

# Dialogue can help to deepen understanding

Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, archbishop of Chicago, is a person known and well-respected in the United States. There are many good reasons for that. He has served as general secretary and as president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and has chaired many of our key committees over the years. He has been consistent and thoughtful in addressing such sensitive issues as the consistent life ethic and the unfortunate ways in which we Catholics have understood and referred to our Jewish sisters and brothers.

Three years ago Cardinal Bernardin was accused of sexual abuse by a young man who later admitted that the charge was totally false.

Through what must have been an agonizing time, the cardinal conducted himself with charity, dignity and restraint. Indeed, he worked for the peace and reconciliation of his accuser until the young man died several months ago.

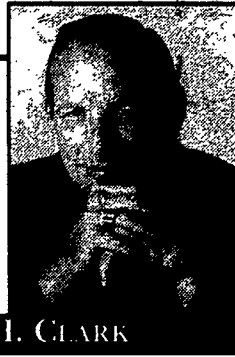
Now the cardinal is a cancer patient. As he copes with that affliction, he continues to manage a demanding schedule and still finds time to minister to other cancer patients.

Cardinal Bernardin is in the news again as co-sponsor with the National Pastoral Life Institute of an initiative known as the Catholic Common Ground Project. The co-sponsors initiated the project with a paper entitled "Called to Be Catholic: Church in a Time of Peril."

In this document the authors express concern about the "fear and polarization" they judge to be all too prevalent in the church. That kind of environment, they argue, tends to split communities and weaken

## along the way

BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK



the capacity of pastoral leaders to bring people together. Through their efforts they hope to call people back to a "spirit of civility, dialogue, generosity and broad and serious consultation."

To those ends Cardinal Bernardin and the institute have gathered a group of bishops and lay people from a variety of disciplines. Their primary hope, as I understand it, is to develop effective means to allow people with differing points of view to come together to discover and build on what they hold in common.

Secondly, they hope that the fruits of their work will ripple out and draw other individuals and groups into that kind of respectful conversation.

The proposal has its critics. Cardinal Bernard Law, archbishop of Boston, and Cardinal James Hickey, archbishop of Washington, have both expressed reservations about it.

Cardinal Law argues that the church already has common ground in our Scriptures, tradition and the authoritative teaching of the magisterium. He believes that the differences among us will not go away through dialogue, but only through conversion to the truth.

Cardinal Hickey's point is similar. He maintains that the Bernardin/Institute proposal, in effect, gives equal status to those who fully support the teaching of the magisterium and to those who do not. This implies, as I understand Cardinal Hickey's argument, that the Common Ground group will be judging magisterial teaching or trying to improve it rather than offering it proper, respectful assent.

A few comments of my own about this new initiative:

1.) There is polarization and disagreement in the church today. It is painful and divisive, to be sure. I am slow, however, to doubt the faith or the loyalty of those who question church authority, who seek a deeper understanding of our common heritage or who, in light of new insights, challenge the ways in which we understand and express our faith. If we really believe that we are a pilgrim people and that the church is always in need of reform, then we need to listen carefully to voices that say that we are not yet where we ought to be.

2.) The discussion to which I have referred in this column makes me deeply grateful for our commitment to our Synodal value of honest and trusting dialogue. That value, identified as one that has given real vitality to our Synod, will keep us together, if we continue to honor it.

Doing so can be difficult. It can often be messy. The bright side is that fidelity to the value allows us to share with others the treasure that is our faith. It also creates an environment in which we can continue to deepen and expand our understanding of our rich heritage.

Peace to all.

TV SPECIAL

*"God's Greatest Gift"*

**Billy GRAHAM**

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## The Monthly Prayer Request For Priests

Will you pray for a priest each day?

### WHY PRAY FOR PRIESTS

1. We pray for Priests because Jesus prayed for Priests and we are encouraged to follow His example.
2. We pray for Priests because they are human and need special graces to offer worthily the Holy Sacrifice and to administer worthily the Sacraments.
3. We pray for Priests because Priests are the number one target of the devil.
4. We pray for Priests because Priests who are spiritually strengthened by the prayers of others are capable of saving thousands of souls, and those who pray for them share in this victory.
5. We pray for Priests because Priests are the special friends of Christ, and Christ rewards generously those who pray for His friends.
6. We pray for Priests that we may share in a special way in the Priesthood.
7. We pray for Priests because God seems to answer first the petitions of those who pray for priests.

## September, 1996

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Reverend Fr. 1 His Holiness John Paul II	2 Oliver J. O'Connor, OFM Cap	3 John M. Costello, SJ	4 Nelson J. Ruppert, OFM Cap.	5 Enrique Cadena	6 Patrick J. Grace	7 Bishop Matthew H. Clark
8 Regis Rodda, OFM Conv.	9 Most Rev. Hickey, DD	10 L. James Callan	11 Sean Garrity, CSB	12 John T. Reif	13 Dennis M. Bonsignore	14 Alexander H. Bradshaw
15 David P. Simon	16 Robert Gaudio	17 Charles E. Curran	18 Raymond G. Heisel	19 John Denburger, OCSO	20 James J. Cannon, CSsR	21 Foster P. Rogers
22 Daniel W. Heintz	23 Michael R. Brown	24 Timothy T. Brown	25 Patrick L. Connor	26 William F. Laird	27 William M. Barrett	28 William G. Darling
29 Regis Tompkins, OCSO	30 Donald J. Curtiss	Look for the October MPRP Calendar in the September 26th Catholic Courier				

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