

# Tribute to a model priest, Father 'EZ'

On this Monday evening, I am mindful that the people of St. Mary's, Auburn, and many other friends are celebrating a parish memorial Mass for Father Ed Zimmer, who died last week. EZ's pastorate at St. Mary's was his last full-time assignment before he moved to St. John's Parish on Rochester's Humboldt Street to begin a very active ministry in retirement in the early '90s.

They loved EZ in both of those parishes, as did people everywhere he served. Those of us who were privileged to observe any part of his ministry knew something of his special gifts. He was warm and outgoing. He made it a point to keep in touch with friends. EZ was unfailingly encouraging to all, especially to those he thought to be struggling or in doubt or feeling uncared-for. At times he offered that encouragement with booming voice or great embrace. On other occasions he wrote warm notes of encouragement.

I know that these days many are mourning the loss of him. But they are also telling the stories of his loving care. I have heard many of them. They are beautiful stories of life well spent and much enjoyed. In the midst of it all I have remembered his kindness to me. It was expressed in the ways I mentioned above. As his bishop, I also had the privilege of conversations with him in which he spoke about his own journey of faith. He spoke of some of the challenges he had faced over the years and some of the sufferings and disappointments he experienced. Most recently, of course, his deteriorating health was a suffering for him. Even here, his concern seemed not so much for himself but for others. He

## along the way



By BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

just couldn't be with them, serving them, as he would have liked.

The conversations we had were not all about him. I found EZ to be a good listener and a person who cared. In addition to those gifts, developed through years of experience, he had a gift that allowed him to understand others without knowing all of the details of their lives. More than once I came into his presence feeling burdened or troubled, only to go my way feeling much more optimistic and confident about life. It was not unusual after such encounters to receive a card from EZ that confirmed both the understanding and the encouragement I enjoyed while with him.

Two curiosities come to my mind as I write. The first is how many people in our diocese have similar memories of EZ? There are people who knew him longer and better than I did. Certainly, their stories of his friendship and ministry are cherished memories to them. I am glad they are being told. Why? Because they encourage all of us to imitate the virtues and habits of life that made him so attractive to so many.

We know there is only one EZ. We know

we need to be ourselves and not try to be someone else. But we can and should rejoice in the goodness and virtues of others and try to live these out in our own fashion, in accordance with our own gifts. There is much talk about role models today. Some lament that there are not many around. I think that EZ was a superb one for many of us.

My second question is - and this alludes to my last two columns - how do your pastor and other priests you know build your fund of stories about good friendship and loving ministry with ordained priests? I ask because I think it is important to tell such stories while these good men are still with us. When we share such news good things happen. We remind ourselves of how blessed we are in good friends, faithful ministers of the Gospel. We encourage others who might approach a parish priest for pastoral support, but who hesitate because they think they will not be understood or will be judged harshly. We pique the interest of our young people who are thinking about what they want to do with their lives. Every study I know about vocations to priesthood indicates two critical factors. They are the example of the priest who by word and work conveys a sense of purpose and happiness in his vocation. The other is family and community support. Don't you agree that telling good stories about our priests is a wonderful way to blend both of those critical vocation indicators?

Please pray for EZ's eternal rest, for those who will miss him most and for his brother priests who continue in the vineyard.

Peace to all.

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By Rob C Staff write

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