

'Father Clark' marks 40th

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

If Bishop Matthew H. Clark could live his life all over again, he'd choose the very life he's lived already.

"I wouldn't want to trade a day of it," he said.

Then, with a slight chuckle, he added, "But there are a lot of days I wouldn't want to repeat."

But there is one day he will repeat, in a sense, on Thursday, Dec. 19: the day of his ordination. Forty years ago on that date, 25-year-old Matthew Clark was ordained Father Clark in Rome, where he had attended the Pontifical North American College. The bishop plans to travel this week to St. John the Baptist Parish in Hillsdale, N.J., home to his classmate Msgr. Philip Morris, for a Dec. 19 reunion Mass and meal with the monsignor and other members of their 1962 ordination class. Other than his journey to New Jersey, the bishop has no plans for a formal celebration of his ordination.

The bishop said he still remembered the first time he served Mass as a young boy growing up in Waterford, N.Y., near Troy.

"I was quite awe-struck by the whole thing," he said, adding that the pre-Vatican II Latin liturgy was challenging.

"It was much more complicated to serve Mass then than it is now, so for a young boy it was quite an honor to be chosen to serve," he said.

The bishop attended public elementary school before going to Catholic Central High School in Troy. It was the first time he came in regular contact with nuns and priests outside of his parish, he said.

"They were just very good teachers," he said. "They were interested in our personal (growth)."

After high school, he attended Holy Cross College in Worcester, Mass., for two years on a Navy ROTC scholarship. However, midway through his second year in school, he decided he wanted to enter the seminary, and left Holy Cross for Albany's Mater Christi seminary. After a semester there, in the fall of



Photo courtesy of Bishop Clark

In this 1962 photo taken at the North American College in Rome, Matthew Clark poses with two fellow students who have become his lifelong friends: Thomas Powers (left) and Howard J. Hubbard (center). Today, Father Powers is a priest of the Diocese of Albany, which is led by Bishop Hubbard.

1957, the young man traveled to the diocese he would eventually lead and enrolled at Rochester's St. Bernard's Seminary. There he met numerous priests on the faculty, including the future Bishop Joseph L. Hogan, his predecessor as bishop.

"I felt very welcome and at home among the students," Bishop Clark recalled, adding that the priests who taught them "gave their lives for us."

After two years at St. Bernard's, he went off to study in Rome, where his final year was marked by the opening of the Second Vatican Council. He and his fellow students were able to hear talks by many of the people who influenced the council, and were able to follow its progress in local news reports, he said.

"It was just very exciting to realize that even in a beginning way, things were happening in that great St. Peter's Hall that were going to impact the life of the church," he said.

The bishop noted that Catholics born after Vatican II may not realize how much the council changed the church, and, in particular, changed life for priests like himself. For example, he said, the highly regimented one-size-fits-all approach to priestly formation changed after the council into one that allowed for individual differences in each candidate. The old way had its pluses, he said, because "you could almost set auto pilot" and more easily become a priest. However, he said, the new program for formation, while less rigid, also calls on candidates to take greater personal responsibility for the direction of their vocations.

Ordination was the "achievement of a dream," but his return to the

United States brought him quickly down to earth when he was appointed assistant pastor of Our Lady of Mercy Parish in Albany, Bishop Clark recalled. Unlike priests today who must spend a year in pastoral formation out in the field before ordination, priests in his day did not receive much pastoral training prior to being ordained. Hence, he felt somewhat ill prepared to deal with such events as the death of a parishioner's loved one or properly welcoming a family bringing a child to be baptized.

"How do you make this sacramental moment all that it should be?" he asked rhetorically.

In the fall of 1964, Bishop Clark went back to Rome to acquire a licentiate in canon law and returned to Albany in 1966 as vice chancellor of the Diocese of Albany. He noted that he found the job somewhat tedious and jumped at the chance to become assistant pastor of St. Ambrose Parish in Latham in 1967. However, his bishop called on him to again serve in administration by naming him chairman of the diocese's new Priest Personnel Board two years later.

"I was not really wild about going back to an office, but I probably got to know the priests of our diocese in a way that otherwise I would not have," Bishop Clark remarked.

In 1972, he returned to North American College in Rome, where he served first as the school's assistant spiritual director, and then as its spiritual director. He stayed in Rome until Pope John Paul II elected him Bishop of Rochester in 1979. He was installed June 26, 1979, and has since seen his share of triumphs

Agency seeks funds for migrant house

Diocese of Albany, in effort by diocesan Catholic Charities to help migrant workers, is seeking funds for a new house and kitchen. The house, located in Albany, is being built by the diocese of Rochester, according to Sister Jane Kern, social media supervisor for Catholic Charities.

Sister Kern said that the minister to migrants in the diocese has found that they need an emergency shelter, especially in times of illness or if they are facing domestic abuse. She said that the diocese is looking at providing such a place, a residential facility for migrants, including women and children.

Sister Kern said the agency is looking for private donors and grants to help fund the project, which would cost \$20,000 a year. The money would be used for the cost of running a kitchen, as well as other basic food items, laundry, and other necessities. She said the house is established, but the money would be needed to run from which could be used for the guests to doctors, appointments, stores and schools, cooking, nursing, teaching English, and grant writing.

Donors may send checks to Catholic Charities, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, NY 14624. Donations should be sent to the attention of Sister Kern, and should indicate that they are intended for the "Migrant Safe House."

For information, call Sister Kern at 365-126-1176, ext. 207, or e-mail her at skern@ccny.org.

— Rob Cullivan

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and defeats. Through it all, the bishop said he begins each day by putting all that's ahead into God's hands, and ends each day by reflecting on all he did, right and wrong. He added that the Eucharist remains the center of his priesthood, and that he would recommend the priestly life to any man interested in it.

"I think it's a marvelous vocation, filled with challenge and satisfaction," Bishop Clark said.

And no matter how dark or difficult life gets, there's always reason to hope.

"You have to bring a spirit of faith to whatever life offers and respond in that spirit and work with people of faith to make the world what it should be," the bishop said.