

to those who are strangers to us. Too often we assign a person to this or that category without even giving him or her a hearing. How can we model the reconciling Christ unless we give time to voices and needs which may make us uneasy? For some, this means listening to Pentecostals; for others, it might mean listening to one who is an advocate for ending all war. If there are people in your neighborhood whom no one knows, then you should get to know them. Fear and routine must not lock us into a stance that is condescending to persons or groups of persons.

4. I ask you to please remain with me. Renewal is not a romp or a few years of intensive work. It is a long and painful process that will stretch beyond my lifetime and probably beyond the lifetime of most of you. Some have spoken of the long winter of renewal. We have such great gifts to offer and our message is needed today. Pray for patient endurance.

PARISHES

As the family is basic to any society, so the local gathering of Christians is basic to the Church of Jesus Christ. I want to say a few words to the leadership people of our parishes. You are such a source of hope to me:

1. It all begins with you, and what strength and promise we have as a Diocese springs from the strength and promise the Lord has given you. It is your leadership that brings vitality to the Church of Rochester. There are many other groups but you are the seedbed and beginning of them all.

2. I am impressed by your generosity. Freely, again and again, you have chosen to give your time to building the Church. There are so many other things you could be doing and I am sure you get told by some that other things would be more important. But you continue to offer your gifts to Church and I am always encouraged by your example.

3. More than any other group you are surrounded by the negativism of so many today. Parish Councils won't work; Regionalism is dead; why bother with Religious Education any more; how can you work at that parish? . . . You must hear these statements every day. You must have the experience frequently of working so hard with little support. But you keep hoping and you keep dreaming. Blessed are you for that.

4. You are rich in talent and skills. I never knew what the Church could be until I began to see clearly how many are the talents of the laity. You enrich the worship, the teaching mission, the social ministry and the supportive ministries of the Church. I hope you realize all that we are together as Church.

But let me share with you now some of my concerns about your role to date:

1. Your very richness can also be

a temptation. As the many gifts begin to emerge in a parish, often there is a tendency to want to know, "Which of us is first?" There can be discouragement and a studied neglect for certain kinds of talents generated by other groups within the same parish family. Avoid judging each other and let each try to be the first in service of the others.

2. You are people of faith and your faith should be evident in every debate and decision that you make. At your meetings, the painful struggle to put on the mind and heart that is Christ should be part of the debate and a part of your decisions. Therefore, a short opening and closing prayer at parish council meetings is not sufficient; I suggest that each council and committee have some of its members assigned to promote the spiritual development of its membership.

3. Be careful lest attendance at meetings become the principal service that you give to the Church. They are simply "huddles" to make your service to the needs of people more intelligent and more loving.

4. I know it is painful; but, please continue to broaden your vision of what is Church. None of us can build our parish as an island fortress while neglecting completely any concern for the other parishes of the region, or the Diocesan Pastoral Council, or the needs of the entire Church. Isolation is no path to the future. Therefore, I urge all parishes to give serious consideration to periodic joint meetings with neighboring parishes and I expect that all parishes and institutions will be represented at regional assemblies.

RENEWAL GROUPS

I want to speak some special words to all the renewal groups in our Diocese for they are a special gift that that we have in Rochester.

1. There is a great spiritual hunger in our times, and you, perhaps more than any other groups in the Church, struggle to respond to that hunger. I do not know where we would be without the special gifts you have in this area.

2. I wish to recognize and commend your willingness and zeal to be involved as servants in our parishes.

3. I have seen outstanding signs of your goodness in the leadership that you have developed for the Church on every level. That leadership is spiritually renewed and brings so much hope to all of us.

4. Another special gift you bring to the entire Church which we desperately need is your spirit of joy and confident hope.

But you also face some temptations that are common to groups that generate so much response and so much enthusiasm.

1. Be careful of a tendency to set

yourself and your ways as the norm of what constitutes a fully developed Christian today. You offer a rich and fruitful approach to Christian living but your way is one among many others. Do not use your special graces as a means of judging others and finding them wanting. You have the graces you possess because you are called to service of others. Therefore, I expect all renewal groups to develop proposals for assisting parishes.

2. In your discovery of a deep and rich personal spirituality, you may be tempted, as Peter was at the time of the transfiguration of Jesus. He wanted to remain on Mount Tabor and build a shelter. But Jesus took him back down the mountain and along the humble way that led to Jerusalem and the cross. Listen to the sayings of the Gospel that urge us toward compassion and zeal in responding to the needs of those who suffer in our world. The social mission is recognized as a necessary and intrinsic dimension of the Church.

3. Be careful that you don't give so much time to your renewal groups that you neglect your responsibilities in your home.

REGIONS

One of the newest groups in the Diocese is those who work to create and build up the regional structures of our Diocese. It is hard to assess this project as yet but already there are some things I want to say:

1. I admire the courage that you show in your roles as frontier people. You are piecing together new relationships despite the barriers of a tradition of competition among our parishes that has existed for many, many years. There is a real strength in your willingness to work in uncharted territory. In this area of building, more than most others, we have no guidelines, no set answers.

2. You do your work of planting a new idea in the Church with such hope in things unseen. Paul put it this way, "I did the planting; Apollos the watering; but it was God who made the plants grow. . . . For we are fellow-laborers for God, and you are God's farm, God's building." (1 Cor. 3:6 and 9) What you are planting has just barely begun to grow but you bring such hope to your work that I am confident of the harvest.

3. Great faith and trust characterize your work or you could not survive in it. Your example is one of the best ways of building regionalism.

But since we are all so new in this effort I think some cautions are particularly important as well:

1. Don't be rigid in setting up one official form of regional sharing among the local churches. Be open to other models, such as clusters of parishes. Take risks in embarking on programs or projects which, while very uncertain, hold great promise for the Church.