



ABP. RUMMEL

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me read everything about that bus boycott when that woman had to sit in the back of the bus in Montgomery.”

Helped after world wars

Archbishop Rummel's concern for social issues was evident in his early New York years when he was placed in charge of the German refugee program right after World War I. He also was influential in gathering and sending supplies from the New York docks to help rebuild Germany. After World War II, he worked to promote the resettlement program for refugees.

Bishop Vath recalled an incident in Buras that typified the archbishop's respect for all people, including those who opposed him. A sister was bringing a group of CCD children, black and white together, into the Our Lady of Good Hope Church in Buras for class. Leander Perez entered the church, grabbed the African-American children, pulled them out of line and told them to get to the back.

When Archbishop Rummel heard of the incident from the sister, he immediately contacted attorney Charles Denechaud and instructed him to call Perez and demand an apology. Perez quickly apologized, and the incident did not go to court.

“The archbishop never published that,” Bishop Vath said. “It would have been a tremendous feather in his cap if he had made Leander Perez make a public apology, but he didn't. Again, here was the man unwilling to quench (sic) the smoldering flames. He didn't want to crush.”

Vocal in USCCB

Archbishop Rummel's racial efforts reached beyond the archdiocese. He was influential in preparing and gaining support for the



1958 U.S. Catholic bishops' statement condemning racism.

“Archbishop Rummel had practically composed it – it was his draft the bishops worked on,” Bishop Vath said.

When Washington, D.C., Archbishop Patrick O'Boyle sent Auxiliary Bishop Philip Hannan to New Orleans for guidance on integrating D.C.'s Catholic schools, Archbishop Rummel's advice was, “Listen to the people – you have to let them get out this venom and listen to them, but then insist on Christian principles. And then, gradually, you educate them, but it is not easy. But the main thing is to listen to them.”

Sought consensus

The archbishop did not proceed alone; he drew on local lay, religious and clerical support in his long effort to address racism. The archbishop's “genius was in inspiring people with his leadership rather than organizing them,” Msgr. Plauche noted. “He had a genius for surfacing good leadership.”

“(He) had a knack of surrounding himself with very fine advisors,” Bishop Vath added. “He always had the best legal advice.”

Bishop Vath and Msgr. Plauche recalled some of those who stood by the archbishop in the difficult times: Bishop L. Abel Caillouet; Msgr. Henry C. Bezou; Msgr. Robert Gordon Raine; C. Ellis Henican, a prominent attorney and “a tower of strength”; attorney Charles Denechaud; Dr. Paul Hebert, dean of the LSU Law School and a former Nuremberg judge; and Margie Burke, the wife of architect Thompson Burke.

Throughout the long process of fostering a more integrated and just archdiocesan community, Archbishop Rummel never wavered from his initial vision.

“One of the reasons why that (opposition) never fazed him was because he was so completely in possession of himself,” Bishop Vath said. “He was a whole man and knew what he wanted, and he knew what he was aiming at. And if it was going to take him a long time, he was willing to wait as long as necessary. But he began the process, and he was (often) out there in front, all by himself.”

Dr. Charles Nolan is the former archivist of the Archdiocese of New Orleans.



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German-born Archbishop Joseph Rummel, at left and above, holding his crozier, worked for the common dignity of all races and ethnicities.

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