

# BIOCESAN NEWS

## Bishop clarifies report on Dignity Mass 'ban'

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The diocese plans to establish a regular Mass for gay and lesbian Catholics, according to a statement issued by Bishop Matthew H. Clark on Sept. 11.

When this Mass is established, the diocese plans to ask priests to stop celebrating Mass for Dignity-Integrity Rochester, diocesan officials said.

However, no definite date has been set yet for the new Mass to begin and for priests' involvement with the Dignity-Integrity Mass to cease, according to the officials.

The bishop issued his statement in response to questions raised by a front-page article that ran in that day's edition of the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle*.

Headlined "Clark bans priests from gay Mass," the article reported that the bishop planned to ask diocesan priests to discontinue saying Masses for the gay and lesbian Christian group Dignity-Integrity Rochester.

"Regarding the story in the morning paper, there is no ban on special Masses for gay and lesbian Catholics," the bishop's statement read. "Rather, we are interested in establishing a regular Mass at one of our parishes as part of our Catholic Gay & Lesbian Family Ministry."

Dignity-Integrity Rochester consists of between 50 and 70 Catholics, Episcopalians and other Christians. The group — which is not approved by the Catholic Church — meets for worship every Sunday at 5 p.m. in St. Luke & St. Simon Cyrene Episcopal Church, 17 S. Fitzhugh St. About one dozen diocesan priests currently volunteer to say Mass for the community, according to Patricia M. Hayes, a Catholic and a Dignity spokeswoman. There is no official relationship between the diocese and Dignity, she noted.

Hayes said the bishop's Sept. 11 statement was the first time the group had learned of the diocese's desire to establish a specific Mass for gay and lesbian Catholics. In past months, the group has had some informal contact with a diocesan representative, she said, but no discus-

sions about a specific Mass for gay and lesbian Catholics had taken place.

"We had discussed a worship community that would possibly exist within the bounds of the diocese, but we didn't expect the diocese to announce (the Mass) when they did," she said.

Father Joseph Hart, diocesan pastoral office moderator, and Father John Mulligan, diocesan vicar general, said that the diocese will eventually ask diocesan priests to discontinue saying Masses for Dignity. No specific date for ending priests' services to Dignity has been set, Father Mulligan added.

Father Gary Tyman, chaplain of the Interfaith Chapel at the University of Rochester, said he has been celebrating Dignity Masses for 10 years. The priest said he was disappointed that eventually he would no longer be able to say Mass for the group.

"I have come to have great admiration for their faith and for their commitment," he said of Dignity-Integrity. "I knew that this would hit them hard."

The priest added that the group's services are often a first step for many gay and lesbian Catholics seeking to come back to the church. Many Dignity members are active both within the Dignity community and Catholic parishes, he said.

"These are people who take their faith seriously and want to work for it," he said.

Father Hart said the diocese's desire to establish a Mass for gays and lesbians was prompted, in part, by a Vatican inquiry into the diocese's Solidarity Sunday held on Oct. 4-5, 1997. Solidarity Sunday was designed to raise awareness of anti-gay sentiment in society. The Vatican had asked about Solidarity Sunday since it had originally been sponsored by Dignity/USA, Father Hart said.

The Vatican's questions prompted the diocese to begin examining the fact that for years gay and lesbian Catholics had been worshipping apart from the diocese within the Dignity setting, Father Hart said. This led the diocese to consider ways of inviting such Catholics to worship with the diocesan church, he explained.

Fathers Hart and Mulligan also said the

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Bordered on the north by Lake Ontario, south by the Pennsylvania border, west by the Diocese of Buffalo and east by the Diocese of Syracuse, the Diocese of Rochester serves 12 counties with a Catholic population of more than 360,000 people. We are led by the Most Reverend Matthew H. Clark, eighth Bishop of Rochester.

**Our Mission**

We, the Catholic Church of the Diocese of Rochester, joyfully embrace our baptismal call to worship God, to preach the good news of Christ, to build up the community of faith and hope.

## Diocese goes on line

The Diocese of Rochester officially launched its Web site effective Sept. 14. The site will include Pastoral Planning documents and final plans; recent news releases; selected columns by Bishop Matthew H. Clark; a calendar of events; and links to other sites of interest. The site will be updated as departments come on line. The address is: <http://www.dor.org>.

diocese has been exploring the possibility of a diocesan-sponsored Mass for gays and lesbians as part of a wider effort to make diocesan parishes more welcoming to gay and lesbian Catholics.

"In the best of all possible worlds, there wouldn't be a need for a separate Mass for gay and lesbian persons because they would feel safe in all parishes in the diocese," Father Hart said.

Hayes said that Dignity-Integrity members were "deeply pained" to learn they would eventually lose the services of Catholic priests, but they would respect Bishop Clark's decision to remove them from Dignity services.

"Matthew is still our bishop," she added. "We don't take what he has done personally. He has shown his desire for ministry is genuine."

She added that Dignity members would consider participating in any diocesan-sponsored Mass for gays and lesbians. However, Hayes said Dignity members are not interested in such a Mass if it means they will be condemned for pursuing same-sex sexual relations.

"We would welcome (the Mass) provided it doesn't turn into a chance for us to be told once again that we aren't whole and holy," she said.

Dignity/USA, the national group with which the local group is affiliated, has been expelled by a number of Catholic dioceses and parishes throughout the country since 1989 when the group released a document on sexual ethics that endorsed "genital expression" of homosexuality.

Meanwhile, Dignity/USA's current statement of purpose, available on its Web site, says: "We believe that we can express our sexuality physically, in a unitive manner that is loving, life-giving, and life-affirming."

Such a statement directly contradicts church teaching that while it is no sin to be homosexual, it is a sin to engage in homo-

sexual behavior.

In light of the controversy that has swirled around Bishop Clark's efforts to minister to the gay and lesbian community in recent years, the bishop Sept. 1 issued a letter titled "We All Need Redeeming." The letter was distributed through parish bulletins the weekend of Sept. 12-13.

In "Redeeming," the bishop points out that the diocese's gay and lesbian ministry efforts fall within the pale of church teaching. In the letter, he notes:

1. Pastoral care for homosexual persons is encouraged both by the bishops of the United States and by the papal magisterium.

2. The church holds that homosexual orientation is not sinful.

3. The church teaches that sexual activity — whether heterosexual or homosexual — outside of heterosexual marriage is objectively sinful.

4. The church teaches that marriage is a sacrament celebrated between a man and a woman and so same-sex marriage is not possible.

5. We cannot judge the spiritual condition of another because we cannot know the other's subjective disposition before God.

6. Prejudice and discrimination against homosexual persons are sinful.

7. We must accord to all persons their God-given dignity.

8. Gay and lesbian Catholics should be full, equal, participating members of the Christian community.

9. Together with "all who need redeeming," homosexual persons should seek out the sacraments.

"I realize this is a tender subject," the bishop wrote. "But ignoring the presence of gay and lesbian persons, refusing to use their gifts for the good of the community or pretending that they are not in need of our pastoral care does no one any good."

## Team will oversee Corpus Christi

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Bishop Matthew H. Clark plans to appoint a temporary administrative team to Corpus Christi Church before the weekend of Sept. 19-20, according to a diocesan statement released Sept. 11.

The exact nature and makeup of that team were not available as the *Catholic Courier* went to press Sept. 15.

Currently, the parish's sacramental duties are being handled by Father Enrique Cadena, parochial vicar, according to Mary Ramerman, pastoral associate. Ramerman also said Sept. 13 that she is overseeing the parish's administrative duties.

Ramerman reported that Corpus staff members were slated to meet with diocesan officials on Wednesday, Sept. 16, to discuss the parish's future.

Meanwhile, in the Sept. 11 diocesan statement, Bishop Clark outlined his "expectations" for Corpus Christi Church in light of the recent removal of its administrator, Father James B. Callan, for defying church law concerning intercommunion with non-Catholics, ministry to homosexuals and women's liturgical roles.

In the statement, the bishop noted that, under new parish leadership at Corpus Christi, "I want the staff and the parish to have clear direction on what I expect." He then put forth the following "expectations":

- "An understanding of the church that recognizes the Catholic Church as a communion of communities and not communities in isolation."

- "An understanding of the sacrament of Holy Orders (ordination) that recognizes that the ordained alone are authorized to pray Eucharistic prayers and wear the vestments of ordained offices."

- "An understanding of the sacrament of marriage which recognizes that marriage is a sacrament celebrated between a man and a woman. Any simulations of marriage — including blessing the union of same-sex persons — are not permitted."

- "An understanding of the Eucharist as a visible sign of communion that is reserved for the baptized. It symbolizes corporate unity and not merely personal unity; therefore, those who are not corporately united to the Catholic Church may not be invited to the communion table."

In August, Bishop Clark announced that he was removing Father Callan from Corpus Christi. The bishop cited as reasons for the removal the facts that Father Callan regularly offered Communion to non-Catholics and allowed women liturgical roles not permitted by church law. Father Callan had also publicly stated in the past that he had blessed same-sex unions, a practice that contradicts church marital law.

As of Sept. 11, Father Callan had been temporarily assigned to Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Elmira, as a resident priest.

## A Healing Mass

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7:30 PM

Our Celebrant: Fr. Bob Werth

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