

Quiet affords time for thought

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

This is a quiet evening at Sacred Heart. There's a parish council meeting going on downstairs. Father Paul Tomasso is in his room doing some scheduling and calendar work. And I have just gone through some mail and catching up with Paul after arriving home from St. Augustine, Fla., this afternoon.

The peace of the evening — something I always appreciate — is doubly welcome because it's unexpected. My original schedule called for arrival home at 10:30 tonight. But an unexpectedly early finish to our meeting and a good break changing flights got me home five hours early.

The session at Marywood Retreat Center near St. Augustine was a most rewarding one. Our National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Women in the Church and Society sponsored an orientation and training session for diocesan women's commissions. That program began on Friday evening and concluded at noon on Sunday. Our committee met on Sunday afternoon and Monday morning.

As I sit here this evening, I have been remembering the goodness of the people who gathered at Marywood — the women and men who came from many parts of the country because they want to help make the church a more loving, inclusive, peaceful community.

In our sessions we covered a wide range of issues. We talked about the nuts and bolts of forming a commission, how it can best fit



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into a variety of diocesan structures, what issues should be handled by such a group, and how best to serve our parish communities as together we seek to deal with issues of particular concern to women in our church.

In addition to some of those basic questions, we explored other substantial issues during our time together. One was the increasingly obvious multicultural nature of the church in the United States.

That rich diversity is a marvelous gift to the church. But it does call all of us to some new ways of organizing ourselves, to some new ways of communicating with others.

I believe that our diocesan Synod is an extraordinary opportunity for us to do both of those things. We all need to encourage all of our sisters and brothers to participate as

partners in this process.

A second theme that emerged strongly from our reflections was a concern for what seems to be an escalation of violence in our country.

Of particular concern to participants was the high incidence of spouse abuse, which cuts through all segments of society. Our committee has been looking into that issue, and we were much encouraged to continue by our friends who gathered at Marywood. They urged our conference to lend strong support to efforts to deal with this terrible social evil.

It was a fascinating experience for me to be at Marywood — as it always is when I have the privilege to experience the faith of people from other local churches.

Inevitably, such experiences always help me to put our local problems in proper perspective. More importantly, they remind me of the high level of talent, commitment and rich faith we enjoy in our local community of faith.

At the moment, I thank the Lord for the memory of the meeting as we move into Lent. It is a time of conversion — a special, graced moment when we enjoy a renewed invitation to become more the people God wants us to be.

Normally, we do that first by listening attentively to the voice of the Lord and, when we have heard that voice, by doing what the Lord asks of us. I hope we will support one another in prayer as we try to enter Lent in that spirit.

Peace to all.

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