

CONTINUED...

reconciliation

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by mother-daughter cantors Lori and Laura Osgood, Bishop Clark kidded that the two of them likely don't always see eye to eye.

The bishop spoke of the need for reconciliation over a broad spectrum, for family and friends to within the diocese and the larger church.

"Bishops don't stand apart from this type of experience," he noted.

He drew several examples from his own experience, including: the "recent, painful split" in the diocese — a reference to the division that began in Corpus Christi Parish and led to the forming of a new church; his daily awareness of questions about women in the church; negative reactions to his appearance at a mid-1980s peace rally in Sampson State Park; his desire for a more collegial approach within the church; and his work with ministry to gay and lesbian Catholics.

Citing the March 1997 Mass for gay and lesbian Catholics and their family and friends, for example, Bishop Clark said, "Obviously it wasn't something we did without talk."

In dealing with almost any issue, parents, children, teachers, pastors, parish leaders and others often face similar questions and themes, he suggested.

Questions are raised in faith and prayer, he said. How much talk is too much, how little is too little; have I tried to imagine all kinds of reactions; in the end, what have I learned from the experience; did it produce some good; and what would I have done differently.

The challenges of leadership are many, he said. "There's no guarantee that what you are doing is absolutely the best you can do. And if it's not, you'll hear about it soon," he said, to some laughter.

Still, reconciliation should always be pursued in a manner of hospitality, of honesty, of humility and of hope, he said.

"My point is not to name all the issues which challenge me and my ministry of reconciliation," he said. "My intent is to encourage you to accept such challenges and share your views about them."

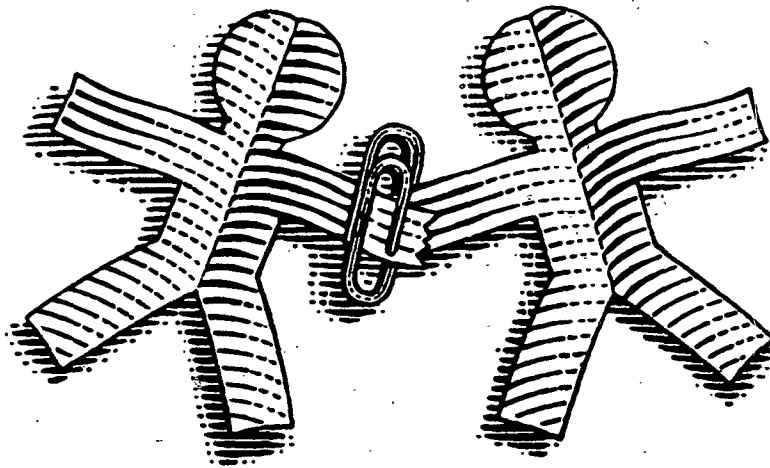
"We'll never resolve all the tensions in our lifetime, but if we keep at it prayerfully and generously we will make the contribution God wants us to make, and in the doing, we'll grow in the bonds of faith and charity that identify us as followers of Christ."

After the bishop's talk, Lori Osgood remarked, "I nearly stood up and thanked him."

The director of music and coordinator of liturgy for Holy Ghost Church, Gates, noted that she and other church workers in leadership roles often face people who are frustrated and angry.

"His grace, his calm spirit-led person-

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ality is such an inspiration," she said. "Even though you do pray and I know the Lord is with me and the Spirit is guiding me in my ministry, I'm still human, and you do become frustrated at times."

"You can't live unless you forgive and are forgiven," Laura Osgood, 14, commented.

Forgiveness

Being willing to forgive and reconcile has practical results, noted the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' *Book of Readings on Reconciliation*, published this year by the Subcommittee on the Third Millennium.

- Forgiveness benefits emotional health. Anger is extremely painful and can be self-destructive.

- Forgiveness is a factor in physical wellness.

- Forgiveness helps a person live fully in the present — rather than in the past.

- Forgiveness gives a person control over life. "When one's emotional response is altered by recalling a person who has inflicted pain, then one's emotional life is controlled by that person."

- Forgiveness is primarily a gift to oneself — a gift of new life.

Forgiveness is the password needed to enter the Jubilee, wrote Dr. Doris Donnelly in the *Book of Readings*.

"There's a global agenda percolating with regard to the Jubilee and it has to do with reconciliation," Donnelly stated. "Something important is brewing — a weariness about war and violence, a

raised consciousness about needless suffering and an eagerness to relieve it, a desire to heal broken relationships, a hope for peace and justice for all. And the secret password to making a difference in all these areas is forgiveness."

"As long as we see the other as 'other,' forgiveness and reconciliation will remain remote possibilities," she stated.

The word "reconciliation" has to do with restoring relationships, Msgr. James Mulligan noted in the *Book of Readings*. But it is much more.

"The Greek word (for reconciliation) has a fuller meaning and actually implies an internal change, a vital transformation," he stated, adding that it points to the beginning of a new life.

Common ground

"Reconciliation is first and foremost not our work, but the work of God," stated Father Richard N. Fragomeni, in an interview with the *Catholic Courier*. The Albany priest, an associate professor of liturgy and preaching at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, also was a keynote Leadership Days speaker.

"It is a movement God does in us, through Christ and the Spirit, through ways we encounter Christ in our present world — through sacraments, through Scripture, through prayer, through encounters with suffering."

In his Aug. 19 keynote talk, Father Fragomeni spoke of the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin's Catholic Common Ground Initiative and his inaugural 1996 document, "Called to be Catholic," for the initiative.

"It was intended to set up opportunities for dialogue, i.e., therefore reconciliation," he told the *Courier*, "so we might find deeper common ground. The intent was to examine pastoral issues, he added.

"The heart of initiative is the willingness to allow my own assumptions; my own interpretation of the Catholic tradition, to be enriched by dialogue."

The document noted 13 issues that deserve dialogue: changing roles of women; religious education; the eucharistic liturgy as most Catholics experience it; the meaning of human sexuality; the image and morale of priests; lay people in leadership; the church's presence in political life, responsibility to the poor and defenseless, its support for lay people in their family life and daily callings; embracing African-American, Latino and Asian peoples; survival of Catholic school systems and other institutions; dwindling parishioner financial support; decision-

making and consultation in church governance; responsibility of theology to authoritative teachings; and the place of collegiality and subsidiarity between Rome and American bishops.

Bishop Clark is seeking to create an openness for such dialogue in the Rochester Diocese, Father Fragomeni suggested, "within the integrity of the Catholic tradition."

As sacrament

Reconciliation contains many dimensions, noted Father Robert Kennedy, assistant professor of liturgical studies at St. Bernard's Institute.

The Old Testament understanding of jubilee contained the dimension of trying to attain right social relationships, or reconciliation, he explained. One key way of doing that was to forgive debts.

So the talk about forgiving debts, he said, from certain diocesan debts to Third World debt, "wouldn't be thought of as reconciliation but in fact is a way of saying, 'Let the debts go. Let us be at peace. Let there be new life here.'"

As opening speaker for Leadership Days, Father Kennedy centered on the sacrament of penance (which has also been called confession and reconciliation), which has fallen from frequent use.

"Yet the needs for reconciliation are great," he said in an interview prior to his talk. People don't see how the sacrament applies to their lives, he added.

He suggested studying the rite and adapting the church's tradition to fit people's needs today.

"How can the rite and other resources in our liturgical life be used along the way as people are on the journey for peace and reconciliation?" he asked. He encouraged studying the rite and the church's tradition, "to begin to adapt all of that to fit the actual needs of people, and I think the rite encourages that."

Deacon Bill Coffey's prayer gatherings outside the homes of murder victims in Rochester is one such example, he said. Deacon Coffey holds vigils within a day or two after a homicide, and some 25 people join him.

The gatherings are like modern pilgrimages, Father Kennedy said, a way for people to deal with societal violence, to emphasize peace and to reconsecrate ground.

In another example, AIDS services proliferated to help people to deal with increasing tragedy and to promote reconciliation with communities, he said.

Immediately after such tragedies as the April high school killings in Littleton, Colo., he continued, services are held "to process the immensity" of what occurred to a community.

Such responses bring out the principles of penance — which is actually the process that moves one from forgiveness to reconciliation, Father Kennedy said. They include forms of confession as well.

However, in encouraging church leaders to reconsider the rite of penance and reconciliation, he added, "I'm really trying to break open what is behind those older terms. The old terms are so emblazoned on people's minds they can't get by some of the terms themselves."

He offered the following steps toward forgiving and reconciling — adding a caveat: "You have to recognize it's never this neat."

- 1) Recognize something is out of sync. Something is wrong, someone is wounded. This may take 25 minutes or 25 years.

- 2) Name what is out of sync. (This could be seen as confession.)

- 3) Name your options — several should open up by the mere fact you've named what is wrong. Choose from among them.

- 4) Announce your commitment to peace, your stand for a new way of life. Tell your family, for example.

- 5) Deepen the new relationship in your daily living.

"You really have to practice reconciliation," he said.

Reflections for reconciliation

The *Book of Readings on Reconciliation* published by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Subcommittee on the Third Millennium, offers reflection questions to help deepen a commitment to reconciliation, including:

- What steps do we need to take to help ourselves appreciate and assimilate the reconciliation that God has already accomplished for us in Jesus?

- How might the coming Jubilee Year be a liminal (on the threshold) moment of reconciliation for you and the parish community?

- Which of the qualities that mark a person committed to reconciliation are a challenge? Which are strengths? For each of us personally? For our parish communities?

- Remember a time when you have been hurt by someone close to you.

What do you remember about the experience and its impact on you? Were there times long after the situation was resolved that hurt feelings resurfaced? How did you deal with these feelings?

- From your experience what have you learned from interacting with people who have been hurt?

- Are there people in your life you have failed to forgive? What prevents you from forgiving those who have offended you?

- Who are your models for forgiveness?

- Can you recall any instances in which you offered or received forgiveness? What difference did it make?

- How can we, as individuals and as Christian communities, foster forgiveness?

- What are some debts that you can forgive during the Jubilee Year?