

COLUMNISTS

Cardinal walks the way of peace

Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, archbishop of Chicago, has been prominently in the national news in recent weeks: first, in his announcement of a new initiative to overcome polarization in the church through dialogue (also known as the Catholic Common Ground Project); and, second, in his poignant disclosure that his cancer has recurred and that he has only a year or less to live.

These two developments followed by only a few years the intense, public agony visited upon him by false charges of sexual misconduct — charges that he denied unequivocally and that were eventually retracted. But the damage had been done. It was a terrible, punishing blow.

What is remarkable about each of these three, disparate events is the consistent manner in which the cardinal addressed them: humble, soft-spoken, self-effacing, restrained and honest, without a trace of defensiveness, self-pity or disingenuousness.

Joseph Bernardin is that kind of a human being. He is a good pastor because he is, before all else, a good man and a committed Christian. It is no mystery why he is, for so many Americans, the most respected leader in the U.S. Catholic Church today.

His readiness to take the lead in helping to bring contending parties together is as natural to him as his signature. His every instinct moves him inexorably along



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

the path of reconciliation. He is a charter member of one of the groups the Lord singled out for special blessing: peacemakers (Matthew 5:9).

Some of the cardinal's more liberal Catholic critics have been occasionally irritated with his abiding predilection for peacemaking, confusing his persistent efforts toward unity with a reluctance to fight for what is right.

But his way has always been the way of patience, understanding, compromise and reasoned dialogue — not to mention faith, hope and love. He understands that, when human beings are engaged in conflict, the distance from point A to point B is rarely measured by a straight line.

As we learned anew from the experience of the United Nations peacekeeping force in Bosnia, even peacekeeping can be a dangerous business. Warring parties take shots at peacemakers, particularly if they insist that peace demands total victory for

their side, and total defeat for the other. Joseph Bernardin, the peacemaker, has probably been shot at more times than he can remember.

The cardinal's handling of the news about his suddenly deteriorated health was, again, utterly characteristic of the man and the pastor. No fanfare. No fudging of the facts. No self-pity. No false optimism. No empty pieties. Just a person of faith, facing a suddenly abbreviated earthly future.

He will, in the meantime, continue doing what he does best for as long as he can do it. Which means being a good pastor to the Catholic community of greater Chicago and to those enduring, like himself, the pain and anxieties of terminal illness.

In disclosing his condition, so openly and yet with such modesty and restraint, Cardinal Bernardin gave us all a lesson in humanity. He, the peacemaker, assures us that he is himself at peace. Which is not to say that he is without fear or anxiety. Just at peace. And ready to carry on as best he can in spite of these new limitations on his capacities and on his very life.

Sports writers praise certain athletes for displaying what they like to call "grace under pressure." Cardinal Bernardin's press conference displayed the workings of real grace, that is, of God's presence, under real pressure, that is, of life and death. In that moment, he disclosed to us what it means to be a human being in the fullest

sense of the word and what it means to be a Christian, filled with a faith and a hope that does not erase all fear, all pain or all uncertainty.

In his third and earliest of these recent public events, Cardinal Bernardin disclosed candidly and without recrimination the charges of sexual misconduct that had been brought against him. He denied the charges straightforwardly, but without attacking his accuser. And he remained steadfast in his declaration of innocence until his accuser withdrew and recanted the charges.

Cardinal Bernardin forgave his accuser, even though his reputation had been shredded by the accusation. But it was Joseph Bernardin's way, just as it was Christ's way. Indeed, it was the only way Joseph Bernardin has known and honored all of his life.

The great St. Augustine of Hippo, one of the outstanding bishops and theologians in the entire history of the church, declared in one of his memorable sermons: "For you I am a bishop; with you I am a Christian."

That about sums up Joseph Bernardin's concept of pastoral leadership. What a gift he has been, and is, to the church.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame. He will be speaking at 7:30 p.m. Friday, Oct. 18, at Strong Auditorium, Colgate Rochester Divinity School, 1100 S. Goodman St., Rochester.

God brings familiarity to life disrupted by move

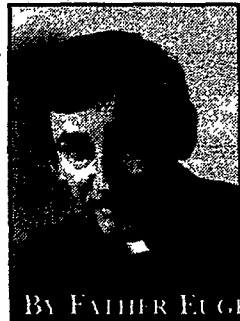
My heart goes out to anyone who must move from a place he or she has lived in and loved. Moving can be like death!

After living 20 years in the same place, I recently moved. Interestingly, I learned these valuable lessons in the process:

- We need to know what possessions are worth possessing.
- We shouldn't worry that we'll lose our old friends by moving.
- It's a good idea to take an inventory of our surrounding "atmosphere" — the personal aspects of our environment that give us the greatest delight, and reestablish them in our new environment as soon as possible.
- And we need to bear in mind what best helps us to keep focused in the midst of a major disruption.

My move took three times as long as it should have because I collect everything under the sun and don't believe in obsolescence.

When I began to unpack, I realized



the human side

By FATHER EUGENE HEMRICK

that a good deal of what I was unpacking never is used. I ended up trashing most of it, and learned that possessions can possess us. We can actually feel indebted to our possessions because they once served us well. So we feel guilty about throwing them out.

One lesson my move taught me was to let go of this myth and instead to carefully identify what important possessions need to be kept, while letting the others go.

One of the biggest fears I had about

moving was the thought of losing friends. I loved the neighborhood, colleagues at work and the priests I lived with.

At first, fear of moving away from them gripped me firmly. It subsided when I was reminded of my grandfather's wise advice: "If they are real friends, you will never lose them. If they aren't, they aren't worth keeping."

When I finally moved into my new place, I still felt an emptiness. Then a strange thing happened. I put up my pictures and positioned my plants as they had been positioned in my last home. Suddenly, I felt better.

I told this to my sister, who said she believes that we develop a certain supporting atmosphere around us; this helps define who we are. Some people like flowers and pictures, others don't. Likes and dislikes are part of us.

For me, pictures and plants add life to a home — a life that is part of me. By reestablishing them in my new home, I was reestablishing who I am.

Of all that helped me get over the trauma of moving, the most important was celebrating Mass each morning. As unfamiliar as a new home may be, daily communication with God brings a sense of familiarity to life wherever we are — and this has the power to overcome the sense of separation that comes with a move.

No matter where we move we can always keep contact with God. Actually, God keeps contact with us. It helps us realize how foolish our attachment to our world is when compared to the bigger world God wants for us.

One last thought helped immensely. From the moment we're born, we're on a journey — on the move. As much as we feel we are in control of these moves, ultimately it is God who moves us.

Each time we move, we are being drawn closer to God. Knowing that makes moving much easier to accept.

Father Hemrick is the former head of research at the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

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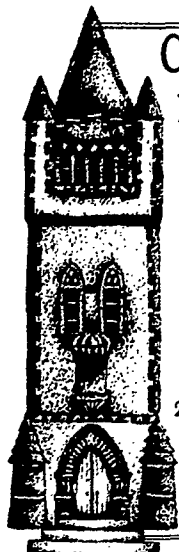
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