

Gratitude for individuals' generous service

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Last week at a pre-confirmation dinner at Holy Rosary, Rose Davis, who oversees the parish's religious-education program, was speaking with considerable respect and affection about the young men and women to be confirmed that evening. As she spoke, she communicated in a clear and gentle way what I hear so often when I speak to her colleagues in that ministry: that is that their work affords them a privileged awareness of God's loving presence in the hearts of our young people.

During the course of that conversation, Rose mentioned that she was preparing for comprehensive exams in pursuit of her master's degree in theology from St. Bernard's Institute. Rose did not make a big issue of that, but she seemed easy about responding to questions of interest posed by those of us who were sharing the meal with her. We asked, for example, about the theme of the final paper she needs to submit for her degree. (It's on the Sacrament of Marriage.) We were curious about who her examiners would be. (Father Bob Kennedy and another examiner as yet unnamed.)

It was a most enjoyable meal and when we finished and it came time to walk over to church for the celebration, I found myself marveling at what Rose has taken on, how well she does it all and how serene she remains in the experience. It can not be at all easy to be wife, mother of five young children, direct a program of religious education and complete work on a graduate degree — all at the same time!



A LONG THE WAY

Her story carries its own details of course, but I am continually impressed by people from all parts of our diocese who, like Rose, manifest a remarkably strong commitment to the formal ministry of our local church. They consistently demonstrate qualities I believe are critical for ministry in today's church. I refer to such qualities as a genuine spirit of service, a recognition that ongoing education is of great importance, and an ability to relate in healthy, encouraging ways to a wide variety of people.

The dinner experience at Holy Rosary reminded me of two special days in January. I spent them at Notre Dame Retreat Center, Canandaigua, and they were special for me because I was with about 70 religious-education leaders and youth ministers from parishes in our diocese. They had invited me to help them in two days of prayer and reflection

on the theme "Come away...and Rest Awhile."

We met four or five times through those hours. I would offer some brief reflections on the theme, and they would spend some time in quiet thought and prayer. Then we would gather for conversation about what we had experienced. What I experienced with them corporately was akin to what I experienced with Rose individually.

And what was that? I guess the best way to describe the experience is to say that I was very much aware that I was in the presence of holy people who are gifted for service and who are generous in sharing that gift. I would add the further thought that, as I saw the way they treated one another, I grew more convinced than ever that we are blessed by their ministry in our parish communities.

I wanted to tell you about all of them this week because I think it is important to remind the community from time to time that we have much to be grateful for in the willingness of people in our local church to step forward for ministry. It's good to remember the blessing of such institutions as St. Bernard's Institute and Notre Dame Retreat Center, which do so much in support of quality pastoral and theological education, which is so vital for the health of our faith community.

We surely face many challenges, and we should have a healthy respect for the work they will demand of us. But we can turn the work to drudgery if we forget the wealth of wonderful, generous, serving people with whom we are blessed.

Peace to all.

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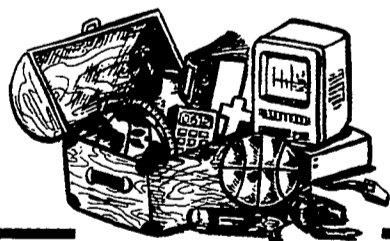
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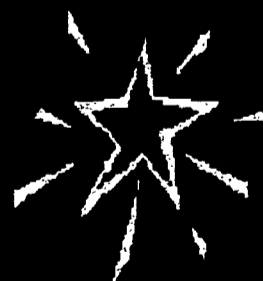
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