

Lessons of 18 years as a bishop

In the midst of the recent publicity and controversy about my article, "The Pastoral Exercise of Authority," and about our pastoral outreach to gay and lesbian persons, a woman said to me, "This is good for you. Now you know what it's like to be a mother!"

She said it in good spirit and we had some fun talking for a while about the analogy she used. I liked it very much. I had often thought about my ministry as bishop as being analogous to the place of the father in the family.

Her deliberate use of the feminine image invited me to employ it in reflection on these recent experiences.

Let me list for you some of the things I have learned about the exercise of pastoral authority in 18 plus years of ministry as a bishop.

I'll ask that you, as parent or as child or both, judge if the items I name below correspond to parallel experiences within families. I have found that:

1. Our parish communities and the people of our diocese are much more likely to support pastoral decisions that affect their lives when they have had a chance to shape and develop those decisions.

2. Pastoral decisions I have made with such input have always been better than those I have made without it. My experience tells me that appropriate consultation with the faithful is essential. Their shared wisdom and faith experience always improve the quality of such decisions.

3. We all learn in different ways. Children learn in one way. Adults learn in another. Some embrace the larger

along
the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

picture first and then work back through the details. Others build their vision of the whole through a systematic consideration of each successive part.

An honest effort to respect the different ways in which people learn is important for anyone who would hope to teach.

4. Repetition is important in the educational process. It helps people to absorb and to order the data, to know the facts. But there is a difference between knowing the facts and understanding them, between marshaling the data and understanding their meaning and their relationship to one another.

5. People rarely respond positively to "because I said so and I am in charge." They are much more likely to respond positively to "please think about this and let me know if you think this would be good for us."

It may be possible sometimes to demand a certain behavior. We can not force people to intellectual assent.

6. Education, most especially among adults, is a process in which no one is teacher only and no one is learner only. It is a mutually enriching process in which all teach something, all learn something.

The teacher who is not willing to learn is not a good teacher.

7. Education that follows only the teacher's agenda will be incomplete at best. We need to deal with the honest and sincere questions of students. If we do not, the questions will not go away. Learners will still discuss them, but the teachers will no longer be in the loop. They will have made themselves irrelevant to the process.

8. No one of us alone nor all of us together ever know it all. Therefore, for our individual and corporate good health and growth we need always be open to new knowledge, fresh understanding.

The above points exemplify some of the experiences on which I tried to offer some reflections in my article. They assume a common grounding in and surety about the truths of our faith.

But they attempt to recognize as well that our understanding of those profound truths, the ways in which we express them and the ways in which we live them out can change over the courses of our lives.

We do not think or understand or act as an adult in the same ways we did when we were children.

For example, think of the mother I mentioned above and the ways in which she has thought of, understood and expressed her relationship with her children over the years. Same basic relationship? Yes. Same way of thinking about it, understanding and expressing it over the years? I think she would say, "Not likely!"

Peace to all.

The Monthly Prayer Request For Priests

Will you pray for a priest each day?

Jesus' Prayer for His Priests

O Jesus, by Thy most loving Heart, I implore Thee to inflame with zeal for Thy love and glory all the priests of the world, all missionaries and those whose office it is to preach Thy word, that on fire with holy zeal, they may snatch souls from the devil and lead them into the shelter of Thy Heart, where for ever they may glorify Thee.

Imprimatur: E. Morrogh Bernard, Vic. Gen. Westmonasterii, May 5, 1953

Prayer Suggestions: Mass, Rosary, Fasting, Day Offering, Eucharistic Adoration, Offering, Sufferings, Divine Mercy Chaplet

November, 1997

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Rev. Fathers	Inactive Priests	Robert L. Belgotti	Frederick Brinkmann, CSSR	Most Rev. Dennis W. Hickey, DD, VG	Scott M. Kubinski	Most Rev. Matthew H. Clark, DD
7 Pope John Paul II	8 William D. Lum	9 John C. Murray, CSB	10 John P. Norris	11 Leo J. Reinhardt	12 Robert J. Schrader	13 Richard J. Belgotti
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Expanding on its monthly Parenting/Family Life feature, the Courier will publish this section to offer a closer look at raising Catholic children in the 1990s. This section will feature the church's insights on such topics as discipline, education and faith development. Other topics may include developing strong communications with teenagers and letting go of maturing, older children.

BOOKS, MUSIC AND VIDEOS

Publication Date: December 4 - Deadline: November 18
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