

Commitment gathering inspires optimism

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

I have referred often in my column to June 26, 1979. That was the night of my installation as the eighth Bishop of Rochester. (Monsignor Bill Shannon, maintaining that only washing machines and dishwashers are installed, implores me to use another word.)

I explain my frequent reference to that event by the fact that it was such an early and powerful experience for me of the vitality and variety of our local Church. It was a stunning, moving night because of the people of our 12 counties who gathered to express and to grow in their faith. Few Eucharistic liturgies I have ever participated in have left me with such memories.

Now, however, I have experienced an event I am sure will rival that June night. It happened on Saturday at Rochester's Riverside Convention Center. Twelve hundred people from 140 of our parish communities gathered that day to continue the work of our Commitment to Ministry process.

It was exciting to be among those people because they represented all that is best about our faith community — their courage, commitment, generosity and imagination. They took advantage of a wide variety of workshops (all offered by people of our diocese), they presented their questions to me and listened patiently as I proposed

some criteria by which we can judge together the vitality of our local parish communities of faith.

One of the bright spots of the day for me was my impression that people are slowly beginning to relax and to see that the Commitment to Ministry process is a positive, constructive means of growth. It will allow for a more immediate experience of bonds with neighboring faith communities. It will help us to be better stewards of our spiritual and material resources. It will help us to plan together for the training and support of the excellent pastoral ministers which we will need for the future.

This emerging awareness is slowly beginning to replace a perception that was fairly common in earlier days: the idea that this process was somehow a veiled and indirect way to remove resident parish priests and to suppress smaller parish communities.

It is true, to be sure, that the number of our diocesan priests will diminish to the point that we will not be able to supply resident pastors to every community that has one now. But I will be able to make the necessary decisions in the best possible manner when I can enjoy the fruits of the reflections of local parish groups about their pastoral resources and needs.

Beyond that, I believe, it is becoming more clear that even were we to enjoy a

super-abundance of ordained priests, a process like this would offer us a valuable experience in appreciating what the church is and who we are to one another.

Today's world is too small, and communications too rapid for us ever to think that we can live in isolation from each other. More importantly, the very reality of our faith demands of us a visible, consistent care not just among individuals, but among local communities as well.

You will learn more about Saturday's events and the continuing Commitment to Ministry process through this paper and through summary updates your parish will receive. I ask you please to be attentive to that information and to pray for the continued success of Commitment to Ministry.

I have two closing notes today. One is a word of apology for not submitting a column last week. I wish I could say that urgent business called me away or that I was unavoidably prevented from doing the column. The truth is that I plain and simple forgot, remembering I had not done it at just about the moment when it was due at the *Catholic Courier* office. That's not a big deal I suppose, but I must confess it was a little embarrassing, since the idea for this year's Thanks Giving Appeal centers around my writing to you.

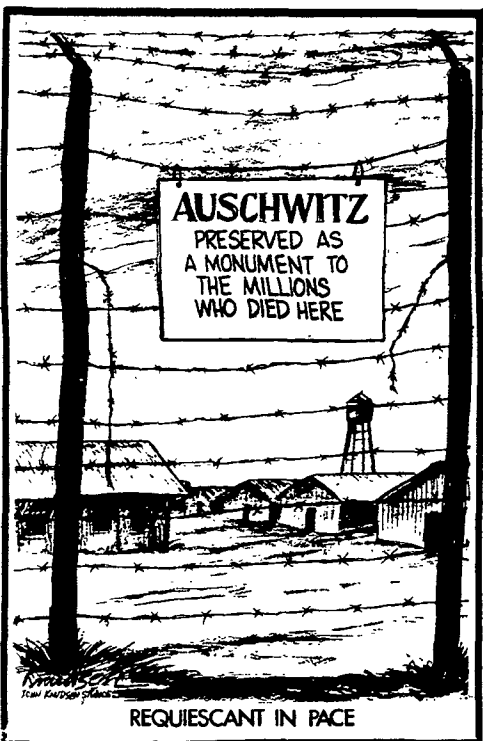
Secondly, I want to invite you to help me encourage Catholic friends to support and



Along the Way

read the *Catholic Courier*. This newspaper, always an important medium for news and information, will become even more important to us in the next few years. More about that another time.

Renewed thanks to all who made Saturday's event such a rich one for our diocese. Peace to all.



Pre-schools a poor substitute for loving home care

To the editor:

Sociologists and child psychologists have been repeatedly telling us that the first five to six years of a child's life are the most important ones he or she will ever have. Not only does the child learn an enormous amount of factual and motor knowledge, but, most importantly, the child learns his values, his behaviors, and his priorities these beautiful first years. Hopefully, the values, behaviors, and priorities that he learns will be those of his parents.

In the *Catholic-Courier* supplement on Catholic schools of 8/10/89 in an article entitled, "Tykes Learn How to Learn in Programs," Catholic school pre-school programs are lauded and their existence validated by giving them "roots" in the Project Head Start pre-school programs which we are told "helped the children" of the disadvantaged in the '60s. However,

when Head Start was initiated the planners KNEW that school was not the BEST answer for the children it would serve. The best answer would be and still remains for the pre-schooler to be in the loving, caring presence of a full-time parent. Because it was felt that some disadvantaged youths lacked the possibility of this kind of pre-school life, Head Start was begun. Definitely NOT as a substitute for the home but to supplement those homes that had trouble being homes!

Currently the Catholic school pre-school programs serve the economically advantaged. For the most part the children have little trouble learning or socializing. Children at this age don't have to learn to learn! Let them be children! Let them totally take up their parents' time! Let them benefit from knowing that they're loved so much that their parents are willing to sacrifice to be there with them. Our world is not short

on learners or social butterflies, we are however short on people knowing that they are loved!!!

The same article goes on to state "although located in Catholic schools, the programs do not put a strong focus on teaching religion." What a sad, SAD statement! After these dear children are deprived to their earthly parent's presence and love! What a moment missed! What a perfect time to teach about God. If the pre-schools of the Catholic Church taught about God that would at least give them some validation. As it is, it would almost appear to be offering a rather expensive Sesame Street.

So that we can come to love and serve God, we must first come to know Him. That's what Christianity is all about. It should be what teaching in a Catholic school is all about.

Barbara A. Fredericks
Electric Avenue Rochester

Article on traditional lay organizations failed to cover certain groups

To the editor:

The August 31st issue of the *Catholic Courier* had on its front page a story on lay church organizations. As the international president of the Ladies' Auxiliary, Knights of St. John, I find it incomprehensible that you could so blatantly ignore our organization.

We are affiliated with the Knights of St. John and have been in existence since the 19th century. Our membership in this area is strong, and we have been noted for our many charitable works including contributions to Bethany House, Melita House, School of the Holy Childhood, St. Peter's Kitchen and many national charities. Anyone who visits the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., enters under the Rose Window which was contributed by the Ladies' Auxiliary. We have educated priests and teachers of the handicapped, and we have

built chapels in undeveloped areas.

Mr. Cullivan certainly did not do his homework when researching this article. I know we are listed in the directory of lay organizations. Neither our District President nor myself was contacted. There were probably many other organizations that were left out. However, ours is an international group on the same level as the Knights of Columbus. You included our Brother Knights but insulted us by your oversight.

It is thoughtless actions such as yours which undermine the membership of these worthy organizations which work for the advancement of the Church. May I suggest that you work at rectifying this attitude.

Isabelle A. Shea
Supreme President
Ladies' Auxiliary, Knights of St. John

EDITOR'S NOTE: We certainly did not intend to insult or exclude the Ladies' Auxiliary, Knights of St. John, from our story on traditional societies ("Traditional groups put faith in action," CC-Aug. 31). However, the very number of such groups — which take up six pages of the diocesan directory — dictates that we could not deal with all of them in a single story of reasonable length. Instead, staff writer Rob Cullivan attempted to contact and include in his story a representative sampling of members and organizations, which — as

you noted — did include your brother organization, the Knights of St. John, as well as several women's groups.

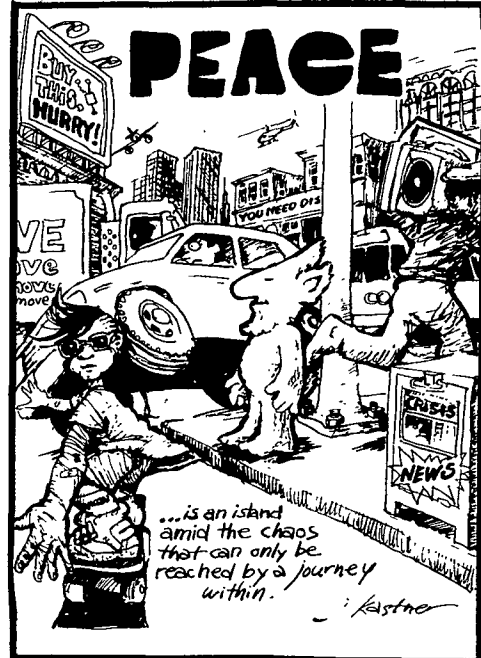
Rather than undermining membership, our hope is that the story informed and interested readers in the good work that your group and others do.

Return Mass to regular time

To the editor:

Please ask your readers to phone or write Channel 10, television, to return Mass on TV back to 11 a.m. on Sundays. Eight a.m. is too early for older shut-ins. I am writing them myself as I was devastated Sunday when it wasn't on.

Mrs. M.J. Dowling, Jr.
811 Elmwood Terrace
Rochester



Correction

A line was inadvertently omitted from James G. Connor's letter, "Changes in emphasis are facets of living faith," in last week's *Courier*. The line should have read: "If it be of God it will prosper. Like November, it will come. This work of God in us, the world and the church will not be stifled!" We regret the error.

Catholic Courier Letters Policy

The *Catholic Courier* wishes to provide space for readers throughout the diocese to express opinions on all sides of the issues. We welcome all signed, original letters about current issues affecting church life.

Although we cannot publish every letter we receive, we seek, insofar as possible, to provide a balanced representation of expressed opinions and a variety of reflections on life in the church. We will choose letters for publication based on likely reader interest, timeliness and a sense of fair play. Our discerning readers may determine whether to agree or disagree with the opinions of the letter writers.

We reserve the right to edit all letters. Mail them to: *Catholic Courier*, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, New York 14624. Please include your full name as well as telephone number and complete address for verification purposes.