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O'Connor

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bishop "is "to be vigilant that the faith and ecclesiastical discipline are carefully preserved and to inform the Roman Pontiff of abuses if there are any."

Father Kevin McKenna, Rochester diocesan chancellor, said that only in extreme circumstances would an archbishop become involved in matters concerning a provincial diocese other than his own archdiocese. "There's a limited interfacing," Father McKenna said. Rather, explained Father Joseph A. Hart, diocesan vicar general, an archbishop's chief role is to "assemble the other bishops" and lead them at meetings.

The cardinal has been a staunch defender of church teachings on such issues as abortion rights, gay rights, birth control and premarital sex. He has advocated outreach to AIDS patients, the poor, the developmentally disabled and other denunciations. He has been fiercely determined not to shut down churches and schools within his see, and has consistently promoted ecumenism and racial tolerance.

Cardinal O'Connor hasn't been known for subtlety during his reign, according to Father Hart.

"He doesn't play politics, saying 'This is what you want to hear so this is what I'll say,'" Father Hart remarked. "He genuinely defends the teaching of the church because this is what he believes. He is every inch a churchman."

"He speaks very directly and, I would say, very consistently," said Bishop Clark, who was consecrated a bishop along with Cardinal O'Connor on May 27, 1979, by Pope John Paul II.

The quotable cardinal has admitted that, at times, he has probably said too much.

"He's tried to be very open," Father Hart said. "After Sunday celebrations he would hold a mini press-conference and would answer any question on any subject. He learned that's not always the best way."

To wit, Cardinal O'Connor noted in a 1997 *New York Times* article, "I said some dumb things. The press could have asked me about satellites to Mars, and I would have given them an answer."

But the cardinal doesn't second-guess his statements on church teachings. In 1990, he caused a stir when he said Catholics who advocate for abortion rights — including politicians Geraldine Ferraro and Mario Cuomo — ran the risk of excommunication.

Cardinal O'Connor has reportedly also been blunt in his conversations with Pope John Paul II.

"(He) knows that I love him and have great respect for him. But I'm no good to him if I talk ambiguously," Cardinal O'Connor stated in a May 29, 1998, feature article in the *National Catholic Reporter*.

And his illness has not lessened the cardinal's ability to get his opinions across, as evidenced by his Jan. 27 "From My Viewpoint" column in *Catholic New York*. Writing about the annual March for Life in

The bishops and archbishops of New York

R. Luke Concanen, OP	1808-1810
John Connolly, OP	1814-1825
John DuBois, SS	1826-1842
John Hughes	1842-1864 (became first archbishop in 1850)
John Cardinal McCloskey	1864-1885 (became cardinal in 1875)
Michael Augustine Corrigan	1885-1902
John Cardinal Farley	1902-1918 (became cardinal in 1911)
Patrick Cardinal Hayes	1919-1938 (became cardinal in 1924)
Francis Cardinal Spellman	1939-1967 (became cardinal in 1946)
Terence Cardinal Cooke	1968-1983 (became cardinal in 1969)

Washington, he railed against the increasing presence of abortion:

"What would once have been a nightmare for anyone in public office, to support or to advance abortion, not only no longer needs defense, but any one committed to the 'Pro-Life' Movement can be looked upon as 'anti-patriotic,'" the cardinal wrote. "So has our culture changed dramatically in these nearly 30 years (since abortion became legalized in the United States). Death has become life, life death. And it is death of which we are speaking, although abortion can make it sound life-giving. Yet we tear an unborn baby to pieces, bit by bit or limb by limb."

Cardinal O'Connor's words and actions have reached far and wide. Noting that any New York archbishop automatically becomes "one of the most prominent Catholic spokespeople in the nation," Bishop Clark said he's impressed by how Cardinal O'Connor and his predecessor, Cardinal Terence Cooke, have "balanced the extraordinary complexity of the New York Archdiocese and still gave their time and energy on the national scene. I just don't know how they negotiated all the demands. They've served on many committees."

Father Hart said some of his friends in the Diocese of Scranton still remark about Cardinal O'Connor's work ethic when he was bishop there in 1983 and 1984.

"He's a ferocious worker," Father Hart said. "They were amazed at how, in even a small diocese, he gave 150 percent. He'd be up late at night and early in the morning, and there was always work waiting for them when they came in in the morning."

The personal touch

Yet Cardinal O'Connor never has been so consumed by the pressures of his office that he became inaccessible, Father Hart observed.

"He always holds Wednesday afternoon open for any priest who wants to come on in and talk to him, without an appointment. They would just wait in line," Father Hart said.

Bishop Clark recalled that Cardinal O'Connor was attentive to him when he had heart trouble in the fall of 1998.

"While I was laying in Park Ridge Hospital, he called and expressed his support. Since then, he's been solicitous of my health whenever we've talked," he said. "Now I'm able to reciprocate."

Father Hart noted that Cardinal O'Connor also expressed a great desire to take part in the diocesan Synod in 1993.

"He was attempting to fly in even though he could only be here an hour and a half or so," said Father Hart, who served as Synod director. "We persuaded him that it would be foolish. But that's the kind of man he is, always putting himself out for the sake of doing the best job possible."

Father Hart added that had it not been for Cardinal O'Connor's own ill health, he most certainly would have attended the funeral Mass last October for Auxiliary Bishop Dennis W. Hickey.

Bishop Moynihan confirmed, from firsthand experience, that Cardinal O'Connor indeed maintains close contact with his priests. When he first arrived in New York, Bishop Moynihan — then Father Moynihan — bumped into the cardinal on the street. Cardinal O'Connor said he knew all

about him, and even noted the date Bishop Moynihan had been baptized.

"I said to myself, 'I'd better make sure I know that date myself,'" Bishop Moynihan recalled with a laugh.

While stationed in New York City, Bishop Moynihan would often see Cardinal O'Connor, who worked five floors away from his office. Both the Catholic Near East Welfare Association and the archdiocesan chancery are located at 101 1/2 First Ave.

"He was always most gracious to me," Bishop Moynihan said. "He always was genuinely interested in a person."

Bishop Moynihan recalls that shortly after he received notice of his appointment as bishop of Syracuse, Cardinal O'Connor asked him, "Well, are you getting used to the idea?" and invited him to dinner that day. The cardinal also presided at Bishop Moynihan's installation on May 29, 1995.

Bishop Moynihan added that he is not sure how big a role Cardinal O'Connor played in his appointment as bishop, saying they never discussed the matter. "But he probably wasn't opposed to it," Bishop Moynihan remarked.

Cardinal O'Connor's personal concern reaches far beyond his clergy. For instance, he noted his strong support for underprivileged mothers in his Jan. 27 *Catholic New York* column:

"Since 1984, the Archdiocese of New York has offered any woman of any race, color, creed, or other diversity the opportunity for free counseling, free medical care, free hospitalization, free adoption of her baby or assistance in keeping the baby should she so desire. All of this on an as needed basis. Thousands of babies have thus been born who might otherwise have been aborted and thousands of mothers are today living in peace of conscience."

In addition, reporter Arthur Jones noted in his May 29, 1998, *NCR* article that Cardinal O'Connor "gives his annual Social Security income to a scholarship fund for black students, gives \$18,000 of his Navy pension to charities, keeps \$12,000 and draws no archdiocesan salary."

Bishop Clark said the cardinal's ideals have made a vivid impression on him.

"If I had to choose one significant theme of his personality and ministry, it would be his consistency and courage in speaking for the vulnerable," Bishop Clark said.

Who's next?

Regardless of Cardinal O'Connor's health, his resignation likely would be accepted soon, Father Hart observed.

"John Paul II has let people go on (past their 75th birthday), but normally the 80th is much more the cutoff," Father Hart said. "And I think that's the sense in New York, from the things the cardinal has said and the testimonials he has allowed to take place."

Father McKenna also noted that because he is now 80, Cardinal O'Connor automatically has lost his right to participate in a conclave to elect a new pope. This policy was begun by Pope Paul VI, Father McKenna said.

Joseph Zwilling, director of communications for the New York Archdiocese, said he doesn't know "who or when" a new archbishop will be appointed.

"It's in the hands of Pope John Paul II, and we will wait to hear," Zwilling said.

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