

WORLD & NATION

Bishop Clark urges priests to work together

By Kathleen Schwar
Assistant editor

While "no one pre-established pattern or framework" exists for the relationship between a bishop and his priests, this relationship "is crucial to the task of carrying out the mission of the church in our time," Bishop Matthew H. Clark said Oct. 24 in an address to the National Federation of Priests Councils.

Bishop Clark's topic was "The Relationship of Bishop and Priest in Ministry," and took place in Mundelein, Ill., at the NFPC's second colloquium to update the bishops' 1973 document, "Spiritual Renewal of the American Priesthood."

The bishop said "we ordained priests will best serve the church in these demanding times if we 1) work together in service of God's holy people and 2) acknowledge in the doing that we are different one from the other, that these differences should not divide us one from the other but enhance our common work."

Bishops and priests must create for the larger church a model in which difficult questions can be discussed, he said.

An NFPC member said the federation invited Bishop Clark to speak because of his openness and honesty.

His audience was "very appreciative of the honesty and forthrightness with which he dealt with issues of today," said Father Daniel Danielson of the Oakland, Calif., Diocese.

"I think most priests get along well with and like their bishop," Father Danielson said, but added, "An awful lot of bishops seem to deal with issues in the church like ostriches. They don't admit there are any issues, or dismiss it with a kind of pious phrase rather than looking at it with the priests and trying to figure out how the Lord wants us to respond."

"It is a chicken group, pretty well intimidated and in many cases pretty well divided," the priest said.

Origins, a documentary service provided by Catholic News Service, planned to publish the text of Bishop Clark's talk

Nov. 9. The text was available through CNS prior to the publication date.

According to that text, Bishop Clark spoke about an address by a New York diocese priests' council chairman.

"He was giving voice," the bishop said, "to the concern of the priests' councils of New York that we bishops are not giving them proper leadership and backing as they deal with some of the sensitive issues we are facing today." The priest was referring to such things as the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, *Dominus Iesus*, the recent Vatican paper on the distinctions between ordained and lay ministry, and documents relating to gay and lesbian issues, he said.

The priest also indicated that the priests of his province were concerned that the "normal processes by which significant pastoral decisions should be made are being short-circuited or overruled by Roman dicasteries," he added.

Bishop Clark encouraged frank discussion of matters of importance, with mutual trust and common faith.

While priests and bishops have had adversarial relationships in the past, he noted, priests have begun to sympathize with the toll that being a bishop takes, with some getting caught up in sex and finance scandals, drug and alcohol addiction, and health problems. Bishops as well realize the emotional toll that aging and declining numbers of priests have on priests.

"Both bishops and priests have realized as never before that it is only together that the Gospel will be effectively preached to a new generation of Roman Catholics," he stated. Their relationship is both personal and ministerial, he added.

While the priest brings personal and ministerial matters to the bishop often through the priests' council, and both search for strategies, the bishop similarly

represents hopes and cares to the "great church," the bishop said.

"Vatican II reminded the church that it is unity and not uniformity that the church of Rome seeks. Our theology teaches that the pope 'presides over the whole assembly of charity and protects legitimate differences' (*Lumen Gentium*, 13). But the lived reality is too often lately something different. Many bishops — and through and with them priests, pastoral ministers and wonderful faithful people — feel left out, diminished, unheard, put down when the church of Rome acts in isolation. It is a situation that

must be addressed, if not in this pontificate then surely in the next."

And yet, Bishop Clark noted, the great church's perspective "is often a healthy corrective" to narrow local views.

Father Larry Kulick of the Greensburg, Pa., Diocese said that Bishop Clark's talk opened the door to important dialogue.

"I think the bishop is courageous in doing what he's doing and there will be those who applaud this and those who will condemn it," he said.

"The whole point of collaborative spirit, of how the church needs to work together, I thought was excellent."



Debbie Hill/CNS

Welcomed aid

Two children with handicaps lean on sacks of flour dropped off by Catholic Relief Services at the Annahda Rehabilitation Center in the West Bank town of Ramallah. Continued fighting between Palestinians and Israeli troops in the area has made it difficult for CRS workers to distribute food aid.

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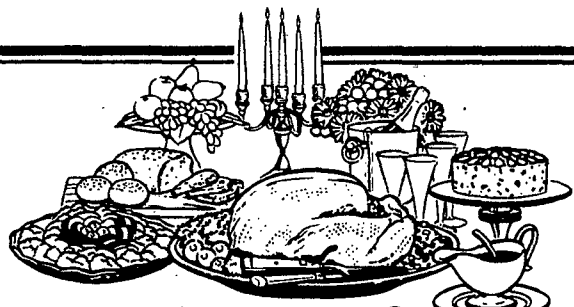
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