

Vatican meetings assess U.S. issues

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

Bishop Matthew H. Clark covered a wide variety of topics in discussions with Vatican officials during his October *ad limina* visit to Rome, from the war in Iraq to the church's position in relation to pro-choice Catholic politicians.

The *ad limina* visit is undertaken every five years, on a rotating basis, by the bishops of the world. Cardinal Edward Egan, leader of the Archdiocese of New York City, led a delegation of the eight New York state bishops, including Bishop Clark, along with auxiliary bishops from throughout the state. A daily diary of Bishop Clark's journey has been published in three installments; in the Oct. 23-24, Oct. 30-31 and Nov. 6-7 regional editions of the *Catholic Courier*.

In an interview with the *Courier*, the bishop noted he and Vatican officials discussed several areas of mutual concern. The following is a summary of the bishop's perspectives on those discussions:

The Iraq War: Bishop Clark said that the Vatican reminded New York's bishops that it opposed the U.S. invasion of Iraq; a position shared by the U.S. bishops, who released a statement prior to the war noting its incompatibility with church teachings regarding presumptions against the use of force.

"We weren't slapped on the wrist or scolded for what's happening,"

Bishop Clark said of discussions with Vatican officials. "But we were reminded that the Holy See was working for peace in the region, and that they had hoped (the U.S. government) would not intervene in the way that they did."

Pro-abortion Catholic politicians: Bishop Clark noted that a recent joint statement from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops left it to individual local bishops to decide whether to deny Communion to pro-abortion politicians. In July, the bishops released "Catholics in Political Life," which noted such decisions about communion should be made "in accordance with established canonical and pastoral principles." Bishop Clark added that local bishops would have to talk to pro-choice Catholic political leaders before making such decisions.

"(The Vatican) recognized the complexity of it, and were affirmative of what we had done," Bishop Clark said.

Catholic identity of health institutions: The Vatican shared with the bishops its recognition that Catholic health-care facilities are under attack by pro-choice forces, Bishop Clark said.

"There are some elements in society that don't want us in the business, so to speak," Bishop Clark said.

According to Catholic News Service, on Oct. 5 the U.S. Supreme Court turned down the request of



Photo courtesy of Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Bishop Matthew H. Clark meets with Pope John Paul II in Rome Oct. 8 during his *ad limina* visit to the Vatican with the other bishops of New York. The *ad limina* visit occurs every five years.

Catholic Charities of Sacramento, Calif., to review lower court rulings that the church-run agency must provide contraceptives as part of prescription-drug coverage for employees. Church-run agencies in both California and New York have been confronted with such government mandates, but the bishops' conferences of both states have challenged the mandates in court. The legal challenge by the New York State Catholic Conference is still working its way through the courts.

When New York handed down its mandate, the state's Catholic leaders threatened to consider closing church institutions rather than vio-

late church teachings. Likewise, Sacramento Bishop William K. Weigand has made it clear that he will not willingly allow the church to cooperate in practices the church considers to be sinful, such as artificial contraception.

Bishop Clark noted his concern over the potential for such a confrontation between church and state.

"I hope it doesn't come to that," he said. "That would be a terrible loss to our society."

Abuse scandals: Reforms undertaken by the U.S. bishops to deal with the clerical sexual-abuse scandals were also discussed during the *ad limina* visit, Bishop Clark said.

"(Vatican officials) are anxious, as we all are, certainly, to protect children, but also to be mindful of people's rights, and of all parties concerned, including those who have been accused of violating young children," he said.

The bishop added that he and his fellow bishops will be discussing the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People during their November meeting. The charter and accompanying norms — prompted by the issue of priestly abuse of children — were developed and approved by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in late 2002.

On a final note, Bishop Clark said he found Pope John Paul II physically weakened, but mentally strong. He added that he is always awed by his meetings with the pope.

"Just to be in the presence of the person who sits in that chair (of Peter) is always impressive," Bishop Clark said.

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