

Bishop forges strong interfaith bonds

In the summer of 1998, Bishop Matthew H. Clark led a historic interfaith sojourn to the Holy Land in Israel, accompanied by Roman Catholics, Protestants and several members of Rochester's Jewish community.

The journey was emotionally exhausting for the group. They visited each other's sacred sites, prayed together, witnessed each other's worship rituals, wept together at the famous Holocaust museum at Yad Vashem and often talked long into the hot Israeli nights.

They tackled discussions of such difficult subjects as the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, individual beliefs about the Messiah and historical troubles between the faiths.

Hardest of all, those who went on the trip reported, were spirited discussions of how to use the synergy of the goodwill generated by the trip to make a real difference back home in Rochester. One aspect of the discussion was readily agreed upon. People of good faith, however different their beliefs, must work together in mutual respect and celebrate their common mission of bettering the community, rather than be divided over their differences.



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

Bernard Grizard.

The Forum

That belief has been at the heart of Bishop Clark's ecumenical and interfaith efforts in the diocese — efforts that have won national attention and made history.

In 1988, after years of fruitful dialogue between Roman Catholics and

Episcopalians locally, the bishop signed a special covenant with retired Episcopal Bishop of Rochester William Burrill.

In 1996, Bishop Clark and the Rochester Board of Rabbis signed the Rochester Agreement, the first known formal agreement of understanding between a Roman Catholic diocese and a Jewish community. The interfaith journey to Israel was one fruit of that agreement, as has been joint programming, interfaith youth activities, jointly sponsored programs to send scholars to Yad Vashem, eight years of joint study of biblical texts, seminars for rabbis and priests, and special curriculums in both Jewish and Catholic schools.

Then, in May 2003, Bishop Clark and other diocesan officials entered into a formal Agreement of Understanding and Cooperation with the Greater Rochester Council of Masajids. It is believed to be the first such agreement between a Catholic diocese and Muslims in the world.

"This unique agreement — and the ongoing work to implement it — is a testament not only to the historic cooperation and harmony between our two faith communities but also to the firm commitment by people of two

different faiths to explore their similarities, rather than dwell on their differences," Bishop Clark said recently. "Together, we have a mutual desire to reflect in our relationships and in our larger community the spirit of love and understanding God desires for us, and to work to make our community a better place to live."

During the past year, a team of people representing both faith communities — called the Muslim-Catholic Alliance — has worked to develop community-wide initiatives and programming aimed at increasing public understanding of Catholic and Muslim beliefs, as well as exploring ways to better life for all in the Greater Rochester community, especially those in economic need.

On a regular basis, Bishop Clark has committed diocesan support and membership to such groups as the Greater Rochester Community of Churches, which brings Protestants and Christians together for the common good; the Interfaith Forum of Greater Rochester, at which Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and others gather to dialogue; and numerous other activities at which the bishop is a regular participant

Congratulations

Bishop Matthew Clark

**On 25 Years of Distinguished
Leadership and Service to the
Rochester Community**

**Mayor William A. Johnson, Jr.
and the
City of Rochester**



City of Rochester, New York



Congratulations

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From

**HOLY CROSS SCHOOL
& PARISH**

OF CHARLOTTE, NEW YORK

*(The Church that overlooks the
home of the "Breeze")*

Congratulations

*on your 25th Anniversary
as Bishop of Rochester*



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