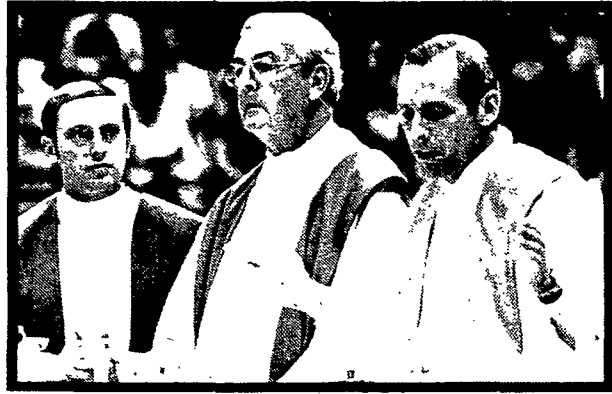


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Albany Bishop Howard Hubbard, left, and Bishop Joseph Hogan took part in Bishop Matthew Clark's installation as bishop of Rochester June 26, 1979, at the Rochester War Memorial.

Bishop Clark

Continued from page 1

that I bumped into when I came was some concern ... that I might be unsympathetic to the wonderful work done before my arrival to include women in many ways of ministry that had not been done before and was still not common in other local churches. I think (the) concern was heightened by the fact that I came from Rome and was totally unknown here. I found myself quite often in circumstances in which people expressed their concerns to me in such fashion that I thought it would be important to give a comprehensive kind of answer for them to have.

It was out of that basic reality that I invited a fairly large number of men and women to gather to reflect on this issue with me and to help in the research and ... finally the writing of "Fire in the Thornbush."

I am very proud of that document because I'm proud of this local church. And I'm proud of it because to this day because I think it speaks helpfully to people who study this issue. It has been helpful to many local churches around the country as they explore the themes of it.

Strong: Have you seen changes since its release?

Bishop Clark: I think, generally speaking, that trend in our church is clearly to the gradual development of a clearer, deeper understanding that we need to progress in this area, that all people in our church — including women — need to have an active, thoughtful, appropriate participation in our direction, in our development.

I think that's at the heart of reforms to which we're called by Vatican II. I think that is happening beautifully ... in our church, and I don't just mean here but in our church around the country.

But I would also say that it has not been a totally consistent, steady, ever-progressive growth. I'm trying to think of an analogy. The stock market has its up days and down days, but there are trends that are clearly identifiable.

When the progressive trend slows down or there are controversies or misunderstanding in the middle of it, I think that comes from a very appropriate and even necessary function of the church as conservator of our tradition. It's very important and healthy to stop and think about what we are doing, and to be sure that it goes the right way, and to be sure as best we can that momentary enthusiasms don't lead us to decisions that in the long run will be counterproductive.

Strong: Another focus of yours has been ecumenical and interfaith efforts, such as the Jewish-Catholic "Rochester Agreement" (1996), co-leading the interfaith trip to Israel (1998), and the Episcopal-Roman Covenant (1988). Did you see that as just the right way to go?

Bishop Clark: I'm going to return once again to the seminal event of this century, in our church, that is the Vatican Council, and to one of its fundamental insights ... that our church needs to be in healthy, respectful dialogue with the world in which we find ourselves, the culture, and with other religious bodies who in genuine good spirits seek to do the will of God in ways that are known to them.

I think the church tells us with that insight that we have a lot to learn from one another, that no one has a total and exclusive claim on the truth, that we are all, as we describe ourselves, in pilgrimage, needing to learn, needing to reform.

I just think that's a healthy way to move through history, if you will, not isolated from the world, and certainly not from other religious bodies, but in that kind of dialogue with them that, when it works, yields deeper life for everybody involved.

Strong: What fruits have you seen from these efforts?

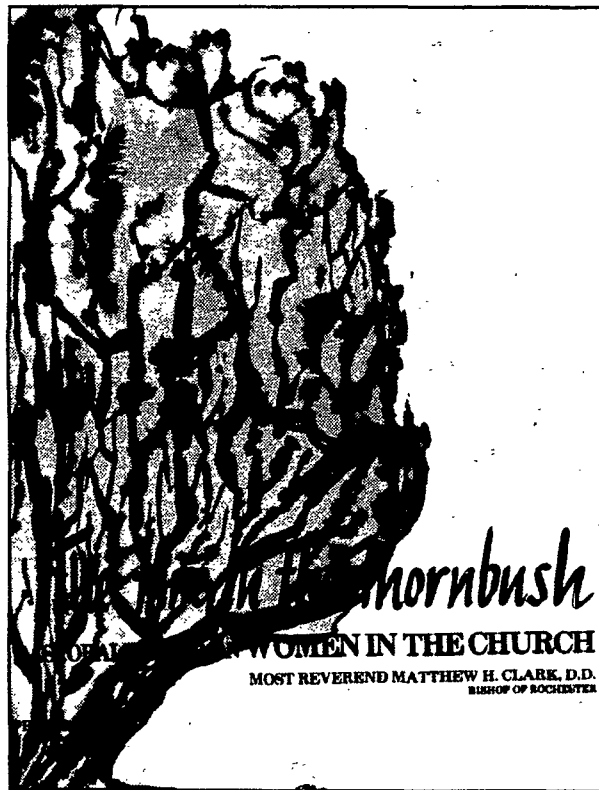
Bishop Clark: I think a much better understanding of one another's traditions ... I think that kind of conversation diminishes the possibility of misunderstanding one another's faith traditions. I think it's the foundation for growing mutual respect.

I think that kind of conversation is not auxiliary to our fundamental purposes. ... It seems to me that Christ's prayer — that we might all be one — is one that we follow.

Strong: Unfortunately, there has been some disunity



Bishop Matthew H. Clark hugs Justin Danzy of Rochester's St. Bridget Church at the conclusion of the Oct. 3, 1993 Synod Mass.



among Catholics in the diocese over some issues, such as the restructuring of Catholic schools.

Bishop Clark: I think that effort was born of a realization that circumstances, which once supported a very vibrant and for a long time growing number of parish schools, were rapidly changing. When postwar you had such a move to the suburbs and leaving the cities less populated with fewer resources than they had, our weaker schools in those diminished neighborhoods were dying. It was our conviction that where the schools could most benefit the young people, they were in peril.

We came to the point where we were told when we sought help from people who could be benefactors and stand by us and our schools, that we had to demonstrate our ability to act responsibly as good stewards of the resources we had.

This work began before I came here. But once again in the evolution of things we came to the critical moment when we had to make what we knew would be unpopular decisions. I think if we were faced with that challenge today, that critical moment, we probably would have done a better job of communication. But it was my thesis then and it is now that no matter how perfect the communication might have been back then it still would have been painful because that kind of change is always painful.

I knew lots of people would be angry then, but I didn't do this to make them angry. We did it because we judged it necessary to preserve the availability of Catholic schools for those young people for whom the evidence demonstrates it is their best possible opportunity.

Thanks be to God, I think the evidence shows that those



Bishop Clark visited with children at Guardian Angels School in Henrietta on March 1, 1993. He also answered children's questions about his duties as bishop.

very painful times have yielded a much more stable condition than we had.

Strong: Another focus over the 20 years has been on gay and lesbian issues, such as your pastoral letter about HIV-AIDS, "The Lord Himself Taught Me to Have Compassion" (1988), the Mass at the cathedral for gay and lesbian Catholics and their families and friends (1997), the relationship with the Catholic Gay and Lesbian Family Ministry (1996), hosting the conference of the National Association of Catholic Lesbian and Gay Ministries (1998). What moved you to reach out in that area?

Bishop Clark: I think for me the stirrings ... began with our conversations first with parents of gay and lesbian people, the opportunity those conversations provided to hear of their suffering. They told me that they felt they had no place to go to deal with the implications of that reality in their lives because it was their experience ... that they couldn't talk about this within the context of the church, that there was nothing to be said about the situation except it's bad and too bad. These people clearly and appropriately loved their sons and daughters and were just trying to make sense of all this, find a place where they know the compassion of Christ, and they felt that if they could not find it in the church where could they find it?

The conversations with such parents (lead) to lots of conversations with gay and lesbian Catholics, something that I had not engaged in before.

It was a tremendous eye-opener to me to speak with such individuals, and to hear them especially about their experience of life, their experience of the church, and in particular their experience of dealing with a growing awareness ... that they were indeed gay or lesbian.

Certainly those conversations were the seed for all of that. Paralleling that has been a growing experience of re-