

# The Holy Spirit lives in the people of God

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

It's not unusual these days to read articles or view programs conveying the idea that if the church has not already come to the point of ruin, it is well on its way to it.

I am amazed, for example, by some of the newspapers, magazines and letters I receive every week. One gets the impression in reading them that there are no more than a few dozen people who remain faithful, and that those few have a divine commission to remind the rest of us how badly we are messing up the church we all used to love so much.

Problems with the insights and initiatives of Vatican Council II often seem to be the catalyst for this kind of thinking and activity. According to the communications to which I refer, the Council wanted merely to fine tune some aspects of the church's self-understanding and pastoral practice. Further, such publications assert, the Council fathers did not intend nor did they intend for us to rethink such issues as what it means to be church together, what our appropriate relationship with the world should be, how we are to express our faith in worship, how we should relate to other Christian people, to the Jewish people, to Muslim people, etc.

The reality, as it has unfolded since the Council ended, is a bit different. Much thought has been given to the ways in which we relate to one another in the church. I think about the advent of parish pastoral councils and the experience of our Synod as examples of that. In addition, we have experienced considerable development in our



## A LONG THE WAY

ways of thinking about and relating to sisters and brothers in the Christian family, and in other faith traditions. Here, I think of the vigorous Interfaith Forum in this region and of our Covenant with the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester.

Looking back at my years of priesthood, which began in the same month as Vatican Council II, I am filled with a sense of gratitude for what has happened and with a sense of hope about what lies ahead. Does that mean I think all has been perfect since Vatican II? Not at all. God knows, I wish we could go back in time, undo some things we did and accomplish some other things as yet undone. Does it mean that I have no concerns about what tomorrow holds for us? By no means. There are some tough problems and questions out there for which I wish we had better solutions than we now possess.

No, my hope and gratitude have common roots. They are in the promises of Christ as fulfilled in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit alive and loving in the holy people of God. That means alive and loving in the likes of you.

When they asked me, I told the beautiful junior high school boys and girls who gathered at Geneseo Sunday that the greatest joy of my ministry is the opportunity it affords me almost every day of my life, sometimes several times a day, to be with the lively, loving, gifted people who make our local church the wonderful community it is.

I'm not sure I was able to communicate that idea to them as fully as I wanted to, but the vitality and beauty of those young people symbolized for me what I have experienced as present in our entire community during the years in which I have been privileged to serve as bishop among you: you are gifted and generous, living witnesses of Christ's fidelity to his promises.

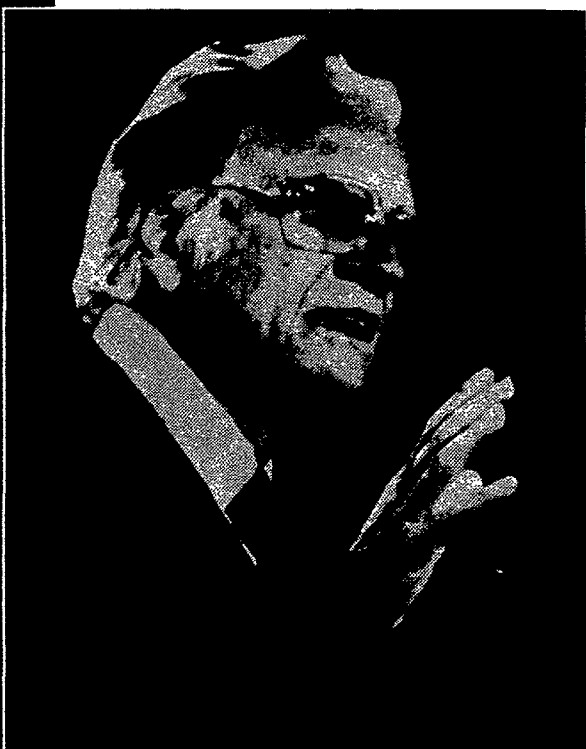
So, dear friends, let's continue our journey of faith together. It will help us to remember as we do that Christ did not promise to take away the snags, problems, snares, or even the tragedies of human life if we believe in him. Rather, he promised to be with us through it all, helping us to love one another and to find new life in all that we experience.

The way in which so many of you accept and respond to his promise leads me to say that I am very happy to be alive in this age of the church and delighted to be sharing my life with you.

Peace to all.

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