

Hope for healing abortion conflict lies in conversion

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

It seems a long time since I sat down to write to you. Actually it's only one week later than usual. It just seems much longer, I suppose, because I was in Baltimore for 10 days and because so much happened during our stay in that interesting city.

I won't go into detail about all that I experienced there. But I will mention the four principal components of those days: a symposium called together to study John Paul's post-synodal instruction, *The Christian Laity*; an orientation program for newly ordained bishops sponsored by our Conference Committee on Bishops' Life and Ministry; our semiannual meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and a meeting of our committee charged with the drafting of a pastoral letter on the Concerns of Women for the Church and Society.

When I flew back from Baltimore late Saturday night, I was aware of many things. I certainly felt the fatigue most people would experience after 10 straight days of morning-until-night meetings. I felt a certain pride that the conference would be willing to involve itself in such a variety of complex and controversial issues. I was very much aware of the human imperfection of the church, of our conference and of myself and the need all of us have daily to remember that we are all subject to the

Word of God. A further portion of the awareness related to the way in which we bishops most faithfully and fruitfully carry out our ministry in the church we are called to serve.

The longer I am at it, the more I am convinced that, while bishops are meant to be teachers in the church, we can not carry out that ministry as fully as the Lord wants if we stand apart from the faith and wisdom, the struggles and the visions of the people in whose midst we stand and whose journey of faith we share. We bishops certainly share the same faith. But it is clear from the diversity among us that no one of us can reasonably stand in the assembly and say that some one has come into possession of all that the church ever needed to know. Or that whatever wisdom he possessed could not somehow be filled up by that of his brother bishops and/or by the people of his community of faith.

One question, among others, which often draws me to think about how to learn and how to teach well rises from the critical life issues we face, and especially from the controversies which surround the life of the unborn. All bishops I know and the vast majority of Catholics I know oppose with deep conviction the termination of unborn human life. I stand firmly with them. I do so because it is human life made in the image of God, because it is totally

innocent life and because it is completely defenseless. To terminate such life is to destroy something sacred, life made in God's image.

Still I am deeply aware, as you are, that this issue is one which engenders emotional controversy as intense as any I have experienced in my lifetime. If we support the inalienable right to life of the unborn, our opponents counter with the argument that, in any case, a woman's right to privacy and free choice stand firm against any public claims to the contrary. And so, in the heat of controversy, those holding the opposing views assign names to one another which deepen the angers and widen the chasms which divide people.

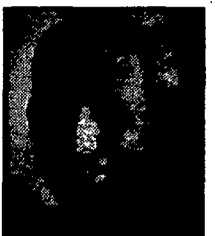
I have not the slightest notion how to solve those problems, but I do believe that any hope we have for civil and progressive work on this matter calls for a conversion of heart in all of us. No matter how correct we think we are, no matter how much we believe we are in possession of the truth, we can always learn from others because no one of us ever possesses all of the truth at any one time.

One of my hopes in this regard is that we can continually search for convergences, links and bridges with those who describe themselves as pro choice. I believe that there is more common ground for fruitful discussion and exploration of this issue

than we have been able to admit to one another. The climate has been too emotional and polemical for that. And, within our church, I believe that there is a huge amount of work to be done to draw on the wisdom and experience of women in this matter. I have a deep sense that the credibility of bishops teaching in the matter of abortion, and in matters, sexual in general, will rise when and as we demonstrate our capacity and desire to learn from faithful Catholic women.

For the next three years, I'll have a special opportunity to explore some of these issues. At our meeting in Baltimore I was elected to a three-year term as chairperson of our conference's Committee on Women in the Church and Society. I am delighted at the opportunity to serve in this capacity because of my interest in the work and because, by virtue of that position, I'll be serving on the Administrative Committee of the conference. I have never had that experience before and look forward to working with the group that has so much to do with shaping and moving our agenda.

More about such things another day. In the meantime, please pray for me. Peace to all.



Courier begins 20th year of Christmas campaign

This week, the *Catholic Courier* begins the 20th year of its "Neediest Cases" Christmas campaign, which throughout its history has aided hundreds of needy people seeking assistance from the various Social Ministry agencies in the Diocese of Rochester.

The cases that appear below — and those that will appear in four subsequent editions of the *Courier* — are representative of the people actually served by donations to the campaign. Readers are asked to send contributions to: Christmas Appeal, Diocese of Rochester, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624. Since the program oper-

ates by providing cash vouchers to people in emergency situations, organizers ask that readers refrain from sending any goods or merchandise mentioned in the cases.

1 Mr. and Mrs. K. are an elderly couple struggling to maintain their independence. They have no family in the area to offer assistance of any kind. Chronic health problems produce medical bills that drain their meager income, making it difficult to pay other living expenses. Their Christmas will be a lean one without your help.

2 Marleen is a young mother who is expecting her third child this spring. She has been at home with her children, but has plans to return to school for training in cosmetology when her baby is old enough. Currently, she is separated from her husband and going through a rough time financially, though she tries hard to keep herself and the children active and cheerful.

The family has many needs this Christmas, including household and baby furniture, and toys and clothing for the children and mother.

3 Miss T. is a young woman of Vietnamese/Cambodian origin. She arrived in the United States in September. She is the youngest of three siblings, and lost her mother at the age of two. She was fixed up with a man by her brother, got pregnant and had an abortion.

Miss T. was raped during her escape to Thailand. Around the same time, she learned that her father had died in Vietnam. She became very depressed and sick. She was hospitalized in camps in both Thailand and the Philippines for chronic stomach pain and somatization disorder.

4 A widow with seven children — ages 4-21 — lived three years in a refugee camp in Thailand. Her husband died in the camp due to an illness. Sponsored by her son who has been in the United States for two years, she and her other children arrived in Rochester in March. The Catholic Family Center provided social

Catholic Courier Social Ministry Christmas APPEAL

adjustment and job-development services to the family.

The widow is attending classes in English as a second language. Her 21- and 19-year-old sons have been employed in factories since August and are no longer on public assistance. Only the mother and the other five children are now on public assistance.

5 Margarita, a 16-year-old Hispanic girl with two young children — Sandra, 2, and Jorge, 6 months — is beginning to make significant improvements in their lives. Sandra was born with only one kidney and has been diagnosed as severely delayed developmentally, making it difficult for Margarita both to care for her children and seek employment.

Margarita is making a difficult but important decision to find a shelter available for women and children, so she can have a safe place to sort out her life and begin to implement a plan for personal and family growth away from an abusive relationship with her husband. Margarita is motivated to change, and she needs some special help this Christmas.

6 Ms. P. is a young mother in her early 20s with five children — the youngest was born in July. Due to ongoing physical abuse by the children's father, Ms. P. experiences severe depression at times, and she sometimes uses drugs to escape her situation. Christmas won't be very merry for her children because of the meager public-assistance grant the family receives, and any donations would be welcomed.

7 Linda became the sole support of her family after her husband deserted her

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SALUTE THE CATHOLIC COURIER in its 100th ANNIVERSARY Special Commemorative Issue JANUARY 4th, 1990

The *Catholic Courier*, official newspaper of the Rochester Catholic Diocese, is planning a special edition to commemorate the paper's 100th anniversary.

Copies of this commemorative issue will be mailed to our regular subscribers on the *Catholic Courier's* January 4, 1990, issue date. Additional keepsake copies will be available at the *Catholic Courier* office.

Your ad in this issue can reach over 100,000 readers while showing your interest in and support for the *Catholic Courier*.

We are counting on your help to make this Anniversary Issue a "special" salute to the *Catholic Courier*. Please call Kathy Welsh or Bernie Puglisi at (716) 328-4340 if you need any additional information. We hope to hear from you soon.

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