

'Fire' continues to burn after 10 years

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

April 29 marks the 10th-anniversary celebration of the publication of *The Fire in the Thornbush*, our diocesan pastoral letter on women in the church.

On the Feast of St. Catherine of Siena one decade ago, that document collected and put forward for our consideration a number of reflections on the reality of that time in the light of our faith tradition.

We spoke about the power and implication of baptism and of what it means to belong to a priestly people; about celebrating the gifts of all in the community; about the change of heart and deepening of life to which we continually are called.

We published the document after a considerable amount of consultation among the people of the diocese and with the direct, substantial participation of many gifted individuals.

Much to the credit of all who contributed to the effort, the letter was very well-received locally and given considerable attention across our nation.

I don't know how many copies of our pastoral have been sent out since its initial publication, but I do know that we receive requests for it to this very day. We have very few copies left, but it also was published in Volume 12 (October 14, 1982) of the documentary service *Origins* under the title "American Catholic Women: Persistent Questions, Faithful Witness."

I remember those days of preparation with



A LONG THE WAY

great gratitude. They offered me a wonderful opportunity to grow in my own knowledge of our faith, and to gain greater insight into the incredible strength of our local church. It was a community I had learned to love even in my early days here.

But the experience of exploring with you the themes contained in *The Fire in the Thornbush* gave rise to bonds of support and affection that nourish my spirit today.

Among the effects in my life of publishing the letter has been my participation on a writing committee preparing for our National Conference of Catholic Bishops the draft of a national pastoral letter on the concerns of women.

Bishop Joe Imesch, who chairs that commit-

tee, invited me to participate because of my experience with you. Little did he or I know when he invited me to join the task in 1983 that we would still be working on it in 1992.

Nine years is a long time for any project of this nature, but the end is in sight. At our plenary sessions in June and November of this year, our full conference will discuss the present draft and bring the matter to resolution.

I am not too sure what the exact determination of the conference will be, but whatever it is, I'll be very happy about two things. The first is that after all these years we will have a full, public discussion of these issues on the floor of the conference.

The second is that our writing committee will finally have come to the end of its work. I do not regret a moment of it, nor will my commitment to the issues cease. It will just be good to come to some closure on this particular project.

To comment at length about what has happened in the last 10 years would take more space than is available here. But I do want to say how encouraged I am by the strong faith and persistent questions of the women of this diocese, and by the commitment of our entire community to the continual deepening of our pastoral life.

My fond hope for all of us is that, through the experience of our Synod, we will take a step further on this issue and the others that will claim our attention in the months ahead.

I hope that your Easter Season has thus far been one of great joy for you.

Peace to all.

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WOULD YOU PRAY FOR A PRIEST EACH DAY?

The following prayer was dictated by Our Lord to Sister Josefa Menendez at Poitiers, France, on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, June 3, 1921, with the instruction: "Josefa! Repeat these words every day."

JESUS PRAYER FOR HIS PRIESTS

O Jesus, by Thy most loving Heart, I implore Thee to inflame with zeal for Thy love and glory all the priests of the world, all missionaries and those whose office it is to preach Thy word, that on fire with holy zeal, they may snatch souls from the devil and lead them into the shelter of Thy Heart, where for ever they may glorify Thee.

Imprimatur: E. Morrogh Bernard, Vic. Gen. Westmonasterii, May 5, 1953

MAY, 1992

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