

# Cardinal Bernardin set shining example

When scholars write the history of the U.S. church in the years after Vatican Council II, Joseph Bernardin will be a central figure in the story.

There are good reasons for that. He was very influential in the establishment and development of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the U.S. Catholic Conference. At different times he served as general secretary and president of those organizations, and chaired several of their key committees.

All of this work he did while serving first as auxiliary bishop of the Diocese of Charleston, South Carolina, then as archbishop of Cincinnati and, finally, as cardinal archbishop of Chicago.

Through all the years he was a valued leader in the life of our bishops' conference. We could always count on him to make thoughtful, consensus-building contributions to all of our discussions.

Now this good and gifted man has passed through death to life eternal. And the event has elicited a response of affection and gratitude rarely accorded, even to the most prominent in our nation.

Why has the response to Joseph's death been so widespread and heartfelt? Surely, his generous, able service accounts for part of it. But I am convinced that the principle reason for that response is people's awareness of the grace and dignity with which Joe responded to two pro-

## along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

foundly painful events in his life — the false accusation of sexual abuse that was made against him, and the knowledge that he was afflicted with a cancer that would soon take his life.

In the first instance, he remained peaceful and non-vindictive in the face of the false accusation made against him and in the midst of the often sensational and irresponsible media attention generated by that accusation.

Eventually, and on his own initiative, Joseph reached out in a spirit of reconciliation to the young man who had falsely accused him. As a result of that effort, the two of them celebrated Eucharist together before the young man died.

In the second instance Cardinal Bernardin responded to the news of his medical prognosis by ministering to the those who, like himself, were struggling against cancer. From that experience of ministry, from his own prayer life and

from his faith in Christ's resurrection, he ultimately found a freedom and peace of heart that allowed him to refer to death as a friend.

I am going to Chicago to attend the cardinal's funeral liturgy this week. I want to be there to honor the memory of a person whose life and ministry were singular gifts to our church and to our nation.

Above all I want to express my own gratitude, and that of so many in our local church who have spoken to me about it, for the witness he gave in deeply painful times. Both in the darkness of slander and the life-sapping experience of cancer, he shone forth as a person of faith, compassion and uncommon courage.

I hope that all of us who were inspired by his living and his dying will honor his memory in our actions as well as in our words. Each of us needs to do that in ways available to us in the course of our daily living. But wouldn't it be wonderful if, out of our own life situations, we could work for some of the things about which he so ardently cared?

I think of things like the dignity of every person, the need we all have to forgive and be forgiven, a church made healthy by a spirit of honest and open dialogue about issues that matter to us all, and the reality of God's loving presence to us even in life's most painful moments.

Peace to all.

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