

Interest in 'authority' inspires more writings

About a year ago Father John Burkhardt, OFM Conv., asked me to write an article for New Theology Review (NTR), a journal of theology and ministry sponsored by the Washington Theological Union and the Chicago Theological Union. Father John made the request on behalf of the journal's editorial board, who wished to devote their August 1997 issue to the topic of authority in a changing church.

NTR asked me to write an article on the pastoral exercise of authority in today's church based on my 18 plus years of lived experience as a diocesan bishop. They wanted to know the areas of difficulty, tension and challenge that are part of the ministry of bishop: dealing with diverse points of view within the community; faithfully representing the church's teaching while working with people who have questions about or struggles living out any of those teachings; helping people meet the complex, often demanding challenges of daily living with a solid and helpful rooting in their faith tradition.

I agreed to do the article for several reasons:

1. The NTR questions were not theoretical and abstract but daily and practical. They forced me to be in touch with the church's self-understanding, the particular shape and meaning of the ministry of bishop and the relationship of that ministry to God's people. All of these elements change over time because the church is a dynamic, living entity. I think ongoing reflection on such themes is essential to my health as a person and to my effectiveness as a bishop.

2. The NTR questions related to some of the deep thematic streams about teaching and learning that emerged from our

along
the way

BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK



Synod experience. The people of our diocese manifested a hunger to learn about the faith. At the same time they challenged us to teach the richness of our tradition in ways that would help them meet the challenges of daily living, support them in teaching their children, draw them closer to Christ.

In effect, this dimension of the Synod invited consideration of such questions as: What does it mean to learn? Do adults and children learn in different ways? Does the church change in its self-understanding and, therefore, in its practice over time? If so, how does this process unfold?

3. Equally attractive to me in the NTR invitation was the opportunity it presented to revisit some of the foundational themes of the Second Vatican Council: a renewed sense of the church as the people of God; emphasis on the participation of all of the baptized in the life and mission of the church; a fresh way for the church to relate to the cultures in which it is embodied in its many locations around the world; the recognition that the church, because it is in pilgrimage, is always in need of reform; a renewed vision of the ministry of bishop, the relationship of bishops one to the other and the relationships of all bishops in the col-

lege of bishops with the pope as head of that college.

Drawing those reasons together and triggering my affirmative response to NTR was the intuition that to do so would be graced opportunity to remember in a deeply personal way my own 35 years of priesthood. You see, I was ordained a priest in Rome in December of 1962, in the same city and during the same month as the opening session of Vatican II. My whole priesthood and, to some degree, my personhood has been deeply affected by the council. In it and through it I learned to be a priest.

All through those years as priest and now as bishop I have taken the council's insights as good guides to pastoral service. I have found the whole experience exciting and deeply challenging.

I think that it has been so life-giving because the church itself has told all of us that we need to keep learning, to seek deeper understanding, to find new ways to help the Gospel spring to life for ourselves and for those who yearn to hear good news.

The publication of the article and a subsequent St. Bernard's on the Road talk I gave on the themes of the article have generated some publicity in the Rochester region. I have the impression that they have generated some discussion in the community. I am glad about that because you write for journals of theology and ministry to offer your ideas and to invite others to critique them.

In light of the interest expressed about the article, I intend to write about its themes in future "Along the Way" columns. I will welcome your comments about them.

Peace to all.

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Sr. Margaret
Registered Nurse from Louisville, Kentucky

"My vocation was a gradual process. It began with a recurring idea that God was calling me to something more. I prayed for guidance, asking Our Blessed Mother's assistance through her rosary, attended daily Mass and Holy Communion, and made two Holy Hours weekly. I also did a lot of spiritual reading. Several articles on "older vocations" encouraged me to explore my vocation.

I was initially attracted to this Community by the fact that the Sisters cared for the patients themselves. When I visited, I saw the loving concern and joyfulness of the Sisters, and their strong prayer life.

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