

DIOCESAN NEWS

Groups issue responses to bishop's Mass for gays

By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

"Particularly proud" is how the diocesan Priests' Council described itself in a resolution regarding Bishop Matthew H. Clark's March 1 Mass for gay and lesbian Catholics.

Officials of other groups, however, including a priest, are declaring concern in the wake of what some label as confusion created by the bishop's approach.

An estimated 1,300 people overflowed the cathedral for the controversial Mass. Bishop Clark said it was simply to show "the church's love for all people, including gay and lesbian Catholics and those who are concerned about them."

The Priests' Council responded with a resolution stating: "We recognize and appreciate the courage and humility required on his part to make this gesture of welcome and invitation to community."

"Bishop Clark, through this opening to the gay and lesbian community, has concretely reminded us that God loves each and every one of us without exception or condition."

Although the council wrote it on March 4, it voted weeks later to make the statement public, and forwarded a copy to the *Catholic Courier*.

Similar statements have been featured in parish bulletins. Father Peter C. Clifford, pastor of St. Michael Church in Newark, wrote in the parish's March 8-9 bulletin, for example, "I found his actions to be Christ centered, entirely consistent with the mission of the church and deeply healing."

In Seneca Falls, Father David Gramke, pastor of St. Patrick's Church, wrote in the March 15-16 bulletin, "I am amazed at people who consider themselves good Catholics, whom I may even consider good Catholics, being upset and even angry at Bishop Clark for celebrating Mass with homosexuals. ... Bishop Clark celebrating Mass with homosexuals is no different from celebrating with white people, or Germans, or any other group of people (who) have no choice in who or what they are."

Less praising, however, have been comments sent by officials of the diocesan Catholic Physicians Guild and Catholic Charismatic Renewal, to about 800 people on their mailing lists. While the 20-member Priests' Council voted one abstention shy of unanimity when deciding to go public with its resolution, no such vote was taken by the other two bodies to determine any consensus.

The renewal's April 1997 newsletter features a front-page piece, "Ministering to the Homosexual," by renewal coordinator Dave Valone, who began by noting there has been "much discussion on this subject" since the bishop's Mass.

Gay and lesbian people need to know, he further explained in a telephone interview, that there is help available to live a chaste life, conversion therapy and "healing." Another renewal coordinator, Bob Cirre, acknowledged confusion about the March 1 Mass.

"I guess I was puzzled at first, but in talking with a couple of people including a priest and nun involved in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, I realized it was an



Kerry Huller/Photo intern

To life!

Wilma Boddie-Beaman accepts a certificate of recognition from Bishop Matthew H. Clark at the 1997 Diocesan Vita Awards reception April 16 at St. Patrick's Church, Victor. The reception honored her and 35 other award nominees for their efforts on behalf of the Consistent Life Ethic. The winners — Flora Appleton, Father Paul English, CSB, Sr. Janet Korn, RSM, Father Anthony Mugavero and Mark Scibilia-Carver — will receive their Vita awards at a dinner May 10.

offering of acceptance on the part of the bishop," he said.

"The only thing myself and others in the renewal are concerned about, is possibly could he have sent the wrong message to the gay community by doing the Mass," Cirre added. Would it have signaled, he asked, that "the sin is being accepted as well as the sinner?"

Father Frederick Helfrich, spiritual advisor to the Catholic Physicians Guild, also spoke of confusion the Mass may have caused.

"I wish we'd had more direction from the bishop on how we were to address the whole thing about the Mass," he commented, referring to diocesan priests. "People were asking questions about what was going on and you really didn't know what to say. ... Everybody gave their own opinion as to where they were coming from and it added to the confusion."

"I would promote the basic theology behind it," he said, "but when it comes to specific things like who was he inviting to Communion, there were problems I couldn't answer."

He said that perhaps if Bishop Clark had offered a special non-eucharistic service, such as that he offered to pro-life activists the same week, much of the controversy could have been avoided.

Father Helfrich admitted his surprise at a March mailing from Dr. Michael R. Aiello, president of the diocesan Catholic Physicians Guild, which he first saw in his own mail. Aiello had sent a letter on guild stationery to about 400 doctors, clergy and other people in the diocese. He sent with

the letter a Society of Catholic Social Scientists' 1995 statement about five "fallacies" it declared "are evidence of the gay agenda at work within the Catholic Church."

Aiello's letter expressed concern over a call for "a more compassionate treatment of homosexuals." It read, in part, "Much concern has been expressed over this movement because this new call for compassion flatly contradicts Catholic teaching on homosexuality. Confusion has arisen because this new call has originated from official diocesan leaders. Attempts have been made to try and teach this new call to parishioners in adult education forums."

Bishop Clark, in addressing some of the criticism, told the *Catholic Courier*, "We tried as carefully as we could" to prepare priests through the Priests' Council and parishes through circulars. He said he has no misgivings about the Mass, saying it was "quite appropriate and helpful to many people."

He noted that as a priest he has never specified who is welcome or not to the Eucharist at a Mass, and added that receiving the Eucharist is a conscious decision made by people trained about the norms that govern it.

"I think some critics ask us to put homosexual persons through a moral filter through which we put no one else," he said.

The bishop also stated that pastoral theology is an area of expertise and, "Any group in the diocese needs to be careful about its stated purpose and competencies."

'Courier' garners 8 press awards

The *Catholic Courier* won first place for Coverage of Religion in the 1996 New York Press Association Better Newspaper Contest. The newspaper also garnered seven other awards.

The awards — for entries published in 1996 — were presented April 4-5 at the Desmond Hotel in Albany during the NY-PA's annual convention.

In bestowing the top award for Coverage of Religion to the *Courier*, the judges said the writers did an "outstanding job of taking certain topics and carrying them through the paper with a great blend of solid reporting and interesting columns — top notch all the way."

Former staff photographer S. John Wilkin and current staff photographer Matthew Scott shared the second-place award for Photographic Excellence. The judges cited the two for "Good sports action photos. Also good feature story photos."

Scott, who started with the *Courier* in July 1996, also earned honorable mention for Photographer of the Year.

The *Courier* earned second-place honors for Best Special Section Cover for its March 26 parenting supplement.

The graphics department won third place for Overall Design Excellence. The judges praised in particular the paper's "creative and eye-catching covers."

The newspaper also received an honorable mention for Best Front Page.

Staff writer Rob Cullivan earned an honorable mention for In-Depth Reporting, for exploring the effects of the U.S. bishops' pastoral letter on the economy, "Economic Justice for All," 10 years after its release.

The *Courier's* advertising department received an honorable mention for Best Special Section — Advertising, for the Oct. 3 "To Life" supplement. The judges praised the "very unique concept — very nice approach to the issue."

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Foundation grants \$84,000 to Nazareth College

An \$84,000 grant will enable Nazareth College faculty members to broaden their computer technology capabilities.

The two-year grant was announced last month by the Teagle Foundation, a New York City-based private foundation that provides funding for smaller liberal arts colleges.

According to Jim Fenwick, director of Nazareth's graduate education program in computers, these funds will enable the college to hire temporary faculty while permanent faculty members go through intensive computer technology training. Fenwick is serving as the training coordinator.

In addition, the college will use a small percentage of the grant for research. During the fall 1997 semester, consultants will assess the level of computer knowledge that students in each academic department need.

From there, a coalition of eight faculty

members will train under Fenwick beginning in the spring 1998 semester. This core team will then be responsible for training other faculty.

Fenwick said that the Teagle grant money will not be used toward purchasing new equipment.

According to Dennis Silva, vice president of academic affairs, the college has already received a \$32,000 installment from the Teagle Foundation. The remaining \$52,000 will be awarded in the summer of 1998.

Silva acknowledged that the faculty training will be necessary due to a new college policy beginning in the fall of 1997, in which Nazareth students in all academic programs will have a computer technology requirement.

"Having raised our expectations on the part of the students, we have to make sure the faculty is equipped," Silva said.

— Mike Latona