

Sister Henninger faces dismissal

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The Rochester Sisters of St. Joseph have begun formal proceedings for the removal of Sister Margie Henninger, SSJ.

Sister Henninger refused to comply with verbal warnings, as well as a written warning issued June 8 by Sister Rosemary St. Peter, SSJ, congregational president.

The admonitions arose from Sister Henninger's involvement in the New Faith Community, a schismatic group that includes many former parishioners and staff members from Rochester's Corpus Christi Church.

In a statement, Sister St. Peter wrote that Sister Henninger's current level of activity in the New Faith Community is "incompatible with the Sisters of St. Joseph."

"At this point, Sister Margie has chosen to participate in a prominent, public role ... despite repeated requests not to do so," she wrote.

Sister St. Peter's June 8 letter gave a June 18 deadline and said Sister Henninger would face removal proceedings if she did not give up her visible role in New Faith Community.

Sister Henninger, 58, said June 21 that she had not changed her stance and that she expects to be dismissed from the order eventually.

"It's hard to see it like that, but it's getting more and more real," said Sister Henninger, who has been a Sister of St. Joseph for nearly 40 years.

Sister Henninger, a Corpus Christi staff member since 1977, was fired — along with five other Corpus employees — in Dec. 1998. She is now a member and volunteer employee at the New Faith Community, where former Corpus administrator Father James Callan is co-pastor.

"I have never had a thought of leaving the congregation," she said. "I don't feel like I'm leaving the church — I'm being put out."

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File photo
Sister Margie Henninger, SSJ, and Father James Callan join a rally outside the Diocesan Pastoral Center Aug. 21, 1998, after Father Callan met with diocesan officials to learn that he was being moved from Corpus Christi Parish.

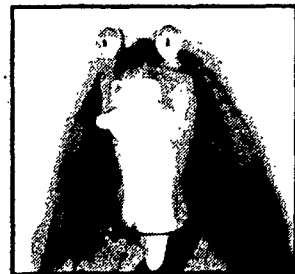
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BISHOP CLARK

20 years



EDITORS' NOTE: Bishop Matthew H. Clark was installed June 26, 1979, as eighth bishop of Rochester. In anticipation of the bishop's 20th anniversary, Associate Editor Lee Strong sat down with him for a look back at the past 20 years. The following are edited excerpts from that interview.

Strong: How did you first learn that you would be bishop of Rochester?

Bishop Clark: I was sitting at my desk in my quarters at the North American College. (Bishop Clark was the college's spiritual director 1974-1979.) Msgr. John Strykowski called and asked me to come to the Congregation for Bishops office toward noon.

While there, Archbishop (Ernesto) Civaradi said to me that the Holy Father asked if I would be willing to serve as bishop of Rochester.

Strong: Had you had any inkling?

Bishop Clark: It was totally a surprise. I was in the very last couple of months of a seven-year commitment to the North American College and I was in conversation with Bishop (Howard) Hubbard, my bishop at that time, about what my assignment would be coming home to Albany.

It was really out of the blue.

Strong: What was your reaction?

Bishop Clark: My memories and associations with Rochester, though brief and 20 years before that, were very pleasant. But beyond that, those pleasant memories, I really knew nothing about the diocese, except having been here and having known Bishop (Joseph) Hogan (bishop of Rochester, 1969-79) and some of the priests of the diocese, I was vaguely in touch with things.

I knew it to be a wonderful diocese.

As I came here, clearly the overwhelming challenge was to learn the story of the diocese and its present condition.

Strong: One of the ways you tried to get to know the diocese was through a series of regional meetings.

Bishop Clark: Through that first summer I asked Father Chuck Latus (Bishop Hogan's secretary from 1978-1979, and Bishop Clark's from 1979-1982) to arrange for regional meetings with all of our priests. Through the course of the year, we did have regional gatherings. They were both to be-

come acquainted and to hear the people and share at least what I had developed as some of my own points of view of pastoral life here at the time.

Strong: What did you discover?

Bishop Clark: I remember a great desire among the people to keep moving forward, along the lines opened for us by the Vatican Council II. They very much appreciated the ground-breaking work of Archbishop (Fulton) Sheen (bishop of Rochester, 1966-69) and the great commitment of Bishop Hogan to that direction.

They made it clear to me that they wanted to continue along those lines. ... Clearly that was the overwhelming, common sentiment of the people here, to keep going on the renewal of Vatican II.

(I began) to learn some of the great human resources of our diocese. There's a lot of talent in addition to the very strong faith. There's lots of talent and expertise in all kinds of areas, which happily go with a great sense of volunteerism.

Strong: One of the first things you did that gained national attention was your pastoral letter on women, "Fire In the Thornbush" (1982). What prompted you to write that document?

Bishop Clark: One of the initial realities
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STORY BY LEE STRONG COVER PHOTOS BY GREG FRANCIS