

Healthy communities foster growth

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

I carried some great cookies home from a visit to St. Joseph, Livonia, and St. William, Conesus, yesterday. It's not at all unusual that I return from parish visits clutching baked goods to my chest. People all over the diocese ask me to bring them home to Father Tom Mull.

This time it was different. On Sunday the youths of the parish were selling the cookies in an effort to raise money for their trip to World Youth Day with Pope John Paul II this August in Denver, Colorado. It was a delight to be with them and to sense their excitement about participating in this extraordinary event. We had some fun talking about how we would all have to do some serious training to cope with the thin air of the Rocky Mountains — especially if we join in the 13-mile pilgrimage that will be one of the highlights of the gathering.

Some other conversations come back to me as I remember the visit. One parish council member approached me to say how enthusiastic he and so many others in the parish had become about our Synod process. When I asked him to say more, he told me that it had helped them as a parish community.

Upon further questioning, he mentioned that the Synod process had stimulated some very helpful long-range planning. And, he added, the experience also had helped the parish community to become more deeply aware of the importance of outreach and genuine hospitality, especially in an area that is experiencing



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considerable growth.

At the tail end of that conversation, a woman offered that when she moved into the area not long ago she was most impressed by the way she had been welcomed into and made to feel at home by the parish community. The spontaneity and sincerity of her comment would have impressed me at any time, but it meant even more to me when I learned that she had moved from St. Mary's of the Lake in Ontario — another parish that invests beautifully in outreach and hospitality.

After Mass at Conesus, we were enjoying some coffee. Virginia Flaherty, who played the organ for many years at St. William's and who

wrote the parish history, spoke with obvious affection for Donna Sabo, who played the organ and led our singing that day. Virginia told of how, when Donna was a tiny girl, she would come and sit at the organ with her predecessor.

One gets a sense at such privileged moments as these of the enormous importance of healthy community experiences, of having the opportunity to enjoy an environment in which growth is encouraged and people, especially the young, are helped to broaden their horizons and engage in challenging projects. But one also appreciates how important it is that we pass on — with whatever increase we can manage — all that we have received from those who went before us.

This is a privileged year in which to reflect on our interaction in the Roman Catholic Community; our Synod process has been eliciting rich streams of such thought and sharing all across our diocese.

And as this year goes on — the 125th year of our existence as a diocese — I am sure that we will have opportunity to remember with great gratitude the women and men who established and built up our local church.

My thanks to the people of Livonia and Conesus for their hospitality on Sunday; to Father Bill Trott for his loving pastoral leadership; and to Ruth Page, pastoral associate, whose gracious guidance brought extra joy to the day.

Peace to all.

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