

SAID ED September 30, 2012

Bishop Clark's Legacy

I must admit that although I knew it would happen sooner or later, the announcement last week that Bishop Clark's retirement had been accepted hit me hard. I have worked side by side with him for 33 years. I have followed his lead in so many ways that I cannot enumerate them. Even when we disagreed about various things there was always mutual respect and profound listening between us. That he will no longer be the head of the Church of Rochester leaves a big hole in my heart. Bishop Cunningham is highly regarded in the Diocese of Syracuse and I am sure that we will come to love him and appreciate him as well, but in the interim I am sad.

I think it is important to realize how much our diocese has grown under Bishop Clark's leadership. One of the things that has been close to his heart is vocations. At the Bishop's encouragement for the last several years we have been hosting a Holy Hour for vocations. At the last meeting of the Presbyteral Council, I learned some happy facts that I thought I would pass on to you this week by affirming the effectiveness of our prayer. It also seems a fitting tribute to Bishop Clark's inspiration as he retires from leadership.

First of all, all of us have a vocation to: married life, to single life, to professed religious or to priestly life. All of these are wonderful ways in which God builds up the community, that we may be channels of God's peace and helpers of building up the kingdom of God. All of us are called to do this according to our skills, gifts and talents by reason of our Baptism. The Lord calls certain people to serve as leaders in the community of faith.

For the last several years we are all aware that the numbers of priests have been diminishing and our aging priests are increasing in number. As of this month we have 86 full-time priests and 83 retired priests. In the next five years there's a whole cohort of priests marching toward retirement at age 70.

This lack of priests has called forth great creativity and imagination among the People of God as many others have come forward to offer their gifts and put them at the service of the community. This has been a blessing of untold magnitude. But the need for priests to preside at the Eucharist, "source and summit of our life" as followers of Christ has not diminished, if anything it has increased.

I'm happy to report that with 25 men now preparing for the priesthood, the Diocese of Rochester leads all dioceses in New York State. We do not know that all these men will complete the process of discernment and formation. Please God – it would be so. But these men, who follow in our footsteps are a great joy to me and my fellow priests. This week I want to thank you all for your prayer and support of our priests, me included. I also want to publicly thank Bishop Clark for his outstanding leadership and the wonderful legacy he leaves in this area.

Please do keep all of our seminarians in your prayers. And remember especially the two seminarians from our parish, Nick Marini and Andy Aman. They are both at Catholic University and are working hard to prepare themselves for the day when they will serve God's people at the Lord's Table.

Thanks so much for your prayers. Have a great week!
