

# Selma trip uncovers wealth of memories

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

The occasions are frequent when the story I want to tell is broader and deeper than my capacity to set it to writing. I can recall very few times when that has been more true than it is late on this Monday evening.

I long to write about my recent visit to Selma, Alabama, to share in the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the presence and ministry of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester in Selma and neighboring communities. But I know I could never do justice to the experience even if I had 10 times more space and time for writing than I have now.

But in the face of those limitations, I can recommend to you *Sisters of Saint Joseph: Alabama 1940-1990*, a booklet written by Sister Margaret Brennan, SSJ, to commemorate this significant occasion in the congregation's history. Sister Peg, as she is known to many friends, is a personal friend of mine, but I promise you that I recommend the booklet strictly on its merits.

First, it captures the work and the spirit of the 50 years. And it does so in a way that highlights the living connection that has always been maintained between the sisters who have been missioned in Alabama,

those who have served in Brazil and those here. It has been a common mission of the congregation. Those who have served in Alabama over the years have been sustained by the affectionate, generous support of the sisters at home. The sisters serving here have been enriched by the courage and faith of the people of Selma. They have experienced those traits through their sisters who have served in that historic southern city.

Secondly, the booklet touches into the notable evolution of religious life over the past 50 years and helps the reader to reflect on that evolution as it has unfolded in the context of the Alabama mission. Education and health care have been central and constant in the ministry of our sisters there for all of the 50 years.

But both ministries are offered in new shapes and forms. There is no longer a Catholic hospital in Selma, but our sisters staff clinics in service of the rural poor.

There is no longer a Catholic school in Selma, but our sisters are engaged in excellent catechetical programs and serve in learning centers in places where the very young need special educational care and would not receive it if our sisters were not present. They conduct nutrition programs, provide day care for frail and lonely seniors and do the kind of hidden gospel service that you and I and probably even Sister Peg will never know about. They do such things every day. They have done them for 50 years. They do it out of love.

My own recollections of the weekend I spent in Selma are many, and I expect that they'll provide food for thought for some time to come.

I remember running across the Edmund Pettus Bridge on a steamy afternoon and realizing that I was treading on holy ground. Here people died in the pursuit of basic human rights we take for granted.

I remember a young black man, now a teacher and proud to be one, who spoke so movingly of how he was a teacher today because the sisters, as he put it, "brought the best out of me."

I remember the same young man saying three times in that conversation (and always with a grin) "that Sister Joan surely was tough on me." He was speaking of Sister Joan Marshall, who is now teaching at Corpus Christi in Rochester. But the young teacher's tag line statement was "yeah, Sister Joan was tough. But when I started teaching, do you know who I imitated? Sister Joan!"

I remember the black city councilman of Selma who in presenting the key of the city of Selma to Sister Elizabeth Anne LeValley, superior general of the Sisters of St. Joseph, said, "We present to you the key to the city of Selma because you came here 50 years ago and have been opening our hearts ever since."

Tonight, I remember the stories I heard



on that weekend visit, stories of wounds bound up, minds opened, hopes raised and horizons expanded. Tonight, I remember the obvious and mutual respect and affection shared by the Sisters of St. Joseph and the people of Selma. They are rich and beautiful memories because they speak to me still of the mission vocation which you and I share with all of them by virtue of our baptism. They speak of the reverence and respect we owe to one another because we are all formed to the image and likeness of a gracious and loving God. Peace to all.

## Bishop Clark names Synod Commission

ROCHESTER — Bishop Matthew H. Clark has appointed a Synod Commission to help set future direction for the Diocese of Rochester.

The 22-member commission — comprising of priest, religious and lay representatives from throughout the 12 county diocese — will assist synod director Father Joseph Hart and assistant director Marcella Holtz. The commission held its first organizational meeting Sept. 18 at St. Stephen's School, Geneva.

According to Father Hart, the commission spent its initial meeting "reviewing the history and the nature of the task Bishop Clark has given to us."

"This first year of the three year synodal process will be a planning year during which we will prepare for a diocesan wide survey to surface themes for the Synod," Father Hart continued, noting that the survey will be conducted in 1991.

He said the themes emerging from the survey will be discussed at parish and regional synods, scheduled to take place during the fall of 1992 and the spring of 1993.

The synodal process will continue through September, 1993, when the Diocesan Synodal Assembly will be convened as part of the celebration of the 125th anniversary of the founding of the Diocese of Rochester.

The word "synod" comes from the Greek and means walking together on a journey. In the pastoral letter he wrote last June to announce the Synod, Bishop Clark wrote the word's meaning "suggests what a synod is meant to be: the people of a diocese gathering together with the bishop to 'walk together.' The walk includes conversation about our shared experience of being church, prayer and study about the direction to be followed, and a shaping and savoring of our vision for the future. The synod will develop a vision for the future and plans to realize that vision."

The Priests' Council and the Diocesan Pastoral Council recommended the Bishop convene a synod. Strong support for the concept was voiced during 12 hearing sessions held throughout the diocese in the fall of 1989.

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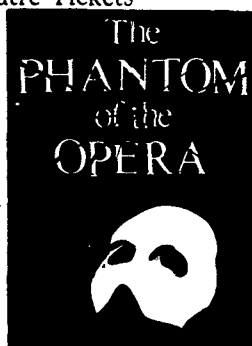
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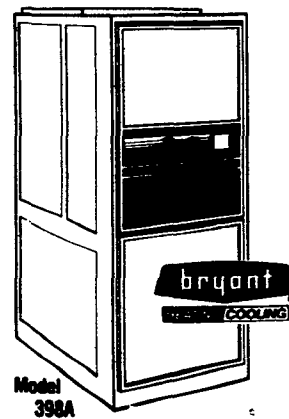
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