

## Pro-life demonstrators witness to convictions

I am grateful to you for the prayers you offered for our priests and pastoral administrators who gathered in convocation last week. If they all enjoyed it half as much as I did — and my guess is that they enjoyed it at least that much — they had a wonderful time. The elements that make such events rewarding were all present: thoughtful input from our speakers, rewarding worship and prayer gatherings, ample time for the development and renewal of friendships, and a generous opportunity to share ideas, experiences and dreams.

As is true with most rewarding experiences, the convocation continues to nourish me even though the event is over. The ideas raised by speakers and colleagues take root and begin to germinate. Memory allows the reliving of moments of relaxation and laughter with friends. The symbolic power and impact of that body of seasoned, dedicated pastoral ministers continues to bring strength to my spirit.

As the convocation was the focus of last week, this week's main event — at least, judging by the amount of media attention it has received — is Operation Save America. That event has been the local lead story on most broadcasts I have seen or heard this week. I am sure that coverage will continue since the demonstrations, which at this writing are in Buffalo, will move to Rochester at the end of the week.

It is difficult to anticipate the number of people who will join the public demonstrations, but it is probably safe to say that many hundreds, perhaps even several thou-

### along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

sand, will turn out for one event or another.

Already there has been some controversy about the ground rules for these demonstrations. A judge's decision has enlarged the buffer zone around facilities where abortions are done and has imposed similar limitation on the use of loudspeakers. Prior to that ruling, I joined the bishops of our state in arguing that such provisions unfairly diminished the right to free speech that is so important to the life of our country. More specifically, I think that the decision is discriminatory toward those individuals who oppose abortion and who choose to voice their views in peaceful fashion. I will be curious to see if the judge's decision survives further legal testing and/or if it will be extended to persons who wish to protest other issues or public policies.

Will the week make a difference? Will the demonstrations and counter-demonstrations change any minds? Any hearts? I do not know the answer to those questions. My guess is that few will be changed by the public demonstrations. It seems, rather,

that people on both sides of the issue dig in more deeply.

Do I thereby argue that such demonstrations are a waste of time? Or that those who engage in them are foolish or misguided? Not at all. This kind of public witness and the possibility of standing up for one's deeply held convictions in this fashion are important for our society and our ability to deal with emotional and controversial issues.

Such events in and of themselves may not change many minds and hearts, but I think they do get lots of people thinking. They occasion many conversations. I'd be quite sure that they lead people to prayer. If these events do no more than that, they will be a good contribution to our life.

I hope that these events in Western New York this week will serve life in all of the ways in which God would have it served; that no verbal or physical violence will be done to any individual or group; that it will not further divide us one from the other but, rather bring us closer together in service of life.

When the visitors have returned to their homes and the media attend to next week's main story, we shall be challenged by life's complexity and, whether in the face of such complexity, we should deal with our problems by ending life or serving it. People who shout at one another can rarely make much progress together; those who treat one another with respect and civility sometimes do.

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God was leading me to the Hawthorne Dominicans.

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