

Companions IN PRAYER



Sisters of St. Clare
Saginaw, MI

Bishop Ken's 10th Anniversary

Anniversary dates are worth remembering. Ten years ago this March 27, 2004, Ken Untener, the former Bishop of our Saginaw Diocese, died. We recall his spirit with fond and precious memories. As friends often do, we want to share our memories of Bishop Ken with you, and we invite you to share your memories on our website: <http://srsclare.com/about-us/companions-in-prayer-newsletter>.

In 1991 Bishop Ken Untener invited us, a Poor Clare contemplative community of four, to the Diocese of Saginaw. He wanted to add a contemplative presence to complete the mosaic of ministries already in the Diocese.

We have many treasured memories of him. However, one of our fondest memories is celebrating our first Chrism Mass with Bishop Ken. As you know, in that Mass, the first Tuesday of Holy Week, the sacred oils are blessed and distributed to every Parish. We knew that the Chrism Mass was especially important to him. In a letter inviting us to Saginaw, he had prepared us for the joy he experienced in this Mass by describing a Chrism Mass that he had recently celebrated:

The Chrism Mass was a wonderful event, with folks from all over the diocese gathered to

celebrate. It's hard to describe, I hope all of you have a chance to be part of our Chrism Mass next year. (And the year after that...and the year after that.) From a letter to the Poor Clares from Bishop Untener written May 1, 1991.

Indeed what he said was true. In our first Chrism Mass celebrated here in Saginaw on April 14, 1992, we saw not only the joy in the Mass that Bishop Ken had previously described, but also his vision of what Church should be. There were many different groups of people from the Diocese gathered to pray. There were no distinguishable differences between the worshippers. Priests sat with their parishioners, sisters moved freely among the congregation. Everyone came together to form the people of God.

As we remember those first Chrism liturgies we celebrated with Bishop Ken, we recall how impressed we were by the gatherings. Representatives from 110 parishes as well as people from various diocesan groups were there. People streamed in from five major cities and 11 counties in eastern Michigan. The whole church family was there together mixing and mingling. There was a palpable feeling of excitement in the air. We were there to be with friends, to receive the blessed oils, and to hear Bishop Ken's mandate for the year.

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We always tried to get there early so that we could sit in the balcony and gaze down to see the gathering of the church. We always found it to be an amazing panorama. The altar was in the center; the vicars vested and sat in the only reserved seating alongside of the Bishop's chair facing the altar. The atmosphere was charged with energy and spirit.

Bishop Ken came vested to his chair without ceremony and began to draw the family together and to focus the occasion. Once he told us that this day was so important for him that he got his only sport coat dry cleaned for the celebration! After some opening remarks to gather the people's attention, we began with an opening song – sung with all the energy of the Spirit. Our favorite song was the Litany of all the Parishes. We sang the names of all the parish patron saints and the location of the parishes: St Mary of the Cathedral, pray for us, Our Lady of Lake Huron, Harbor Beach, pray for us, St. Patrick, Ryan, pray for us... and on it would go through the whole diocese.

Bishop Ken then proclaimed the Gospel from memory, his customary way. The homily followed the readings. His words were usually about ways of crafting the Kingdom of God in the present time. Sometimes he used the occasion to announce a new directive for the year. His most memorable directive was the one given in 1991: "I hereby decree that from this day forward in the Church of Saginaw, every meeting – no matter what its purpose – have as its first agenda item this question: How shall what

we are doing here affect or involve the poor?" He always made the scriptures relevant.

After the directive was given, the oils were blessed and poured into the containers that each parish had brought with them. After communion, the filled containers were distributed by roll call given to each parish. The pastor and two parish representatives received the oils to take back to their church. The final blessing was given and we were sent out into the world to bring forth the Kingdom.

As contemplative nuns, we were impressed by this Mass that showed the joy and unity of the church. The pastors would take their parishioners to dinner. Thus the celebration radiated out to local restaurants throughout the Diocese until the oils arrived at the different parishes for Holy Thursday and the beginning of Triduum. This was a new experience of Chrism Mass for us and made us feel, as contemplatives, a welcomed part within the mosaic of ministries in our Diocese.

As we celebrate the Chrism Mass this year, we will remember our first Chrism Mass here in Saginaw. We will be grateful for all that Bishop Ken showed us about the church, and for the joy he shared with us all.

(We are interested in your thoughts, let us know at:
<http://srsclare.com/about-us/companions-in-prayer-newsletter>)
Sr. Laura and Sisters



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