

FRIENDS, FAMILY SPEAK ON BISHOP'S BEHALF

PHOENIX (CNS) — Friends and family of Bishop Thomas J. O'Brien, resigned head of the Phoenix Diocese, asked Judge Stephen A. Gerst March 12 to remember the bishop's more than 40 years of service as a priest and bishop before he is sentenced later in March for fleeing the scene of a fatal accident.

During the nearly three-hour pre-sentencing hearing March 12, nine individuals spoke on behalf of the prosecution, and four character witnesses addressed the court on Bishop O'Brien's behalf.

"He is a friend, a mentor and my uncle," said his nephew, Jim Dearing. "He is truly an exceptional human being."

PRIEST CLEARED OF SEX-ABUSE CHARGES

TROY, N.Y. (CNS) — Shortly before the 11 a.m. Mass March 7 at St. Francis de Sales Church in Troy, Patty Maleski hugged her pastor, Father Donald Ophals, and said: "Today is the feast of the Transfiguration, and our faith is transfigured because we see you here."

Father Ophals returned to his parish for weekend Masses for the first time in nearly a year, finally exonerated of abuse charges against him.

He told *The Evangelist*, Albany diocesan newspaper, that the support shown to him by parishioners was "wonderful, fabulous, beyond my expectations, overwhelming. It was an outpouring of affection and affirmation after 10 months of a nightmare."

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

Sun., Mar. 21: Joshua 5:9A, 10-12; Psalms 34:2-7; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11-32.

Mon., Mar. 22: Isaiah 65:17-21; Psalms 30:2, 4-6, 11-12A, 13B; John 4:43-54.

Tue., Mar. 23: Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12; Psalms 46:2-3, 5-6, 8-9; John 5:1-16.

Wed., Mar. 24: Isaiah 49:8-15; Psalms 145:8-9, 13C-14; 17-18; John 5:17-30.

Thu., Mar. 25: Isaiah 7:10-14, 8:10; Psalms 40:7-11; Hebrews 10:4-10; Luke 1:26-38.

Fri., Mar. 26: Wisdom 2:1A, 12-22; Psalms 34:17-21, 23; John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30.

Sat., Mar. 27: Jeremiah 11:18-20; Psalms 7:2-3, 9B-12; John 7:40-53.

Film draws varied reviews

Jennifer Burke/Catholic Courier

Violence, historical accuracy and anti-Semitism were among the topics debated during a March 11 panel discussion of Mel Gibson's film, "The Passion of the Christ," at Pittsford's Burgundy Basin Inn.

More than 175 people attended the event, which was the second of two parts cosponsored by St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry, Temple B'rith Kodesh and the *Catholic Courier*.

The second installment of the discussion did not include prepared presentations. Instead, the panelists — Father Joseph Brennan, a leader in area Christian-Jewish relations and former adjunct professor of religious studies at the University of Rochester; Deacon Thomas Driscoll, director of community education at St. Bernard's; Jack Garner, *Democrat and Chronicle* movie reviewer and chief film critic for Gannett Newspapers; Rabbi Alison B. Kobey, associate rabbi and director of lifelong Jewish learning at Temple B'rith Kodesh; and the Rev. Richard Myers, pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church and president of the Greater Rochester Community of Churches — responded to questions submitted by audience members and posed by *Courier* Staff Writer Rob Cullivan, who served as the event's moderator.

The evening's discussion touched on many of the film's more controversial points, including its violence. Although it is extreme, the violence in the film is necessary, Garner said, in order to show the full extent of Jesus' sacrifice. For those worried that the violence may be too disturbing, Garner — who highly recommended the film — suggested waiting until the movie comes out on video or DVD, since he has found that violent movies tend to be less disturbing when viewed on the small screen.

During the first panel discussion — held one day after the film's Feb. 25 release — much of the discussion focused on whether "The Passion of the Christ" paints a picture of Jesus' last hours that is accurate to the Gospels and the historical record of the era. But in the second session, Deacon Driscoll instead likened the movie to the traditional Stations of the Cross, which are used by many Catholics to meditate on the Passion of Jesus.

The 14 "snapshots" of Jesus' Passion that make up the Stations of the Cross are drawn from tradition and legend, not from Scripture, Deacon Driscoll noted. Gibson uses this for-



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

Movie reviewer and film critic Jack Garner (from right), Father Joseph Brennan and Deacon Thomas Driscoll share a laugh March 11 as they participate in a panel discussion of "The Passion of the Christ."

mat as a way to draw viewers into the movie, he added.

Some of the panelists noted Gibson drew his material not only from the Gospels and the Stations of the Cross, but also from the writings of Sister Anne Catherine Emmerich, a German Augustinian nun and mystic who claimed to have visions of Jesus' Passion. This can be a problem if people think they are viewing a historically accurate film, Rabbi Kobey said.

Many people who watch "The Passion of the Christ" may simply assume the non-Scriptural elements are Gibson's artistic license, Garner said. He said he personally believes the film is less about historical accuracy and more about faith and beliefs.

Yet, Rev. Myers noted, "There will be a lot of people, however, who consider this to be an accurate film and this will be the sum total of their understanding of Christianity. ... and I think that's a problem."

Public speculation about the inclusion of anti-Semitic elements began long before Gibson's film was released. While he didn't consider the film to be blatantly anti-Semitic, Father Brennan said he was troubled by the fact that Caiaphas and those calling for Jesus' crucifixion were clearly identified as Jews, while the film did not endeavor to show Jesus, Mary and the disciples in ways that would indicate they, too, were Jews.

"Is it an anti-Semitic movie? I don't know," Rabbi Kobey said. "Anti-Semitism is such a strong term,

but it certainly is a movie that can build bridges, in a way that we are (doing in this panel discussion), or it can set us apart, depending on how we respond to this film."

The rabbi is concerned that the film may stir anti-Semitic feelings, but said she would have no problem with it if Gibson had included a disclaimer stating that it was his own interpretation and artistic vision.

The panel, with the exception of Rabbi Kobey, recommended viewing the film, although some had reservations about its violence and portrayal of Jews. They agreed, however, that the movie is inappropriate for children and young teens. If teens do see the film, adults must discuss it with them afterwards, in order to help them interpret its meaning and the feelings it may have left them with. This type of discussion is something that everyone who views the movie should engage in, regardless of age, Rev. Myers said.

"It's important for us to work on it together after we see it," Rev. Myers said. "It seems to me that if people see it ... they need to spend some time trying to understand, because there are so many powerful strands of this film."

Maureen Casey, of St. John the Evangelist Parish in Rochester, attended the discussion with her friend, Allison Murphy, and both appreciated the different opinions they heard.

"The best thing we can do is to open up the channels of communication," Murphy said.