

Faith, prayer will help Catholic community heal

About 130 priests gathered at St. Patrick's Parish Center in Victor yesterday afternoon (Monday). Tuesday afternoon we will hold a second meeting at St. Mary Our Mother, Horseheads, a place that is reasonably central for our priests who work in the Southern Tier.

I asked for these meetings, judging it important that we gather together for information, mutual support and pastoral reflection after the hard news that six of our brother priests will not be able to exercise priestly ministry in any public setting.

As is usual, whenever I meet with our priests, I came away much impressed by their honesty, genuine concern for each other and — above all — their genuine love for the people among whom they serve. These were all manifest at the meeting yesterday. Though my decision was painful, the priests understood the need for it and seemed quite supportive of what I had done.

They also raised some questions that were on their minds or that were concerns of their people. A few examples come to mind:

One had to do with the perceived abruptness, even the harshness, of what transpired last week. It seemed to them that all of the work was done and decisions made within a 48-hour period. In fact, the priests in question were put on alert several weeks before my request for their resignations that we had substantial concerns, and that they should be prepared for that request. They were free to bring someone with them for their conversation with me. Most chose to do that. And, I am quite sure that, though the moment was painful for

along the way

By BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

each one, they would all acknowledge that they were treated with kindness and respect.

A second concern expressed by the priests was for the future well-being of their brothers. Would they be all right? How can we support them? Will they have sufficient resources for a decent life? I explained to the priests that, although our six brothers may not exercise any public ministry, they remain priests of our diocese. That means that we have lasting relationships and mutual rights and responsibilities to one another. In instances such as this, I need to ensure that these brother priests have sufficient means to lead a dignified life. And so with each of them I co-signed a memorandum of agreement acknowledging a commitment to work together for their peaceful well-being.

A last concern, a most understandable one, is the possibility of a false accusation and the impact a careless or angry person who made one could have on the life of a priest. That is a tough one to answer, save to say that a good name is a great treasure and that anyone involved in these matters would exercise the greatest diligence to pre-

vent it from happening. Even as we spoke of this issue, we all realized that there is no ironclad guarantee that protects any public figure from such horrible conduct.

If you have read this far, you may think that our meeting was dark, heavy and hopeless. Not at all. Without question there was pain and sadness there. But there was also a moving spirit of solidarity and good humor that evoked a lot of laughter even as we discussed a heavy topic.

I left their company very glad that we had met. They are good for one another and I will tell you that they were a special gift to me at that session. It's hard to explain that in detail. All I can say is that to see them together, to sense their care for one another, for you and the whole church deepened my confidence that our church will get through this painful time, and emerge from it stronger than we were before. It won't happen without effort or without pain, but it will happen because God is faithful and so are you, God's holy people.

I hope this bit of information about these meetings with our priests is helpful to you. I also hope that you will let me know of your concerns and questions. We read them all and do our best to respond to them. It is most likely that I'll be writing about other aspects of this issue. I would like to write about what is of interest to you.

Please pray for all those who are wounded or in pain, including our priests. I think we do not — perhaps, cannot — come close to understanding the profound healing power of prayer.

Peace to all.

MOTHER'S DAY BRUNCH BUFFET
 The Greenhouse Cafe & Grand Ballroom
 Sunday, May 12th 2002 • 11:00 am - 3:00 pm
Reservations Strongly Recommended

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 Breakfast Selections: Fluffy Scrambled Eggs, Crisp Bacon, Sausage Links
 Cooked to Order Stations: Create Your Own Omelettes, Belgian Waffles with Fruit Topping

Entrees & Accompaniments
 Chef Carved Top Round of Beef with Au Jus, Carved Roast Turkey with Pan Gravy, Carved Baked Ham, Eggplant Parmesan, Seafood Bienvenue with a Cajun Lemon Cream Sauce, Chicken Sötzel with Bacon, Scallions & Red Peppers in a Lemon Butter Sauce, Pasta Florentine, Fresh Seasonal Vegetables, Oven Roasted Potatoes, Red Bean & Rice

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Three times each year, high-school sports in the diocese reach their crescendo with sectional finals, and, in some cases, state-championship play. These editions will profile the success of Catholic school teams and profile Catholic athletes who attend public schools. While focusing primarily on younger sports stars, these issues also will recognize adult athletes who excel on the turf or in the gym. What a terrific combination for promoting your business to a sports-oriented demographic!

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