

# Looking ahead into the next millennium

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Recently an editor invited me to contribute a chapter for a book he is preparing on what the church will be like in the year 2,000. Such requests do not come in very often, but when they do I consider them seriously. I do so for several reasons.

One reason is the awareness I have that I am called as a bishop to be concerned not only for this local church of Rochester, but for the whole church as well. To contribute to a book that may be of help to that larger community seems a practical way to honor that aspect of my vocation.

A second reason I think through such invitations with care is that they call me to reading, conversation and thought I may not otherwise have pursued. Often these activities hold unexpected richness for me. Allowing such requests to come into and change the rhythm of life is a healthy way to stay out of ruts. And, the Lord knows, I can easily fall

into them.

But the main reason I take interest in such invitations is that they remind me of my privileged relationship with this community of faith. The editor wrote to me not as an isolated individual, but to me as bishop. That is, he wrote to me as a person called to proclaim the Gospel in this community, to foster the bonds of faith and charity that give life to this community, and to witness the faith of this community to others.

So when his request arrived, it made me more aware of my obligation to attend very carefully to the hopes and dreams the people of our community carry in their hearts for the life of the church.

As one practical way of tapping into those hopes and dreams, I asked co-workers ministering in several areas of church life to share with me their reflections on the editor's question. More directly and personally, I have asked several people I've met along the way to do the same.

In the longer run of things, I hope that one of the significant contributions of our diocesan Synod will be to make us aware as a community of how the Holy Spirit is calling us into the future.

In the meantime, I've got to finish that chapter. Whatever ends up on paper will be, I hope, the best I can offer at the present time. But I also hope that years from now when we're close to welcoming in the new millennium, I'll have changed my ideas if they have not withstood the tests of time and greater experience.

I mentioned earlier how easy it is for me to fall into ruts. I don't mention that because I think I have a corner on that market or because I think the tendency is notably strong in me. What makes the phenomenon one to which I want to pay special attention is the potential length of my tenure as your bishop.

Under the present norms of the church, we're looking at 21 more years together. They may require a lot of giving from a lot of people. But of me I



think it demands at bare minimum a commitment to stay alive to new ideas, to different ways of doing things. Otherwise I run the risk of closing down unfairly the creativity and possibilities that are God's gifts to our wonderful church.

Peace to all.

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