

1980s:

By Teresa A. Parsons
Associate Editor

The Diocese of Rochester began the 1980s with a brand-new bishop whose concern for oppressed people and collegial, consultative style have won him both high praise and harsh criticism.

Installed in June, 1979, as the eighth bishop of Rochester, Matthew H. Clark quickly expressed his sensitivity toward women's roles in the church with the 1982 pastoral letter, *The Fire in the Thornbush*.

The bishop heartened some Catholics and infuriated others in 1986 by defending Father Charles Curran against then-threatened sanctions later carried out by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

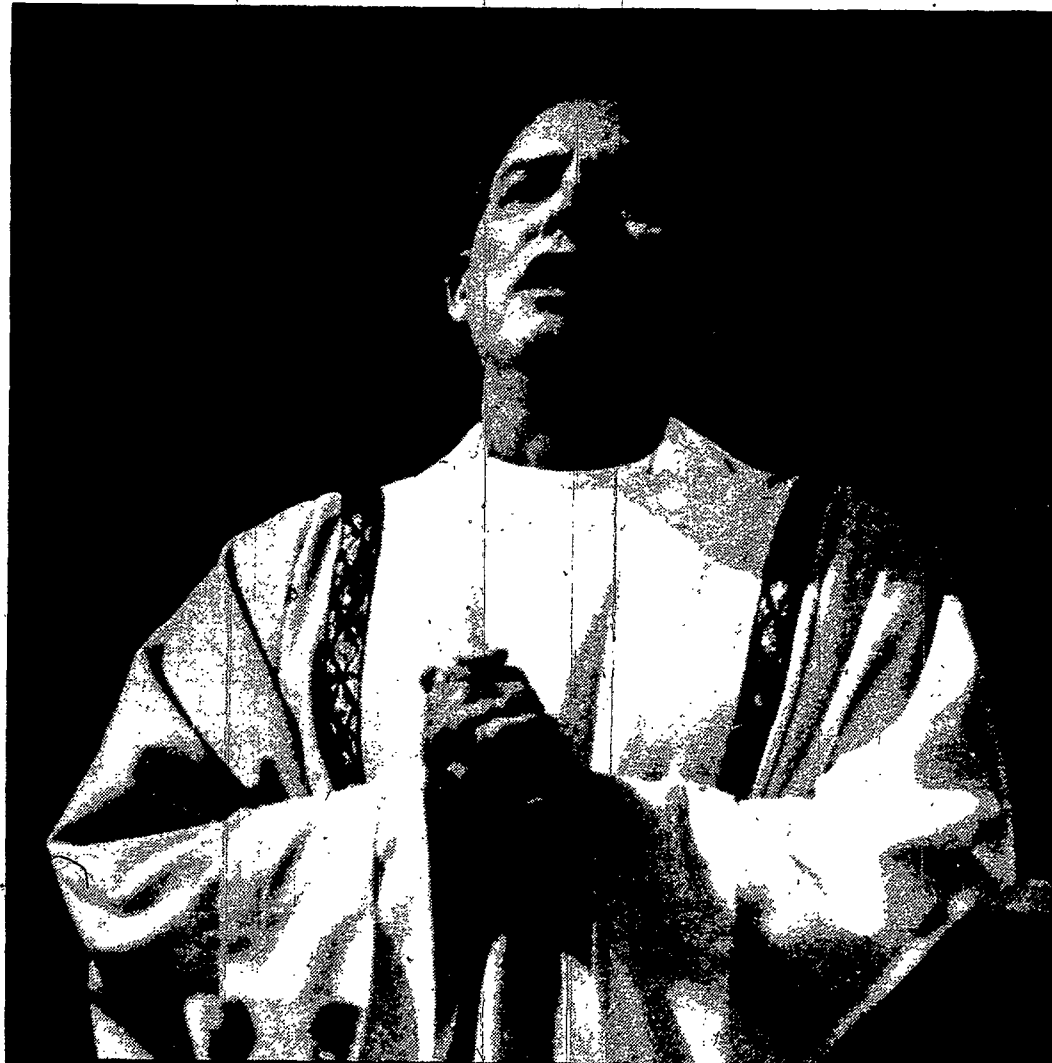
Bishop Clark quickly revealed social ministry as a priority, agreeing in 1983 to supply a mission team to a "sister diocese" in Tabasco, Mexico.

Later in the decade, the bishop approved statements supporting civil disobedience among anti-abortion protesters willing to accept the consequences of their actions, and urged "unconditional love and care" for all those whose lives are "torn by the pain of AIDS," acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

Nationally, the church's social ministry agenda was recast by Cardinal Joseph Bernardin in a December, 1983, address at Fordham University, in which he introduced a "consistent ethic" on life issues.

"The basic moral principle that the direct killing of the innocent is always

Centennial scrapbook Controversy follows collegial new bishop in decade of abortion fights, Vatican censures



File photo
Bishop Matthew H. Clark has won praise for his consultative style and interest in social ministry, but some have criticized his stands on such issues as civil disobedience and women in the church.

wrong is so fundamental in Catholic theology that the need to defend it in the multiple cases of abortion, warfare and care of the handicapped and terminally ill is self-evident," the cardinal said.

Bishop Clark presaged Cardinal Bernardin's vision by speaking Oct. 22, 1983, at New York state's Right to Life Convention and at a peace rally near the Seneca Army Depot, where nuclear weapons are said to be stored.

Through the symbolism of his presence and explicit words of his addresses, Bishop Clark linked the two issues by acknowledging the need to "disarm our own hearts" to end "violence perpetrated against the child in the womb" as well as the violence of poverty perpetrated against the poor of the United States and the Third World by the priority given to defense spending.

Bishop Clark's decision to speak at the rally drew sharp criticism from several directions. The Diocesan Pastoral Council voted not to endorse the Oct. 22 rally and the bishop's participation. Reflecting concerns expressed among Catholics in the diocese at large, some DPC members said it was inappropriate for the bishop to attend a rally at which civil disobedience was planned.

Pro-life advocates, meanwhile, complained that he had chosen to attend the peace rally instead of the state Right-to-Life convention taking place in Rochester the same weekend — a concern Bishop Clark answered by agreeing to speak at both events.

Although pro-life and peace groups had long been divided along liberal and conservative lines, the consistent ethic — which also came to be known as the "seamless garment" approach to life issues — drew some former adversaries together in groups such as Feminists for Life, Justice and the Faith and Resistance Community.

Civil disobedience was a natural means of expression for such groups as the Faith and Resistance Community, which demonstrated at the Seneca Army depot as well as inside a Rochester hospital abortion clinic.

But civil disobedience won far more public attention when employed by an organization known as Project Life of Rochester and other abortion opponents, who introduced the term "rescue mission" into the '80s vocabulary.

Arrested in April, 1986, for blockading a St. Louis, Mo., abortion clinic, Project Life director David Long organized the Rochester area's first rescue mission in January, 1987, at Genesee Hospital.

From that first group of four activists, local rescue efforts quickly expanded to groups of as many as 42 protesters, who occupied hospitals and private doctors' offices to stop or delay abortions said to be

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1970s: Two papal elections, Southern Tier flood highlighted era of malaise throughout U.S.

By Carmen Viglucci
Guest contributor

The 1970s constituted a decade of momentous comings and goings not only on the church scene, but also nationally and internationally.

Two popes died; so did two presidents. A third president was forced into retirement.

Locally, Bishop Joseph L. Hogan, who had assumed his episcopacy in 1969, retired before the '70s were out. Former ordinaries Bishop James E. Kearney and Fulton J. Sheen died.

A disastrous flood ravaged the Southern Tier in 1972, and Americans squirmed through the malaise of the post-Vietnam era and were shocked by the Watergate scandal.

But the decade brought more than transitions. The church agonized through what some saw as growing pains and others as modernism. Communion in the hand, altar girls, communal penance, the advent of the Diocesan Pastoral Council, the restructur-

ing of diocesan offices, the permanent diaconate — all were innovated in the '70s.

Under Gov. Nelson Rockefeller, New York state had established the most liberal abortion law in the land. But with the 1973 Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade*, abortion became a burning issue throughout the nation.

Preparing for the 1970 elections, the *Courier-Journal* conducted a public poll on abortion and aid to parochial schools. Many candidates — including Rockefeller — answered the poll, and the governor for the first time hinted he might favor some changes in the law he had signed.

The Democratic candidate, Arthur Goldberg, didn't reply to the poll but told Father Richard Tormey, *Courier* executive editor, that although he personally opposed abortion, he thought it should be left to choice. Goldberg was neither the first nor last to waffle on the issue.

The other great story of the early '70s was the flood that tore apart the Southern Tier.



File photo
The Elmira Theatre marquee gave a cheery apology to moviegoers as it cleaned up damage caused by flood waters in the summer of 1972.

The most graphic detail was provided in Ss. Peter and Paul Church in Elmira, which was filled with eight feet of water at the height of the flood. The diocese, through the Office of Human Development, mobilized quickly, and priests

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