

25 YEARS

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respected that opinion and let the subject drop. Just a few years later, however, the council approached the bishop to say that it was in fact an appropriate time for a synod, Father Hart noted.

In 1990 Bishop Clark convened the diocesan synod, which culminated in the General Synod at the Rochester Riverside Convention Center Oct. 1-3, 1993. By the conclusion of that event, approximately 1,300 delegates from throughout the diocese had identified five diocesan priorities: lifelong religious education and Catholic moral education (which were later combined into the priority of lifelong faith formation), the consistent-life ethic, small Christian communities, and the role of women in church and society.

Long before the synod established



File photo

Bishop Clark stands on the Mount of Olives overlooking the city of Jerusalem during an August 1998 interfaith trip to Israel.

the role of women as a priority for the diocese, Bishop Clark published the 1982 pastoral letter "Fire in the Thornbush," which gained national recognition.

In the letter, he stressed the dignity, human rights and spirituality of all people and invited diocesan Catholics to pray and reflect on the participation of women in the life of the church; encouraged and invited women to participate within the diocese; and urged the inclusion of women in the liturgical functions that are open to them.

Bishop Clark also has been active in lifelong faith formation. He oversaw the restructuring of the now-defunct St. Bernard's Seminary into the current St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry, a Roman Catholic graduate school. Thanks to the recent success of the diocese's Partners In Faith capital campaign, the school was able to construct a new campus in Pittsford.

Another highlight of Bishop Clark's tenure has been the tremendous growth of diocesan youth ministry, Father Hart noted. Nearly every diocesan parish has some sort of youth-ministry program in place, many diocesan teens are involved in liturgical functions at their parishes, and the bishop often can be found mingling with teens at diocesan and national retreats and conventions.

Bishop Clark said he loves being in the presence of the young people of the diocese, although he admits with a chuckle that they sometimes tire him out. Engaging young people is important, the bishop noted, and he encourages them to find value in the life of the church community.

"I find they're excited and smart; generous and faithful. It pleases me very much when I see young people included in parish life in all the ways for which they are trained and interested," he said.

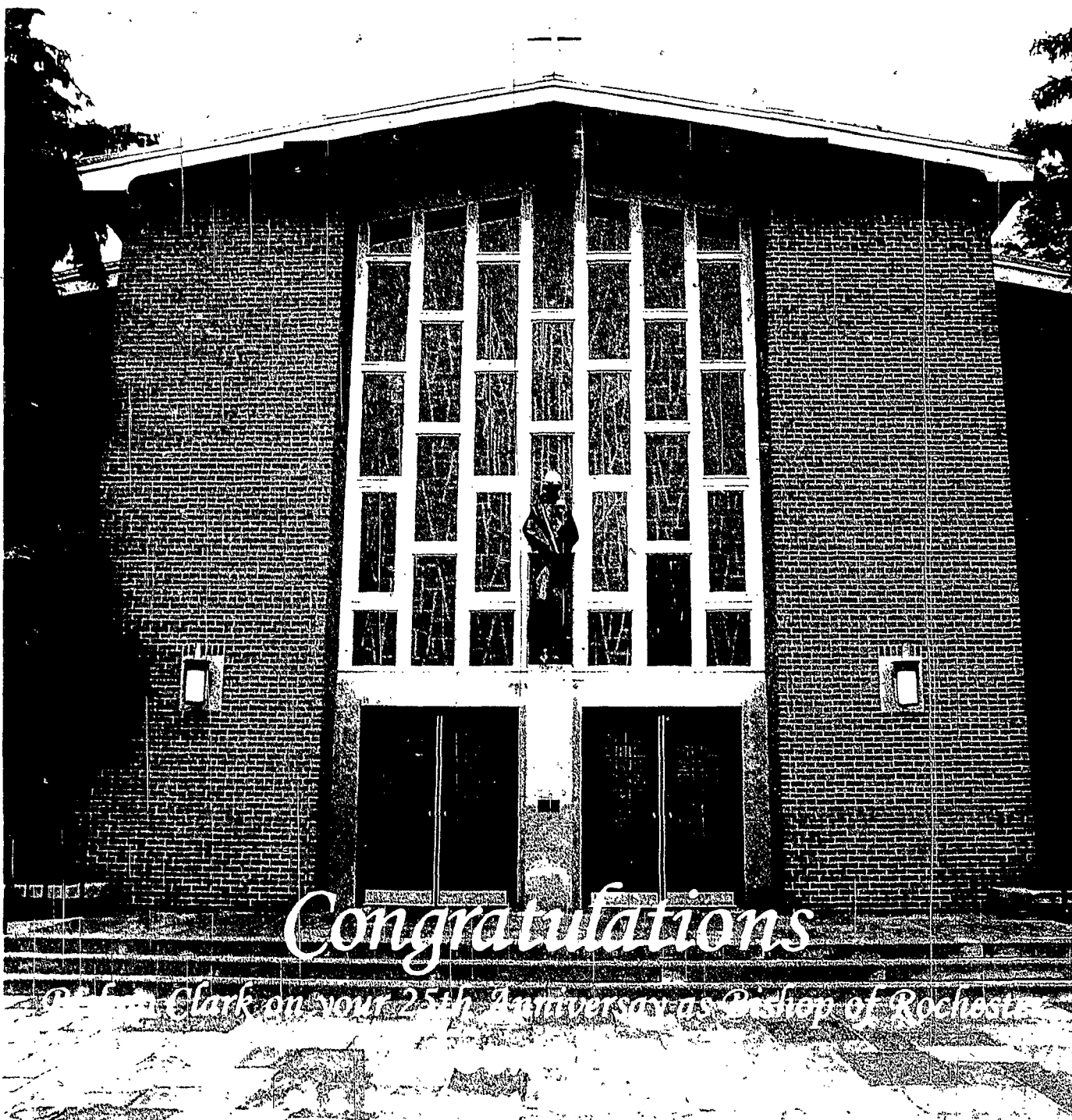
Bishop Clark also has been active in interfaith relations and ecumenism, gaining national attention in 1996 by signing a document, now known as the Rochester Agreement, that committed the diocese to work with the Rochester Board of Rabbis and the Jewish Community Federation to promote understanding of both faiths, and to work together on such issues as combatting prejudice. Believed to be the first of its kind in the nation, the agreement has become a model for similar agreements in such areas as the Diocese of Camden, N.J.

In May 2003, he signed an agreement with local Muslim leaders to affirm rights of free speech and religion; reject religious and ethnic intolerance; and promote deeper knowledge, mutual respect and understanding of Islam and Catholicism. This Catholic-Muslim agreement also is believed to be the first of its kind in the country.

"We're not who God wants us to be if we ever forget our work to bring people closer together," the bishop remarked. "We're all God's family; God's children."

In his 25 years of episcopal leadership, Bishop Clark has also faced several challenges, but Father Hart noted that he has dealt with them in his usual way, listening to what people have to say, then carefully and clearly attempting to show the issues and why he thinks a decision is the right one.

"Looking back at the most important moments, the most filled with learning and deepening, I'd say as a general pattern the deepest times have come at the most difficult times," Bishop Clark said. "They're events and circumstances that you'd never choose for yourself ... (but) I've found the Lord touches those tough times with lessons that are important for the future."



Congratulations

Bishop Clark on your 25th Anniversary as Bishop of Rochester