

# Sample life in another parish community

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

I am very much mindful, as I hope you are, that the second round of parish meetings in our Synod process will be held during the first three weeks of Lent. Permit me to invite you personally to participate in those meetings, if the circumstances of your life allow you to do so.

Individuals have found them stimulating and rewarding. Parish communities already have begun to respond to the needs identified in local meetings. Our General Synod, to be held on Oct. 1-3 of this year, will most certainly be strengthened by strong participation at parish meetings all around the diocese.

The activities of the weekend had me moving around quite a bit. On Saturday evening, I celebrated the 5:30 Mass with the parish community at St. Lawrence and had some spaghetti with Fathers Frank Falletta, Bob Donovan and Don Haycock. We talked about many things, including the great growth taking place in that section of Greece, and about the opportunities and challenges such growth presents to our parishes in that region. How do we best plan for the future? How do we best greet, receive and serve the great numbers of Catholic people moving into the area?

On Sunday morning, I drove to Dansville to fill in for Father Andy Teuschel, who has been ill. I joined the community for the regularly scheduled 8 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. liturgies, and enjoyed the opportunity to preside at their once-a-month children's Mass celebrated at 9:45 a.m.

The people of St. Mary's have been most cooperative during the weeks of Andy's illness. They have pulled together even more than usual to keep parish life as normal as possible, and



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have done so very well. And the priests of our diocese have been most generous in filling in for Andy. He is returning to the parish on Tuesday, and all will welcome him back most warmly. But the parish community, our priests and I all have the special invitation from that experience to think about pastoral ministry in the future.

We priests are getting older and fewer in number. Unless something changes fairly soon, it will become more and more difficult to fill the gaps caused by illness and diminishing numbers. That concerns me, and I know it concerns our sisters and brothers in Dansville. What can we do to interest more of our wonderful young men in a vocation to priesthood? What implications does a declining number of priests hold for our parish communities in the next five or 10 years? What will the problems be, and how can

we meet them? What will the opportunities be, and how can we make the most of them?

On the way home from Dansville, I stopped at the Diplomat Party House to join Father Tony Mugavero and St. Bridget's Parish gathered there to celebrate their vibrant community life and to mark the need to raise funds to repair the church.

At one point in the proceedings — a very touching one for me — they gathered all of the children present for a photograph. There must have been about 50 of them. They came in all shapes and sizes. What made the group especially striking was that they also came in many beautiful colors.

That beautiful variety, all of their vitality and beauty collected in one body of children was a beautiful symbol to me of what our church is meant to be. Do we realize how much variety and diversity exists among the parish communities in our 12 counties? What are the relationships among us? What are the implications of those relationships?

Over the years I have invited you, from time to time, to experience life in some other parish. To see how liturgy is celebrated. To hear the preaching. To find out how visitors are welcomed. To discover what we need to become more catholic than we are. You might try St. Lawrence, Greece, a booming suburban parish, or St. Mary's, Dansville, the only Catholic parish in a small town, or St. Bridget's, Rochester, a city parish of great variety in the heart of the city.

Of such richness and variety is our diocese composed. I am so glad we are coming together in Synod. Please join us for the meetings if you can, and always in prayer.

Peace to all.

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