Louisiana Bishops, area clergy gathering renews church tradition

By Kathleen Toups

Renewing an ancient tradition of bishops and priests gathering to mark the beginning of a new year, Bishop Gerard L. Frey of Lafayette hosted a Mass and luncheon last week. In attendance were the Catholic bishops of Louisiana, representatives of clergy councils of dioceses within the state, priests from the dioceses of Lafayette and Lake Charles.

Archbishop Philip M. Hannan of New Orleans was principal celebrant and homilist at the Mass in the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist which was recently reopened after extensive repairs and renovations.

In his homily, Archbishop Hannan thanked Bishop Frey for accepting the invitation to restore the ancient custom of New Year’s gatherings of bishops and priests. He said he hoped it will become an annual event, hosted in turn by each of the dioceses in the state.

There is a long tradition in the church, with the example set by Christ himself, of clergy offering support and concern for one another, Archbishop Hannan noted.

"There has been little change in human nature since the days of the apostles," he continued. "We have the same needs, and can offer the same help."

He recalled that when he first came to New Orleans as archbishop, some 19 years ago, the Province of New Orleans included dioceses in four southern states, Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama and part of Florida. Now the reconstituted province is made up only of the dioceses in Louisiana.

"This makes a province small enough to develop a sense of community and by communication to show concern and support," the archbishop pointed out.

Archbishop Hannan reminded that Pope John Paul II in recent remarks to American bishops had emphasized the necessity of priests supporting each other.

"For bishops," he continued, "priests are sons, brothers, friends, counselors, co-workers in proclaiming Christ’s name. Priests’ councils assist the bishops in governing the diocese, confirming their brother priests as ministers of the Eucharist and ministers in the Church, in times of calm and in times of crisis.

"We are one family in Christ," the archbishop stressed. "We share each other’s joys and burdens. We are responsible for the morale and welfare of one another."

In brief remarks at the end of the Mass, Bishop Frey welcomed those in attendance and thanked them for joining the prayers, support and fellowship.

Concelebrating with the archbishop and Bishop Frey were Bishops Warren L. Boudreaux of Houma-Thibodaux, Jude Speyrer of Lake Charles, Stanley Ott of Baton Rouge and retired Bishop Charles P. Greco of Alexandria-Shreveport.

The epistle was read by Msgr. H. Alexandre Larroque, vicar general, and Bishop Frey read the Gospel. Father James Doiron, Vicar for Clergy and Religious Personnel, led the prayer of the faithful.

Special music was provided by a quartet of young priests composed of Fathers Tommy Calais, Mamou; Keith DeRouen, Abbeville; David Hollier, Lafayette, and Jay Voorhies, Scott, directed and accompanied on the organ by Father Glenn Provost, Roberts Cove.

Master of ceremonies was Father Bill Ganucheau, Lydia, assisted by Father Keith Vincent, St. Martinville.