

Experience is best teacher of bishops

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

I mentioned to you earlier that I'll be leaving June 19 to travel to the University of Santa Clara, California, for a meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. This session will be the third in a series of occasional NCCB meetings during which we bishops consider a particular pastoral theme, rather than conducting the usual multi-item business agenda. The first two of these meetings were held at St. John's University, Collegeville, Minn., in 1986 and 1988.

The theme of this year's meeting is the bishop as minister. We will explore the ministry of the bishop as he is called to be priest, prophet and leader. Our organizing committee has worked hard to offer a pro-

gram that will include a roster of excellent speakers, as well as ample opportunity for formal and informal interaction among us bishops and sufficient peace and quiet to reflect on the input we'll receive while we are there.

I am deeply interested in participating in the program. It will afford an opportunity not only to reflect on my personal experience of this ministry during the past 11 years, but also to hear from other bishops about theirs. Both opportunities will be valuable because the responsibilities of this ministry are complex and often quite demanding.

In addition to that, I do believe that the ministry of the bishop has changed in the years since Vatican Council II. That change has occurred slowly but very steadily, and is one of the reasons why occasions like our Santa Clara meeting can be so valuable. It will give all of us a special time to collect it all and reflect on it.

Many of you have asked me over the years how one learns to be a bishop. I have usually responded that there's no way in which that can be done. One must experience the ministry day in and day out before one can truly appreciate what it is.

I do not wish to overstate that reality, because certain kinds of life experience and ministerial experience can be valuable to a person in the office of bishop. And there is, I believe, a place for a good orientation program for new bishops. But there is no one formula, no one set way that a person could study and then put it into action. Local churches are much too different, one from the other, for that to be possible. So

are bishops.

Several comparisons come to mind that I find helpful in explaining this. People who are preparing to marry can talk with married couples, pray for guidance and read all kinds of books. But nothing will teach them more about marriage than the experience of living out a marriage relationship with all of the joys and demands, breakthroughs and setbacks that come with the effort.

And how about playing golf? A person interested in golf can read Jack Nicklaus' books from dawn until dusk, engage in appropriate physical training, and talk to polished players until blue in the face. But the moments of truth come at the tee and on the green. Then the realization dawns that practice, practice and more practice is the key.

Experience is a great teacher. I include in that notion not just the passage of time or the events that fill our lives day after day. I add, and judge essential, time to reflect on what we have experienced. That reflection occurs in prayer, in thinking, in sharing our experience with others and in being open to the wisdom of those who share our experience.

Among the questions to be appreciated as our life experience deepens are:



What is of deepest value and therefore is to be cherished and preserved?

What is engaging in the short run, but fades rather quickly and is soon forgotten?

How best can we learn to tell the difference between the two as early and painlessly as possible?

I look forward to our NCCB meeting at Santa Clara University because it will provide a privileged few days during which to consider some of these questions. May I please commend to your prayers all of the bishops of our country as we gather for this meeting. Many thanks.
Peace to all.

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DIOCESAN APPOINTMENTS

Bishop Matthew H. Clark has approved the following appointments, which were made by the priests' respective superiors.

Father Mario Caferelli, CPPS, from parochial vicar at St. Jerome Church in East Rochester, to director of student formation for the Atlantic Province of the Society of the Precious Blood, effective July 31, 1990.

Father George T. Smith, CSB, from parochial vicar at Christ the King Church in Irondequoit, to doctoral studies at the University of Toronto, effective July 1, 1990.

Father Joseph T. Walsh, CSB, from the Michael Power High School faculty in Toronto, to parochial vicar at Christ the King Church in Irondequoit, effective July 1, 1990.

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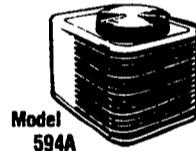
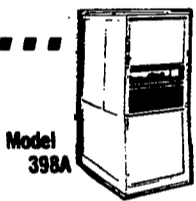
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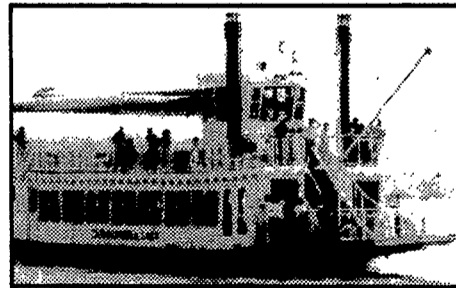
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