

Thankful for 40 years in priesthood

On December 19 when most of our readers receive the *Catholic Courier*, I'll be at St. John the Baptist Parish in Hillsdale, N.J. Msgr. Philip Morris, pastor of St. John's, is hosting our seminary class as we celebrate the 40th anniversary of our ordination to priesthood.

As the day draws closer, I become more excited about being with my classmates again. Some of them I have not seen since we left the North American College in Rome in 1963 to return to the United States for our first priestly assignments.

I am not sure how many will be attending the reunion. My guess is that there will be between 40 and 50 people there. Some will be the spouses of some of our number who over the years left active priestly ministry for other careers and for marriage.

The North American College in Rome is owned and operated by the bishops of the United States. The college was established in the mid-19th century at the request of Pope Pius IX, whose desire it was that some students from our nation study for priesthood in the Eternal City. Also in Rome are many other such national colleges or seminaries — the English, Scots and German colleges, for example. These institutions are places of residence and formation.



Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Along the Way

Students from all of them receive their theological education at the Roman universities. In our time, all students from the North American College matriculated at the Gregorian University, an institution conducted by the Jesuit Fathers.

Ninety-six of us began our first year of theological studies in September 1959. In those days, life in seminaries was tightly regulated and we did not have much interaction with the world around us. As a result, we spent a great deal of time together and formed good friendships. Those bonds last even until today even though we may not see much of one another. I have little doubt that the reunion will find us picking up where we left off without difficulty.

When we were ordained on December 19, 1962, 68 remained of the

96 who started theological studies together. Since then five of our members have died and, as I have indicated, a significant number of us have left active priestly ministry. My best guess is that about half of the 68 are active as priests at the present time.

When I remember the 40 years, I thank God for all of them. The years have been rich and full. They have held many challenges and offered much consolation. The over-arching themes of the years have been shaped by the church's efforts to understand, absorb and live out faithfully the great pastoral insights of Vatican Council II. That effort has been exhilarating on occasions, and discouraging on others. We have come to know by experience that significant reform in the church does not happen easily. We move ahead slowly. Sometimes it seems we go backwards.

But as I look back to 1962, and think about the 40 years between then and now, I do so with a great sense of gratitude. I believe deeply that we are on the right path. We understand better both who we are as a body of believers and how we are meant to interact with other faith communities and with the culture in which we find ourselves.

I also realize that we have a long road yet to travel. There is polarization within our community. While some rejoice in what we have experienced in these 40 years, others judge that we're moving in a bad direction. We know that there is some

tension within the church about the location and exercise of pastoral authority. We struggle to find the happy medium between the powerful and necessary unifying Petrine ministry of Rome and the pastoral needs and strengths of local churches. And, God knows, we are caught up with the ageless human struggle with our sin and selfishness. Do we need to do more to connect with that than remember the deep wounds of the current sexual-abuse scandal?

Yes, we have a long way to go. Yes, we still struggle with darkness 2000 years after the light of Christ first shone in the world. Yes, we can still stray from the light, led by the illusion that we are sufficient unto ourselves.

But, if these 40 years have taught me anything, they have taught me that Christ is always faithful. I believe with all of my heart that the light that is Christ will prevail over darkness.

I shall remember you all in Hillsdale. You bring great joy to my life. You inspire me and strengthen me in my priesthood. Your prayer sustains me in the hard times. Your faith keeps me going when my feet are heavy. I try to let God know that every day. I surely want to do so on December 19.

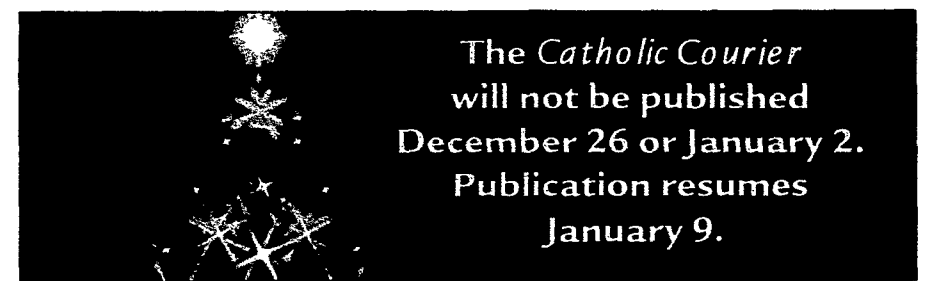
This will be the last issue of the *Catholic Courier* until early in 2003. I hope that what remains of the Advent season and all of the Christmas season will hold many blessings for you and your loved ones.

Peace to all.



On the cover

The photo-illustration by Karin von Voigtlander and Kim Parks depicts this issue's theme, which was inspired by passages from the Christmas readings: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; Upon those who dwell in the land of gloom a light has shone" (Isaiah 9:1) and "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5). Numerous readers responded to our request for reflections on these passages; some of their essays appear on pages 15-18.



If you have not yet made your gift to
The Thanks Giving Appeal
 please take an opportunity to do so
 now and know that every gift is important.

THANK YOU

To make a gift or for more information, contact your parish, the TGA Office at (585) 328-3228 ext. 276, write TGA, Diocese of Rochester, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, NY 14624, or visit our web page at www.dor.org.