to better meet the opportunity it presents or the challenge it offers?
- What event in the life of Jesus, what action He performed, what words He said most encourage me when I am faced with the need to change?

I wish you all a happy holiday weekend. And, I want to say to my friends at St. John the Baptist and St. Cecilia in Elmira that I look forward to being with you on Saturday and Sunday. Please believe Father



Along the Way

Gramke; I have no other purpose than to pray with you and talk with you. Truly. Peace to all.

Monastic calling a needed option

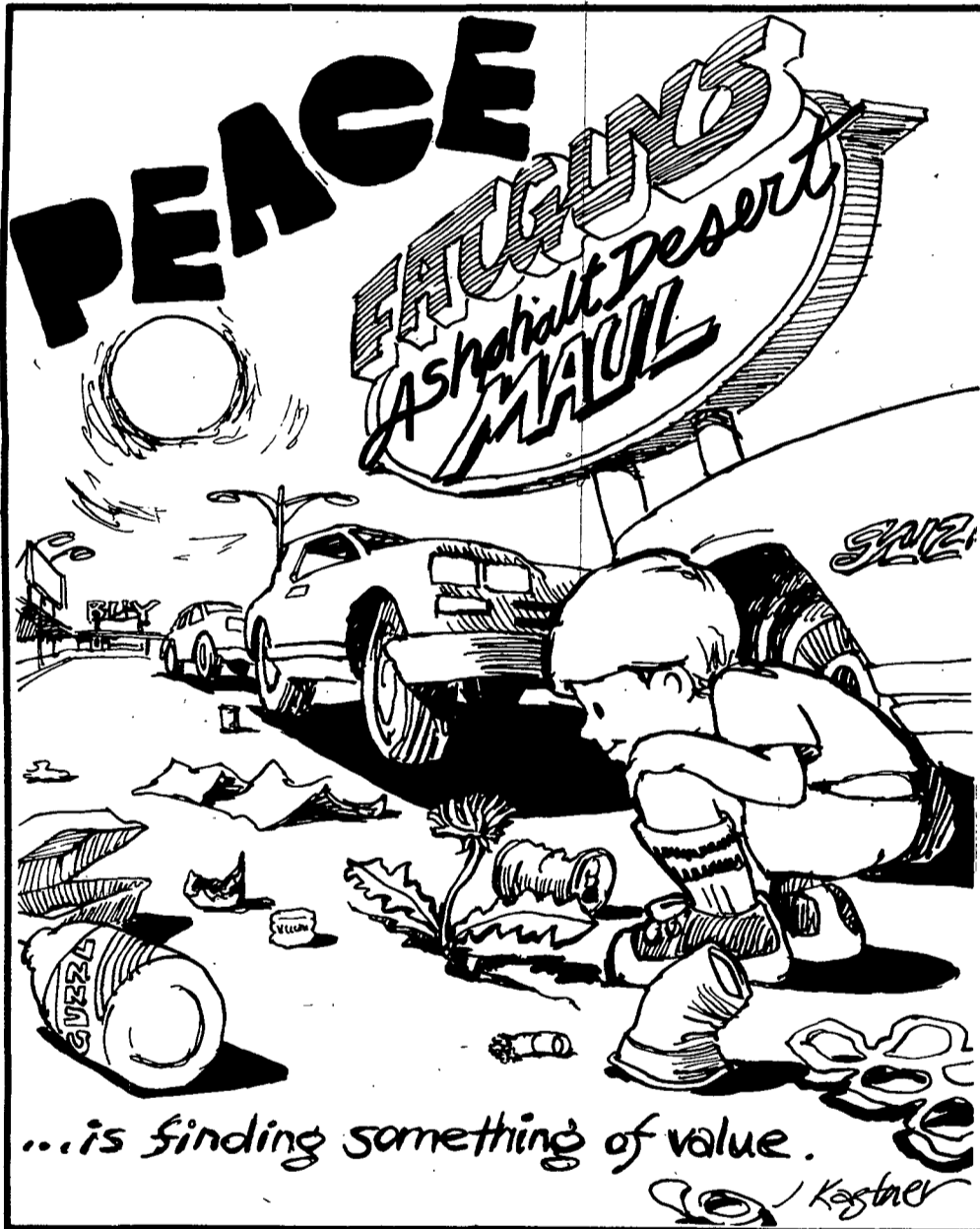
To the editor:

Your July 29 issue carried an excellent centerfold article by Sister Mary Sullivan, RSM, on vocations to the religious life. I found it to be theologically informed and balanced while at the same time simple, direct and realistic. Hopefully, it will attract vocations of the same caliber to our diocesan apostolic congregations of women religious whose active ministry is certainly valued and needed.

But there is more to be said if the Body of Christ with its diversity of members and functions is to be complete in our local Church; and it is too often left in the background or overlooked altogether. I speak, in a sense, as "a voice crying in the wilderness" of the monastic contemplative life — not to mention the wilderness of the comparatively remote Southern Tier of the diocese, as the omission of the Benedictine Monks of Mount Saviour and the Monastery of Dominican Nuns from Sister Mary's otherwise ample listing demonstrates — which lacks visibility in a local Church, and, specifically here, to the Catholic population of Rochester. Yet this contemplative dimension of the Church represented by groups given over to the continual praise of, and intercession to God on behalf of his people is essential to it.

It is an observable fact that there is, in rich and poor alike, a thirst for a kind of fulfillment which reaches beyond our present limited human horizons even at their best. St. Augustine, after all his searchings in various human philosophies and in sexual experience, finally turned to God, the only source of human fulfillment, with the well-known words: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." If that consciousness is not sharply maintained by the existence of groups of men and women primarily dedicated to the search for God in a life of prayer, social justice itself will wither for lack of roots: the realization of our common human dignity and destiny as children of God. As a result, life itself will lose its meaning, and materialism and violence will flourish still further in our society.

Monks and Nuns have a long history reaching back into the early Church. While unceasing prayer fostered by a blend of silence, solitude and supportive community has always been the primary focus, hospitality and concern for the poor have



been steadily maintained in awareness and in simple forms of expression. It was only when society became more complex that distinctive lifestyles emphasizing active forms of ministry developed as alternate modes of religious life.

A call to the monastic contemplative life is a humbling, even baffling experience to a man or a woman. While it answers a deep thirst within an individual, it is a lifestyle so foreign to the modern American mentality and way of life that a radical transformation of values and self-understanding is demanded. As one who has lived it for many years I can only say that it is an experience of spiritual poverty and ever deepening peace and joy in the presence of a God who is all-pervasive yet elusive. It is still a valid alternative. Please, let it and us be known!

Sister Catherine Wolfe, O.P.
Monastery of Mary the Queen
Elmira

Does Father Cuddy want to replace American flag?

To the editor:

Over the years Father Cuddy has recounted in his column, "On the Right Side," his many and varied experiences while serving as an Army chaplain.

I am shocked and saddened that he now wants the American flag torn down only to be replaced by his picture over his column! (Courier, Aug. 10: "Of photographs and scandals that beset the church")

It is not difficult to find his column as he contends. After I read Father McBrien's syndicated column I simply turn to the far right and there is Father Cuddy's.

I know Father Cuddy. I like Father Cuddy. But, Father Cuddy, you're no American Flag!

Father Raymond G. Heisel
Mother of Sorrows Church
Rochester

Church since council undergoing process of 'Protestantization'

To the editor:

Recently I read that in 1969, 70 percent of the Mass was rewritten by a Vatican commission, whose membership included six Protestant ministers. The very nature of the Mass was changed. The New Mass, so similar to Protestant worship services, mirrors a new "ecumenical" religion.

Since then, Protestantization of the Mass and the Church has proceeded apace. The celebrant is now a "presider," which could refer even to the leader of a Mafia meeting. Crucifixes have disappeared as well as other religious symbols and art. The crucifix is the symbol of Roman Catholicism if anything is — so it must go.

This diocese is cozying up to the Episcopal church with no apparent benefit to our Church. Which church is changing toward the other?

Despite protestations of necessity, churches and schools are closing with suspicious rapidity. It seems evident that the substance, the spirit and the trappings of Roman Catholicism are rapidly being discarded or superseded.

To what end is this? RCs whose opinion was not asked re: either the Vatican II Council or the Spirit of Vatican II should think strongly about what they want for what once was their Church.

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