

Times of transition suggest new life

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

My hands are sweaty this morning as I sit at my trusty keyboard to begin this week's "Along the Way." It's not the first time that that's happened. It happens when I'm struggling for a column idea and nothing seems to come; when I'm more under time pressure than I'd like to be; when I know what I want to do, but just can't get it right. And sometimes I just don't know why.

But I know with total certainty why my hands are sweaty today. There's no doubt about it. It's because Jane Frances Early, the second-born of my five gorgeous nieces, is getting married on Saturday. Jane is the first of the five to be married. I hope you'll understand when I say that, while I'm thrilled about the idea of her getting married, it's still going to require some getting used to.

You know what I mean. Scott Neff, her fiancé, is a wonderful young man. I like him very much. Jane's four sisters — a discriminating lot, believe me! — are quite fond of him. My sister and brother-in-law are peaceful with everything. My mind says there's no problem, nothing to worry about. My desire is to do everything we can to prepare, encourage and celebrate. But my emotions, lively and varied, are ricocheting all over the room even as I write.

I'm exaggerating of course. Training to be an uncle-in-law is neither all that scary,



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LONG THE WAY

nor is it terribly demanding. Indeed, I have found the months since Jane and Scott announced their plans to be a special opportunity to reflect on how much Jane has meant to me through the years of her life.

From the beginning, it's been an adventure. Jane went off in an ambulance to be born. Not because her mother was having difficulty, but because Jane decided to be born in the middle of one of the fiercest blizzards ever to strike the Albany area. Tom Powers calls her Snow Bird. All of that occurred on December 31. To this day, Jane is convinced that all of the parties held around the world on that date are to celebrate her safe arrival.

So many memories emerge in these last days before her wedding. I won't list

them. That's not the point. (Although I must admit that I'm tempted to tell you about the early phases of her career as a pastry chef and of the pioneering work she did in preparation of blueberry tarts. Or about that short but memorable phase in her teen years when she chose to dress all in black just like Johnny Cash). The point is that such times of transition are rich in what they tell us about life.

For me this is a time to remember the ways in which Jane has grown to be a bright, gifted, generous and loving person. It's a time to remember the blessing it is to be her uncle, to be her friend.

It's a time to reflect on the changes growth brings, on the sometimes mysterious ways in which a new relationship may invite adjustments in many other relationships. On how all of this can be a source of new life for all involved.

So I'm very happy about it all, and feel deeply privileged to witness the commitment Jane and Scott will make to each other on Saturday. They love one another, have prepared well, live good values and don't mind working. I trust the Lord to look over them and good friends to stand by them.

What does strike terror in my heart is that Kathleen will make me do one of her dances with her at the wedding reception. The very thought evokes a fear of a dislocated hip and brings pain to my arthritic knees.

Peace to all.

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1 Peter 5, 3

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