

Birth puts focus on relationships

Sean Matthew McMahan, son of my niece Margaret and her husband, Doug, entered this world at St. Joseph's Hospital in Syracuse just before midnight on September 30.

I drove to Baldwinsville on Saturday to meet Sean for the first time, and to extend love and good wishes to his parents. It was a pleasure to be with them as always. Margaret and Sean are in good health. Doug, too, is holding strong, doing all that he can to help Liam, now 28 months old, adjust to the exciting presence of his new brother in their home.

I enjoyed an added bonus that day. My sister, Helen, was there and will stay with Margaret this week. Also present just for the day were Grace, Mary Ellen and her son, Patrick. We had a lot of fun fussing over the baby and watching Patrick and Liam do the same. Those little guys were most solicitous for the well being of little



Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Along the Way

Sean. They knew that they were welcome to touch him. They also understood quite well that they were to be very easy on the new member of the family.

A few friends have asked me since the Baldwinsville trip, "Whom does the baby resemble?" I have to respond that, while I think Sean is spectacularly handsome, I cannot answer the question. Rather, I defer to my sister and nieces who, like my mother, have uncanny abilities in this area. The consensus is that he is the image of his brother

Liam. That is what I think of as the collective assessment. With that I have no argument, although I do not have eyes to see the resemblance myself.

It's when the resemblance issue comes to finer points that I lose my way. You may recall such conversations in your own family when a new baby comes along — he has Aunt Thelma's eyes, Uncle Burt's ears and Grandma Brown's mouth. You know well that new babes change quickly and, sometimes, quite dramatically. As the process of welcoming and loving Sean continues in the months ahead, part of the fun will be tracking this conversation. My guess is that the next major familial reassessment of this issue will occur when we all gather for Sean's November baptism.

On the drive home from my visit to the McMahans', I was mindful of how that brief visit put me in touch with people and values I treasure deeply. The main stream of that

prayerful time was a sense of wonder at the gift of life, of how this precious child came to be and of his impact on the lives of his mother and dad, both of their families, and on his brother. But the moment was also touched by an awareness of the importance of loving relationships in our lives.

You'll understand that Margaret was central in all of this drive-home prayer and reflection. She is the fourth-born of my sister and brother-in-law's five daughters. She is also my goddaughter and a good friend. She and Doug love one another dearly. They have cherished Liam for over two years, and now with great gratitude welcome Sean Matthew into the warm life of their family.

Please say a prayer for Sean, his health and peaceful growth — and for all of our children. They are God's gift to us and are deserving of the best we have to offer them. Peace to all.

Diocesan Priests' Council urges president to avoid war in Iraq

EDITOR'S NOTE: Following consultation with the priests of the Diocese of Rochester, the diocesan Priests' Council approved the following statement during its meeting Oct. 1 (see story page 3). The statement was released Oct. 7.

The Bush administration is making plans to launch a war against Iraq. As religious leaders and loyal citizens we feel deeply our responsibility to invite our people and all people of good faith to reflect on the moral issues that a projected war on Iraq inevitably brings to the fore.

1. We recognize that Saddam Hussein is a danger to neighbors, an enemy to his own people and a threat to world peace. We condemn his aggressive policies and we urge the international community to take steps to negotiate a peaceful settlement that will bring an end to the threat he poses to world peace.

2. Given this, we believe that a war against Iraq by the United States or the United Nations conflicts with Catholic teaching that only a defensive war can be justified and then only if the situation meets the criteria for a just war. Pope John Paul II, who has consistently spoken against war as a means of settling international disputes, said on World Peace Day 1999, "Recent history clearly shows the failure of recourse to vi-

olence as a means for resolving political and social problems. War destroys, it does not build up. It weakens the foundations of society and creates further divisions and long-lasting tensions."

3. One of the conditions for a just war demands that it be undertaken only as a last resort. In the present situation other options for dealing with Saddam Hussein are available.

4. We believe that new doors for diplomatic action could be opened. Economic sanctions could be lifted, in particular, those sanctions that target the Iraqi people, especially women and children.

5. We encourage the United Nations to continue its negotiations with Iraq to resume weapons inspections and to make every effort to see that the inspection team is enabled to carry out its work effectively and expeditiously. The Bush administration seems to dismiss this effort out of hand. This is unfortunate. It undermines the efforts of the United Nations and offers little incentive to Saddam Hussein to accept the inspectors.

6. War against Iraq will have dire consequences. It will mean the death of many American military personnel. Are the lives of our young people to be expended in the dubious expectation that removing Saddam Hussein will bring democ-



An Iraqi boy holds the Quran, the sacred book of Islam, at a mosque in Baghdad Sept. 13.

cracy to Iraq. Are we prepared to inflict heavy loss of life on the Iraqi civilian population, if, as is expected, Saddam Hussein concentrates his military forces in urban areas? As Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, Secretary for the Holy See's Relations with States, recently cautioned, "[W]e need to

be careful not to confuse justice with revenge and to make sure that entire populations do not pay the price for the cruelty of those responsible for terrorist attacks."

7. We are particularly concerned that a war against Iraq will surely increase the anti-American sentiment that is already widespread throughout the world. Moreover, it will continue to erode the already volatile situation that exists in the Middle East, possibly inciting terrorist attacks in reprisal for an attack on Iraq.

8. We are also concerned that at the end of such a war, if Saddam Hussein is overthrown, it will be necessary to deploy hundreds of thousands of American service persons to Iraq to create stability and democratic institutions. This effort will cost billions of dollars, money which could be used for health care, social services, education, etc. in the U.S.

We join with Bishop Wilton D. Gregory, president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in his letter of September 13, 2002 to President Bush. "We respectfully urge you to step back from the brink of war and help lead the world to act together to fashion an effective global response to Iraq's threats that conforms with traditional moral limits on the use of military force."

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