Celebrating commonality amid diversity

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

If you follow this column with any regularity, you are aware that I am fascinated by the interplay of diversity and commonality that characterizes the life of our church at its best.

That interplay bespeaks life to me. It suggests growth and dynamism. There's something real about it. I suppose that's because it recognizes both the dignity of the individual person and the fact that we discover, develop and express that dignity in the context of community.

A good example of that interplay for me has been the experience of our Synod. Those who participated shared a common faith and a great love for the church and – because they were willing to express their convictions in a spirit of charity and give respectful attention to others' points of view – all were enriched. I cannot imagine so fruitful an experience if either the commonality or the diversity had been lacking.

I think too of how that interplay is expressed in family life. The members form one family, yet each member has a distinct personality and is, therefore, different from every other member. When it all works reasonably well, common family bonds help each member of the family to grow and mature. When that happens, the family is strengthened by the shared talents, experiences and insights of its members.

This day brought its own wonderful experience of commonality and diversity. This morning I had the honor of



speaking with Sister Aldegarda, the superior general of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, and with Sister Maureen, a member of the congregation's General Council.

Sister Aldegarda is from Bavaria; Sister Maureen, from Japan. Both now live in Rome, Italy, and relate to their sisters from Serbia, Czechoslovakia, Brazil, the United States and several other countries.

You can imagine how fascinating it was to me to hear the two of them speak about their work. This international congregation of women religious is in the process of a major restructuring. Sisters Aldegarda and Maureen are well aware that this will be done successfully only if all members are willing to work for the common good.

But they also know that its success will hinge on the ability of the congregation to recognize and accommodate the

particular needs of some of their members. Just imagine asking the School Sisters of Notre Dame in Serbia to express their commitments in exactly the same way you would ask the Sisters here to do so!

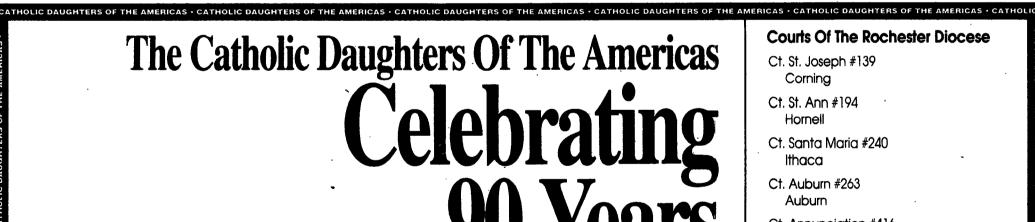
At the other end of the day I enjoyed a conversation with Sisters Lia, Soledad and Marie Ines, the three Chilean members of our Sisters of Mercy. They are visiting our country for the first time and were kind enough to share with me something of their experience.

I wish you could have heard them speak about their visit. You would have enjoyed as much as I did their efforts to sort out impressions of a very lively visit to our area. Two aspects of their reflections impressed me very much. One was the accuracy of their perceptions about their congregation and our local church. The second was their ability to recognize and comment on the fact that values we hold in common are expressed differently in our respective circumstances.

I'll leave it to you to think about the interplay of commonality and diversity as you know it in your everyday experience. How do you experience it at your family table, in your parish community, in your religious community, in your workplace?

Just to stir the pot a little, let me say that I thought that the rendition of our National Anthem offered before Sunday's Super Bowl game by Natalie Cole and supporting choir was quite moving. What did you think?

Peace to all.



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