

DIOCESAN NEWS

Bishop responds to Vatican queries about event

By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

Bishop Matthew H. Clark has answered Vatican questions about a Catholic gay and lesbian ministry event, and expects the matter to go no further, he said.

And he has "abiding optimism" that diocesan Catholics will remain as generous as in previous Thanks Giving Appeals coinciding with other controversies, he said.

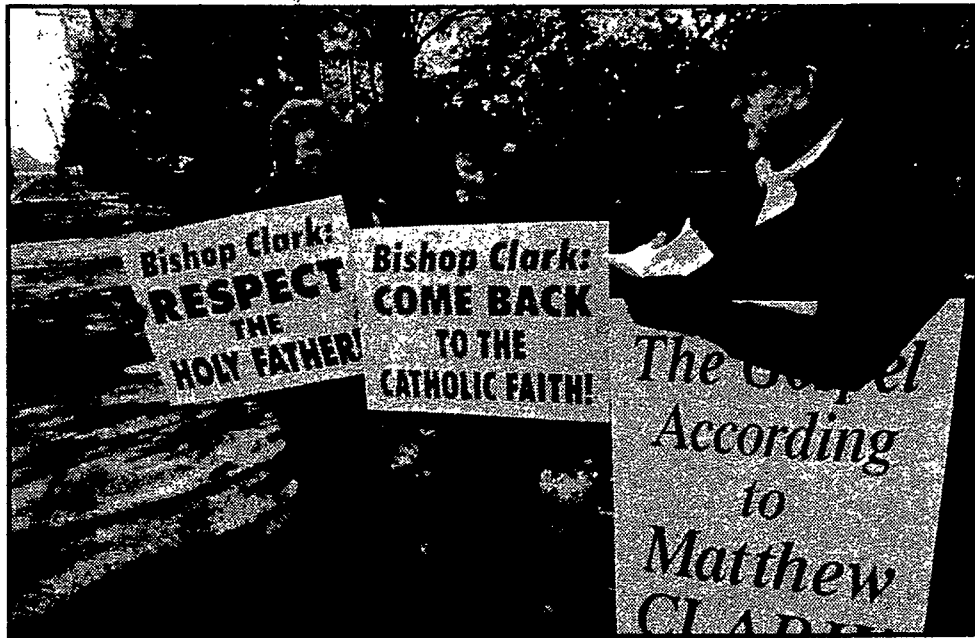
Bishop Clark acknowledged Oct. 22 during the Thanks Giving Appeal media conference that the diocese's Solidarity Sunday Oct. 4-5 had raised the questions and concerns among some Catholics. But he said the questions will have no effect on the Catholic Gay & Lesbian Family Ministry, with which the diocese has formally collaborated since late 1996.

Outreaches associated with the ministry are doing what the church teaches, he said: promoting the acceptance of homosexual people with respect, compassion and sensitivity, and extending pastoral care.

Catholics coming together as the Coalition in Defense of Church Teaching, however, differ with the bishop's approach in this ministry and with other matters. They organized an Oct. 23 protest along Buffalo Road near the site of the Pastoral Center. A dozen protesters carried signs, bearing such sayings as "Bishop Clark: Less Authority, More Humility."

Word of the demonstration also brought out a few people to counter protest — Patricia Boyce, a pastoral associate of Our Lady of Mercy Parish in Greece, carried a basket of stones and a sign, "Stones for the Sinless."

Some diocesan Catholics objecting to the bishop's policies have participated in letter-writing to Vatican officials for years,



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Larry Allen shows a letter he intends to send to a local newspaper about Bishop Matthew H. Clark and the diocesan ministry to homosexuals to Dee Dries, (far left), and Alice Herman Oct. 23 while the trio picketed outside the diocesan pastoral offices. Approximately 15 protesters and counter protesters took part.

noted Michael Brennan of the coalition. But, he said, "I think (Solidarity Sunday) was so blatant, they had to make a call about it."

After the Oct. 22 news conference, the bishop told the *Catholic Courier* he had called Pro-Nuncio Agostino Cacciavillan in Washington, D.C., because of concerns conveyed by Cardinal John O'Connor of New York. That Sept. 24 talk with Archbishop Cacciavillan was "thoroughly cordial and positive," he said. "I wasn't on the carpet."

The recent inquiries came apparently in response to letters sent Vatican authorities

indicating that "somehow we were departing from where we ought to be in terms of Catholic teaching," the bishop said. The questions focused only on Solidarity Sunday, he said.

Solidarity Sunday was designed "to raise awareness of discrimination and violence against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people," according to an Aug. 27 letter sent to pastors and other ministers, by Karen Rinefierd, diocesan liaison to the Catholic Gay & Lesbian Family Ministry. Rinefierd said at least 11 churches participated in such ways as printing bulletin announcements, distributing rainbow rib-

bons to wear and making Solidarity Prayer/Pledge cards available.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith had passed along three major concerns, Bishop Clark noted: the ribbon might be seen as endorsing what was termed the "gay liberation agenda"; the fact that Solidarity Sunday was begun by Dignity/USA in 1995, as mentioned in diocesan material, which might indicate joint sponsorship with the unofficial Catholic group; and the prayer, "God, ... You wish us to live in solidarity with each other and to rejoice in our diversity," as possibly implying acceptance of unacceptable behavior.

The Catholic Church teaches that homosexual genital activity — not homosexual orientation — is immoral.

Bishop Clark added that at the pro-nuncio's request, he summed up their Sept. 24 discussion in a letter to him.

He noted that those who have objected so vocally to the diocese's outreach efforts constitute a small number of people.

"I think folks who protest so strongly about pastoral outreach have not as yet absorbed what has been emerging in official teaching of the church, that for at least many people the homosexual condition is not a chosen condition," he said. At the same time, he said, he realizes the issue is "just so sensitive" and one involving much misunderstanding.

The Coalition in Defense of Church Teaching claims the diocese fails to teach the church's view of homosexual activity and of promotes a "diocesan gay agenda."

The group has been distributing flyers asking Catholics to postpone their TGA donations — which provide half the diocese's budget — "until Bishop Clark ends his efforts to legitimize the sin of sodomy."

Psychiatrist: Gays can be 'healed'

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Homosexuality is a complex "disorder," but it can be "healed," according to Dr. Richard Fitzgibbons, a psychiatrist who directs Comprehensive Counseling Services in West Conshohocken, Pa.

Fitzgibbons will give a two-part presentation on "The Origin and Healing of Homosexual Attraction and Behavior" at a Nov. 1 seminar sponsored by the Catholic Physicians' Guild and the St. Thomas More Lawyer's Guild.

The seminar will take place at St. Mary's Hospital, 89 Genesee St., Rochester, from 8:45 a.m. to 3 p.m. Fitzgibbons is slated to speak at 9:30 a.m. and again at 10:30 a.m.

The psychiatrist outlined his views on homosexuality in an appendix to the 1996 book *The Truth About Homosexuality: The Cry of the Faithful*, by Father John F. Harvey, OSFS. Father Harvey founded Courage, a national support group for homosexuals.

In Father Harvey's book, Fitzgibbons wrote that: "Psychologically, homosexual attractions and acts arise from a number of specific emotional hurts and conflicts in childhood, adolescence and adult life."

The psychiatrist wrote that among males, homosexual orientation may be rooted in a weak masculine identity; and that homosexuality may also be rooted in unresolved deep-seated anger, childhood sexual trauma or a fear of excessive responsibility.

In his writings, Fitzgibbons compared homosexuality to an addictive disorder. He advised a combination of therapy, sacramental life and prayer tailored to the unique needs of an individual interested in leaving the homosexual life.

Fitzgibbon's views are at odds with those of Casey and Mary Ellen Lopata, co-advocates for the Diocese of Rochester's Catholic Gay & Lesbian Family Ministry.

In a written statement, the Lopatas cited statements by both the American Psycho-

logical Association and by the U.S. bishops to support their contention that "homosexual orientation is not something that needs 'healing.'" The Lopatas provided the *Courier* with a 1990 statement by the American Psychological Association that repudiated the idea of "conversion therapy" to change homosexual orientation.

"(S)cientific evidence does not show that conversion therapy works ..., it can do more harm than good ...," the statement read.

The Lopatas also pointed to the U.S. bishops' Sept. 10 pastoral letter to parents of homosexual children titled "Always Our Children." The letter outlined compassionate approaches parents can take to their offspring while reiterating church teaching against homosexual behavior.

"(T)he bishops say: 'it seems appropriate to understand sexual orientation (heterosexual or homosexual) as a fundamental dimension of one's personality and to recognize its relative stability in a person,' the Lopatas wrote.

Although the Lopatas did not refer to this passage in their statement, the bishops' letter addressed conversion therapy in these words:

"Given the present state of medical and psychological knowledge, there is no guarantee that such therapy will succeed. Thus there may be no obligation to undertake it, though some may find it helpful."

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