

# Bishop offers hopes for church of tomorrow

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Bishop Matthew H. Clark hopes that in the years to come the Catholic Church will "become more expansive and inclusive in (its) way of thinking and acting ... and will be unafraid to explore fully and courageously the questions which are active in the hearts of so many of our people."

Such exploration would include further study of issues that cause tension in today's church, including birth control, abortion, celibacy and the ordination of women, Bishop Clark said.

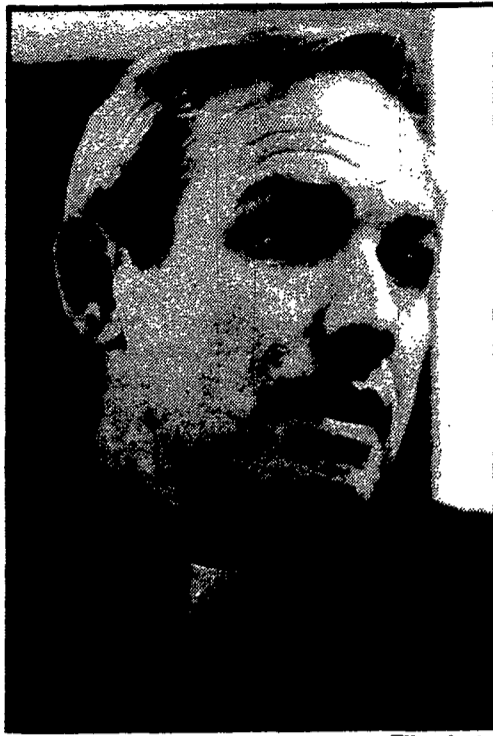
The bishop expressed these hopes for the church during a speech and question-and-answer session Wednesday, May 16, at Colgate Rochester Divinity School.

His talk, entitled "The Church on the Brink of Tomorrow: Challenges and Opportunities," was the sixth and final presentation in St. Bernard's Institute's year-long "Future of the Church" forum.

The other five presentations, given by members of the institute's faculty, dealt with biblical perspectives on change in the church, human rights, sacramental reconciliation, ecumenism, and women in the church.

In his talk, Bishop Clark referred to the earlier addresses, and in particular to Father Sebastian Falcone's discussion of the early church's experiences of dealing with differences and conflict among its members.

The early centers of the church — Rome, Antioch, Jerusalem and Corinth — shared one faith, Bishop Clark noted, but differed from each other in a number of areas, including the ways in which they organized themselves and the methods by which they identified their leaders.



File photo

**Concluding a lecture series on the church's future, Bishop Matthew H. Clark urged more freedom for local churches.**

"How did they maintain community with each other in the midst of such diversity?" Bishop Clark asked. "And if they didn't stay together, who — if anyone — would determine that they had not?"

Bishop Clark emphasized that "the church is a living body with a history that is marked by stunning diversity; that this diversity has existed not only from age to age, but that it existed and still does, more than many want to admit, among local churches at any given time all though (the church's) history."

Again referring to the themes of the earlier addresses, Bishop Clark noted,

## Father Mugavero could face jail for violating terms of discharge

ROCHESTER — Father Anthony Mugavero will have to wait at least two more months before learning whether he will have to go to jail again.

The parochial vicar of St. Theodore's Parish in Gates was back in city court on Monday morning, May 21, facing Judge Gary Smith. Smith told Father Mugavero that he would await the outcome of the priest's appeal on another case before deciding whether to resentence him for violating the terms of his conditional discharge.

Smith had sentenced Father Mugavero to organize a blood drive on January 26, 1990, after the priest was convicted on trespassing charges related to his part in a December "rescue mission" at a city doctor's office where abortions were performed.

Smith released the priest on the condition that he organize the blood drive within three months of his sentencing, and that he stay out of legal trouble for a year.

But Father Mugavero was arrested only four days later when he attempted to persuade a Monroe County Jail inmate to not have an abortion at a Brighton doctor's office. Subsequently convicted in Brighton Town Court of harassment, Father Mugavero spent a week in county jail.

The priest has maintained that he was engaging in free speech — not civil disobedience — when he approached the inmate and spoke with her.

Father Mugavero's attorney, Michael Regan, noted he would appeal his client's harassment conviction sometime in July.

— Rob Cullivan

"We are not now where we ought to be with any of these questions," but the church's capacity to grow and progress in terms of these issues is "both real and deep."

The bishop observed that, "Within so many areas of life which are generally included under any of our four earlier themes, the pastoral practice — or at least the yearning and readiness of the local churches — has advanced beyond the applicable universal norms which speak to those respective issues."

By way of illustration, Bishop Clark cited the practice of general absolution in the Diocese of Rochester.

Bishop Clark said that the local church had interpreted church norms governing general absolution "in a liberal way." He acknowledged that in the past he was uncomfortable with this interpretation, but is no longer.

"I would want to say that even were we properly accused of going beyond the technical limits of the applicable norms, and I believe we do not do that, the fruits realized from such pastoral expansiveness would thoroughly justify the action," Bishop Clark observed.

He noted that the experience of the local church indicates that the practice of general absolution tends to create a stronger awareness of God's love and a greater appreciation of the evil of sin, and leads to a renewed practice of individual confession and a consciousness that individuals are called to be agents of reconciliation.

"Our experience indicates that general absolution does not create or foster a mentality of easy grace, does not diminish a sense of sin in the penitent, does not lessen the sense of responsibility which the penitent has for her or his personal sin, does not injure or otherwise damage our revered tradition of celebrating God's mercy given to us sinners in Jesus in and through the public sacramental acts of the church," Bishop Clark said.

A second example Bishop Clark cited is the participation of women in the local church, especially in the ministry of preaching. He noted that preaching by non-ordained people "is possible only if one gives broad pastoral application to the existing general norms of the church." In his opinion, he said, the local church had done so appropriately, and that the practice had produced "good fruit."

Bishop Clark acknowledged that this practice of allowing lay people to preach is not accepted by everyone. But, he said, "I believe that it borders on the inevitable in this widely diverse Catholic Church of ours — in this age of change so rapid that we can hardly keep pace with it — that the living pastoral practice of the churches will not be perfectly in compliance with our general and common norms."

And if this is true of general norms, Bishop Clark continued, "then it is doubly true of more particular norms and regulations." Variations in practice lead to tensions, he said, but argued that these ten-

sions should "arise from the exigencies of the Gospel, from the legitimate diversity among us and among local churches, from our healthy efforts to honor our God-given gifts, and from our striving to meet the pastoral needs of our time and place."

Such tensions have always existed within the church, Bishop Clark observed, but become stronger in an age like the current time "when life is fast and very complex, and when in my opinion the Holy See is moving toward a more centralized control of church life."

The bishop began enumerating a list of hopes for the church by suggesting that the "rich tradition" of the local church be renewed and re-established. He noted that major cultural, devotional and economic differences exist between the churches of Rochester and of such areas as Nairobi, Kenya, and Goias, Brazil, where local people serve.

Bishop Clark expressed the hope "that the local churches will continually become freer than they presently are to make significant judgments by which they shape the concrete ways in which they celebrate and proclaim the faith. The more particular the matter, the more freedom should the local churches enjoy."

A second hope for the future, Bishop Clark said, is that the church will find ways to use the wisdom and experience of the people of God, especially by emphasizing the relationship between bishops and the laity.

"I fear that at present our practical understanding of the official magisterium of the church is that it is embodied in those ordained to the episcopate, understood without appropriate reference to the relationship of the bishop to the faith of those whom he is ordained to serve," he said.

Bishop Clark said his third hope was that the church would be unafraid to explore issues troubling the faithful.

"The church is most alive," he said, "when she is expansive and inclusive, when she stands in dialogue with the time and with the culture in which she is enfolded, when she searches for truth wherever it may be found, and when she expresses fully the truth she bears in language which speaks to the hearts of the people of that age. At her best, the church finds room for all manner of diversity, disallowing only those points of view or directions which deny the central mysteries of our faith."

The bishop's fourth hope was that the church "will be willing fully and carefully to hear the people as they express their convictions about some of the issues which cause tension in the church."

Among those issues is birth control, Bishop Clark said, noting that the practice of many Catholics is not in accord with the church's official teaching. "That is most unfortunate for all of us," he said, "because it tends to separate bishops from the people and to weaken the teaching au-

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## School plan's opponents slate meeting

ROCHESTER — A parents' group opposed to the current Catholic schools reorganization process in Monroe County scheduled a May 23 meeting for supporters at the Marketplace Inn on Jefferson Road.

John F. Wagner Jr., chairman of the Alliance for Catholic Education, said the group hoped to use the meeting to gauge its level of support in the community and to devise further strategy in its battle against reorganization of Catholic schools.

Last March, ACE released a counter-proposal that criticized the schools' reorganization plan because, in the group's view, it diminished the power of parishes to run schools and lessened parental involvement.

Over the last two weeks, Wagner said, ACE has been distributing copies of its counter-proposal to pastors and parish

council members throughout the county. As of Monday, May 21, the group had not heard any response to the distribution effort, he said.

A letter accompanying the counter-proposal asked pastors and council members to urge Bishop Matthew H. Clark to "suspend quadrant governance of the schools for another year, so as to consider the (quadrant system's) obvious shortcomings as well as (ACE's) suggested alternatives."

Under the current reorganization process, Monroe County is divided into quadrants — Northeast, Northwest, Southeast and Southwest. Each is expected to have its own quadrant governing board that will set policy for its quadrant and administer the quadrant's schools.

— Rob Cullivan

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