

DIOCESAN NEWS

Liturgy for gays draws flood of protest, praise

By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

Bishop Matthew H. Clark's decision to preside at a March 1 Mass for gay and lesbian Catholics and their family and friends has prompted a flood of letters and calls to the Pastoral Center — as well as the announcement of a peaceful protest of the event.

Members of Citizens for a Decent Community will gather a half-hour before the 2 p.m. Mass at Sacred Heart Cathedral, 296 Flower City Park. According to the group's chairman, Michael Macaluso Jr., the group will pray, distribute literature and offer counseling.

In conducting the Mass, the Diocese of Rochester will become one of the few U.S. dioceses known to present such a liturgy with their bishop as presider. Bishop Clark acknowledged that the decision may upset some people.

"I am very much aware that for lots of wonderful, faithful Catholic people this is a jarring kind of thing," the bishop said in an interview with the *Catholic Courier*. "I don't do such things to jar people. But I am also aware that unless you do some things sometimes, you'll never have hope of reaching people whom you'd like to have consider and reconsider sensitive issues like this."

The bishop said he intended for the March 1 Mass "to signal, in as visible and loving way as we can, the church's love for all people, including gay and lesbian Catholics and those who are concerned about them."

The bishop's plans prompted nearly 150 calls and letters a week before the Mass, according to Karen Rinefierd, diocesan liaison to the Catholic Gay and Lesbian Family Ministry, which is co-sponsor of the Mass. Rinefierd said roughly one-third of the responses came in support of the liturgy. Bishop Clark said most of the estimated 50 letters and phone calls he personally received were positive.

The bishop said that he's heard two main criticisms. One is that he should not hold the Mass, he said, whereas the other is that he should use the occasion to remind people that homosexual activity is sinful.

"I've obviously already disappointed folks who hold the first concern," Bishop Clark said. "And I think I'm going to disappoint folks who express the second concern."

He said it would be "oppressive and manipulative" to "pound on" the point of sinful activity during his Mass.

The broad range of reaction to news of the Mass was evident in calls Bishop Clark received as a guest Feb. 19 on radio station WXXI-AM 1370's "1370 Connection" talk show. Some callers were critical, concerned that people in a state of mortal sin might partake of the Eucharist. Another caller, however, called the Mass "awesome."

According to Carol Colella, producer of "1370 Connection," the response to Bishop

Clark's participation in the program was so heavy that some callers had to be turned away.

People should be aware the Mass does not come as a "bolt out of the blue," the bishop told the *Courier*. He said that through years of his own pastoral experience and his contact with the gay and lesbian ministry, he became convinced gay and lesbian people feel unwelcome at liturgy and often alienated.

Last fall, the diocese entered a formal collaboration with that Catholic Gay and Lesbian Family Ministry, a team of lay people, women religious and priests, which had been working without official recognition from the diocese for several years.

Similarly, some 28-30 other dioceses and archdioceses have created or are developing ministries to gay and lesbian Catholics, according to Father Jim Schexnayder, president of the National Association of Catholic Diocesan Lesbian & Gay Ministries. He said two bishops recently presided at well-publicized liturgies — one for a ministry's 10th anniversary (Los Angeles) and one to recognize the founding of a ministry (Orlando).

Father Schexnayder could not recall any other such Masses, but said he presumed that other less-publicized liturgies have been celebrated by bishops in dioceses with established ministries.

Rinefierd said the Rochester liturgy will be a "simple Mass" with no special blessings or other unusual elements. Bishop Clark said his homily will address both homosexual and heterosexual people.

"I want to be certain to say if people are expecting my homily that day to be some kind of position paper that is going to be thorough and exhaustive about a complex issue, they will be sorely disappointed," the bishop said. "First of all, I think that's inappropriate to the occasion, and secondly, the matter is much too complex and intricate to lend itself to eight minutes of 'Here's all that needs to be said.'"

The Vatican and the U.S. bishops have issued numerous statements on homosexuality. Both Bishop Clark and Rinefierd said that a number of people who contacted them seemed to lack a full understanding of church teaching on homosexuality.

"They seem more familiar with the evangelical Protestant position that condemns gays and lesbians categorically," Rinefierd said.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, in part, that homosexual acts "are intrinsically disordered" and cannot be approved.

Yet it also states that, "The number of men and women who have deep-seated



Matthew Scott/Staff photographer

Friday night out

Neal McDannel offers his son Liam a bite from his plate at the Lenten Fish Fry sponsored by the Knights of Columbus at St. Leo Church, Hilton, Feb. 21.

homosexual tendencies is not negligible. They do not choose their homosexual condition; for most of them it is a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity."

Church teaching to the contrary, Bishop Clark said, "My experience says to me a great number of Catholics vehemently hold the position it (sexual orientation) is simply and solely a matter of choice."

The bishop added that he realizes people often struggle with new information that seems to conflict with what they have been taught over the years. "This is a real part of what is going on here," he said.

While saying he will pray for healing of gays and lesbians at the Mass, Macaluso claimed in a flyer that the Mass will be a culmination of diocesan effort "to establish acceptance of the homosexual lifestyle."

Macaluso said counselors will inform

anyone interested of Catholic organizations such as Courage, a Vatican-approved organization that offers help in living chaste lives, and encourages homosexuals to change their sexual orientation.

Bishop Clark acknowledged that the group has every right to express varying opinions, and that protests are not new to the cathedral. But he said he was concerned that the protest will discourage some people from attending the Mass.

"I think some folks who would really find comfort and solace in this event but who aren't ready to be identified as associating with it won't come," he said.

"My hope is that all Catholic people, anybody concerned about this issue, ... would be trusting enough and confident enough in my care for this local church, that I would do not do something that doesn't have a legitimate place in the church," he said.

!!Finally!!

The music you've been asking for is here...
Golden Lyre Records proudly presents Keith Wells' "I Believe in Miracles" featuring
On Eagle's Wings

• Be Not Afraid • Prayer of St. Francis • Hosea • Here I Am, Lord... and many more!
Still Available *Avè Maria* A beautiful tribute to the Blessed Virgin Mary featuring...
• Hail Mary, Gentle Woman • Schubert's *Avè Maria* • Hail Holy Queen
• Gounod's *Avè Maria* • Immaculate Mary... and many more!

Mail U. S. check or U. S. money-order payable to:

Golden Lyre Records • PO Box 6300 • Apache Junction, AZ 85278-6300

Qty.	Title	Format	Price	Amount
—	Avè Maria	Compact Disc	\$15.95	\$
—	Avè Maria	Cassette Tape	\$12.95	\$
—	I Believe in Miracles	Compact Disc	\$15.95	\$
—	I Believe in Miracles	Cassette Tape	\$12.95	\$
			Shipping/Handling (One Time Per Order)	\$ 2.95
			Total Enclosed	\$

(Please Print)
Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____

Zip _____

100% 30-day money back guarantee

Not Sold in Stores

RNY

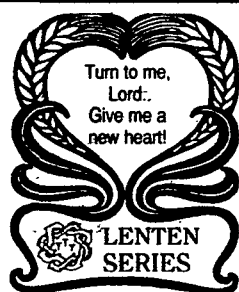
TYBURN ACADEMY FINAL SCHOLARSHIP/ ENTRANCE EXAM

March 1, 1997 • 8:30 a.m.

For information, call
315-252-2937

Tyburn is a private, college preparatory
school for young men and women
in grades 9 through 12.

EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE IN
THE CATHOLIC TRADITION
59 Pulaski St. • Auburn, NY 13021



Wednesday
March 5, 12:15 pm Mass

Guest Homilist

Sr. Gratia L'Esperance,
Mercy Center for Aging
*How the Church of Rochester is
ministering to the Elderly*

Coffee hour in the rectory
immediately following mass.

CHURCH OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

534 Oxford Street • Rochester