

Melkite bishop visits diocese - Page 3



Follow the Courier to press in photos - Pages 6-7

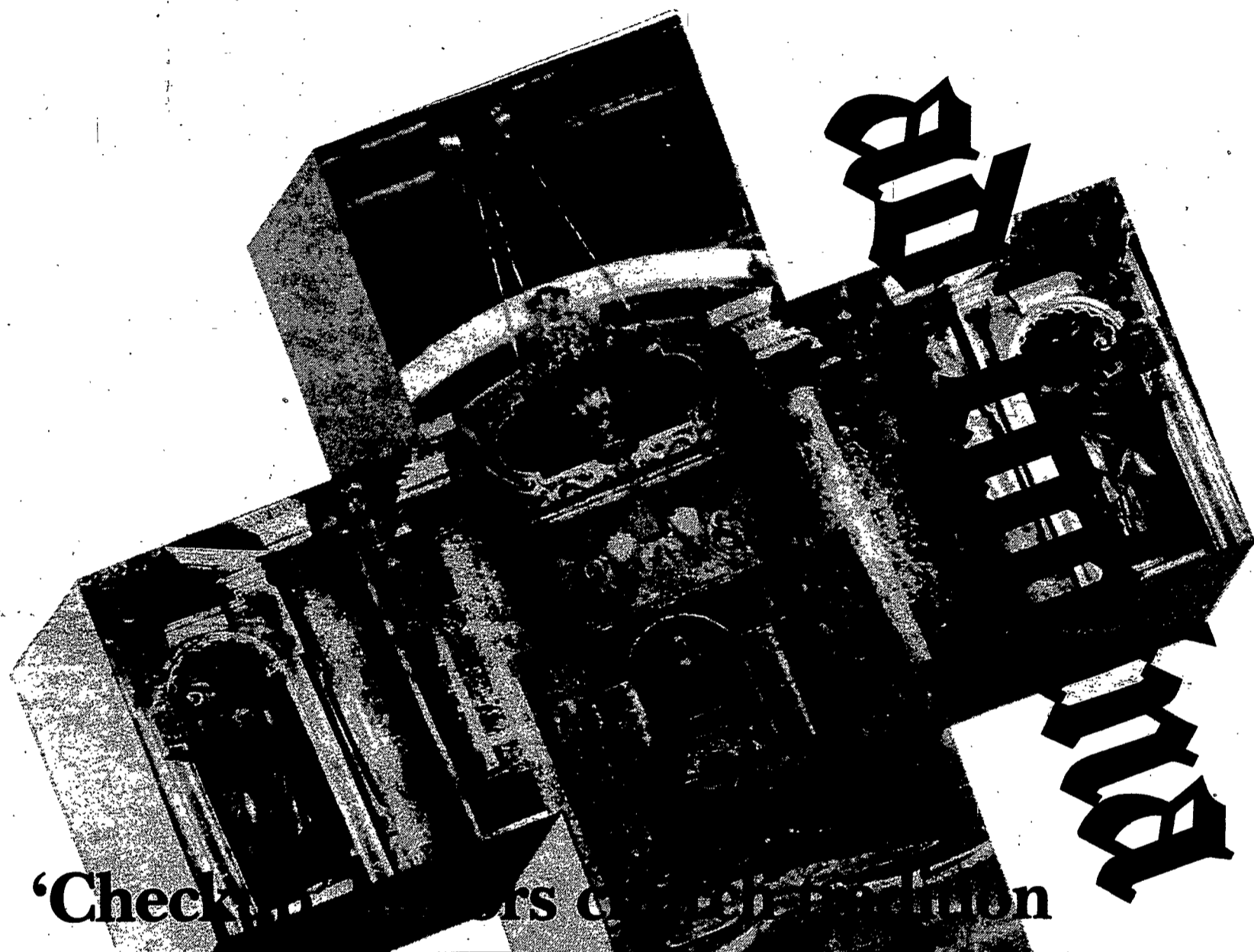


Going to college? See special section - After Page 6



Catholic Courier

DIocese OF ROCHESTER, NEW YORK ■ VOL. 109 NO. 220 ■ THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 1998 ■ 75¢ ■ 16 PAGES



'Checkup' for U.S. Bishops

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

The Catholic Church in the United States is beginning a top-level checkup that will bring the heads of every U.S. diocese to the Vatican.

Through October, U.S. bishops will go to Rome for their "ad limina" visits, which the heads of all the world's dioceses are required to make every five years.

The U.S. bishops will go to Rome in 13 regional groupings, spending about a week in the city. New York's bishops, including Bishop Matthew H. Clark, are part of the first group, which left for Rome Feb. 19.

The visits have several distinct moments that vary in tone - from business meetings to deeply symbolic prayer emphasizing the bishops' unity with the pope and their ministry as successors to the Apostles.

In fact, the core of each "ad limina" is a visit to the tombs of St. Peter and Paul, noted Father Joseph Hart, pastor of Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish, Brighton, and a professor of theology at St. Bernard's Institute. The full name of the visit is actually *ad limina apostolorum* - to the threshold, or doorstep, of the Apostles.

"One goes to the tombs of St. Peter and Paul and to the church that grew so strong from their martyrdom, their witness to the faith, as a sign of their building of the church in love and of the building up of the faith," Father Hart said.

Thus the visit is a way of symbolizing bishops' ties to their spiritual forefathers, and a sign of the unity of the church today, he acknowledged.

"In visiting the tombs one is saying one is recommitting to the faith of the Apostles," he remarked.

The checkup portion of the "ad limina" itself is a mix of recent history of the church in the diocese; a look at the di-

ocese's progress; and advice on preparing for the Vatican's expectations. The report is about the diocese's health, about its clergy, about its parishes, about its religious and seminarians, information about who makes up the pastoral office staff, and so on - and highlights any initiatives undertaken in the diocese in the past five years.

Father Kevin McKenna, who as chancellor of the Diocese of Rochester compiled the 80-page quinquennial report for this year's "ad limina," said Rochester's report highlights the Synod implementation process, Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium and Bishop Clark's 1996 pastoral letter on the Eucharist, "From East to West: A Perfect Offering."

The report was sent in December to the Congregation for Bishops in the Vatican. That congregation will dispense the information to other Vatican congregations. During the "ad limina," Bishop Clark and bishops with him will visit some of those congregations - though not necessarily all. The Vatican will determine who they visit.

The tradition of "ad limina" dates back to at least the Middle Ages, Father Hart pointed out. Pope Pascal II (1099-1118) required archbishops to come to Rome. The practice continued off and on until Pope Sixtus (1585-90) required all bishops in charge of dioceses to come, varying the time depending on distance from Rome. Thus Italian bishops were required to visit every year, while bishops from the Americas only had to visit every five years.

The five-year interval was formalized by the 1917 Code of Canon Law. Pope John Paul II revived the "ad limina" process to emphasize the pilgrimage aspect of the visits.

The tradition of "ad limina" dates back to at least the Middle Ages, Father Hart pointed out. Pope Pascal II (1099-1118) required archbishops to come to Rome. The practice continued off and on until Pope Sixtus (1585-90) required all bishops in charge of dioceses to come, varying the time depending on distance from Rome. Thus Italian bishops were required to visit every year, while bishops from the Americas only had to visit every five years.

The five-year interval was formalized by the 1917 Code of Canon Law. Pope John Paul II revived the "ad limina" process to emphasize the pilgrimage aspect of the visits.

Bishop Clark to meet with pope - Page 10

Continued on page 10