

# Grace Elizabeth Clark, bishop's mother, dies

By Lee Strong  
Senior staff writer

A devoted mother who valued family and faith over all else, Grace Elizabeth (Bills) Clark, the mother of Bishop Matthew H. Clark, died Wednesday, July 26, 1995, in the presence of family members in her Waterford home.

Mrs. Clark had been sick for several months when her condition worsened recently. It was important to her to be at home with family members in her final days, explained the bishop, who was at his mother's bedside when she died.

"My mother always had a desire to face her death openly and honestly," said Bishop Clark, adding, "She was devoted to family."

The latter observation was echoed by his sister, Helen Early.

"She was the 12th of 13 children, and family was everything to my mother," Early said.

The daughter of the late Nelson and Helen Catherine (Daley) Bills, Mrs. Clark grew up during the Great Depression. The Bills family lived in Troy, N.Y., before moving to Waterford in Saratoga County, near Albany, when Mrs. Clark was 10 years old.

"They didn't have much, but they did have a lot of love," Early said of her mother's family. One way Bills family members displayed their love for one another was by singing old-time songs — a tradition passed down to Mrs. Clark's children and grandchildren, Early observed.

Following a stint as a telephone operator at New York Telephone Co. in the early 1930s, Mrs. Clark married M. Harvey Clark on April 14, 1936. Mr. Clark died on Aug. 29, 1977.



Grace Elizabeth Clark

File photo

After she worked in the Behr Manning factory as an inspector of small machinery during World War II, Mrs. Clark became a full-time homemaker. Even after her two children grew up and left home, she kept an active interest in their lives as well as those of her other survivors: granddaughters Grace, Margaret and Kathleen Early of Waterford, Mary Ellen Early of Cohoes, N.Y.,

and Jane Neff of Buffalo; and that of her great-granddaughter, Julie Neff of Buffalo. She is also survived by several nieces and nephews.

An avid traveler, Mrs. Clark frequently visited Rochester after her son became the diocese's bishop in 1979. In Rochester, she befriended Marie Latus, the mother of Father Charles J. Latus, who was Bishop Clark's first secretary. In addition to traveling together to Rome, the two women made several trips to Florida.

"She had a wonderful sense of humor and was avidly interested in the people and politics of the day," Marie Latus recalled. "Grace has been a good friend during these years since Bishop Clark came to Rochester, and I will miss her."

In addition to love of family, his mother taught him how to have "a commitment to the task at hand," Bishop Clark said. In addition, she shared "a spirit of fun and openness to new experiences."

"The greatest thing she taught me is if you're in a situation and it's a problem or troublesome, you should find as many ways of looking at it as possible, and deal with it in the best way," Early recalled. "She always used to say, 'There's got to be a better way.'"

And one of those ways was through prayer.

"She had a great devotion to the Blessed Mother," Early said. "Any time there was any difficulty or problem, she'd say, 'Say a Hail Mary.'"

Bishop Clark celebrated a Mass of Christian Burial for his mother at St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Waterford on July 29. Interment was in St. Mary's Cemetery in Waterford.

A memorial Mass will be celebrated at Rochester's Sacred Heart Cathedral Monday, Aug. 14, at 7:30 p.m.

## Priest appointed ministry director

ROCHESTER — Bishop Matthew H. Clark has appointed Father R. Richard Brickler as director of ministry to priests, concurrent with his duties as pastor of St. Boniface Parish, 330 Gregory St.

Father Brickler, whose appointment was effective July 1, replaces Father Daniel Tormey, who will continue to serve as pastor of St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Scottsville.

As director of the diocesan Office of Ministry to Priests, Father Brickler will be responsible for coordinating retreats, support groups and other opportunities for priests seeking personal and spiritual growth. In addition to serving on the Priests' Retirement Committee, he will be available to provide one-on-one support to fellow clergy.

Father Brickler said he will also provide "advocacy for priests who might be in some kind of crisis."

The St. Boniface pastor noted that Father Tormey described the director position as a kind of "ombudsman" who "makes sure people get the help they need." Father Brickler added that he hopes to serve his fellow priests as well as Father Tormey did.

"Father Brickler is widely respected and trusted by his brother priests, and most priests would feel very comfortable talking with him about challenging personal issues," Father Robert P. Ring, director of the diocesan Department of Priests' Personnel stated in a diocesan press release. "His knowledge of diocesan history and issues of concern to priests will be very helpful in his new position."

A Rochester native, Father Brickler attended Aquinas Institute, St. Andrew's and St. Bernard's seminaries, earning a master of divinity degree from St. Bernard's. After his ordination in 1961, he served as assistant pastor at two Rochester-area parishes — Corpus Christi (1961-65) and Holy Family (1965 and again from 1970-74).

He was also part-time chaplain at Monroe Community College (1964-69), taught at the former King's Prep, and served with the diocesan Tribunal from 1974-83 before his appointment as St. Boniface's pastor.

— Lee Strong



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

**PEACEFUL WAVE** — As part of the Rochester Challenge Against Violence, Paxton Dickerson (right) waves to passers-by before a July 27 prayer vigil at Rochester's Gift Center, 505 North St. The Challenge concluded with a July 31 canned-goods drive at Silver Stadium, 500 Norton St. The goods will be donated to area food cupboards such as St. Bridget's Church Food Pantry.

## Sisters arrested at welfare office

ROCHESTER — Three Sisters of Mercy of Rochester were arrested July 25 at the Monroe County Office Building during a protest of the Department of Social Services' plans to fingerprint welfare recipients.

Sisters Grace Miller, RSM, Gloria Ruocco, RSM, and Rita Lewis, RSM, entered pleas of not guilty to charges of third-degree criminal trespass at their arraignment before City Court Judge Joseph D. Valentino July 25. A pre-trial hearing has been scheduled for Aug. 22.

Third-degree criminal trespass is a Class B misdemeanor. If found guilty, each woman faces a maximum sentence of 90 days in jail, one year's probation, and a \$500 fine.

According to Sister Lewis, the protest at the county office building, 111 Westfall Road, began shortly after 8:30 a.m. The three sisters were among about two dozen protesters who were asked to leave the building after about 10 minutes. Sister Lewis said the three women religious refused, and were arrested.

During the protest, she reported, "We were careful not to damage property and not to prohibit business from going on."

The sisters' arrest comes only two weeks after three men with connections to the Catholic Worker movement were arrested after they left inky fingerprints on the walls inside the waiting area of the county's Department of Social Services.

Sister Lewis said participants held the most recent protest because they believe fingerprinting welfare recipients "truly is criminalizing the poor, and as we were fingerprinted ourselves when we were arrested, it just drummed it home to us."

The woman religious added that, among those the House of Mercy serves, the belief is that fingerprinting "is associated with being treated like criminals. It is very dehumanizing."

In addition, Sister Lewis claimed that the policy's attempt to cut down on people who fraudulently apply for welfare benefits when they are already receive such assistance is flawed.

"The type of fraud that is prevalent is people receiving more income than they report, and this isn't going to uncover that," Sister Lewis said.

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