

Called to free gifts of all to service

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

I am so grateful to you for your prayers in support of our annual convocation of priests. It hardly seems possible that two weeks have passed since we gathered in Corning to reflect on some themes that are important not only to ordained priests, but to other pastoral ministers and our whole community of faith.

As I mentioned two weeks ago, we were to devote our time together to consideration of ordained priestly ministry in tomorrow's church and, in particular, to consideration of the need for ordained priests to work fruitfully with the variety of wonderful pastoral ministers with which God has blessed our local Church.

We centered on the God-given gifts of the community, our common call to holiness and the responsibility, which is ours, to engage the gifts of all members of the church to do the work of the Lord.

Our presenters — Sister Carroll Juliano, Brother Loughlan Sofield and Father Phil Murnion — did an excellent bit of work in stimulating the process, but the session took its life from the presence and participation of 100 pastoral ministers from our parish communities who interacted richly with the 200 priests in attendance.

We looked at training and development needed for fruitful and mutually rewarding collaboration. We considered factors that can make it difficult. We discussed some of the means available to us to make progress in this area and dreamed of ways we could deepen our capacity to advance.



A LONG THE WAY

It was a gratifying experience to hear such a wealth of ideas so freely shared. I find myself mulling them over even now. But what was even more pleasing was the beautiful openness of all of our pastoral ministers to adapt to the demands of rapidly changing circumstances.

To me, their disposition was an encouraging sign of genuine Easter optimism. They were not unrealistic about the problems we face in the years ahead, but I had a strong sense that the sisters and brothers who met in Corning trust deeply in the presence, guidance and strength of the Holy Spirit to lead us in safe paths. Also important, they are genuinely willing to join their full energy to the Spirit's leading.

In my comments to our priests during our closing session, I encouraged them to be confident about tomorrow, to be unafraid to put aside tried-and-true expres-

sions of ministry when it becomes clear that present-day pastoral needs call us in new directions. Such change is not easy for any of us, but we need truly to be open to change lest, unwittingly, we confine the communities we serve within the borders of our personal time, energy and talent.

The great majority of the priests of our diocese want to serve the church generously, even if it means some very difficult adjustments. Of that I have no doubt. That's the way they are. The challenge will come in working through all these adjustments in as productive a way as we can.

I ask you please to support this effort by your prayer and by your willingness to share your insights with the community. If the ordained stand among the people and are to be at their service, as I believe they are, it is important to know the sense of the people and their hopes for pastoral service.

In that context, let me ask you to think about and discuss questions like these in your parish: Where would we ask our priest to center his attention and energy? If he moves in that direction, what adjustments would he and we have to make so that other important areas of parish life will not suffer? How can we help one another to free the gifts of all in the community to advance our common mission? What are the resources of spirit we possess that will allow us to deal with these issues? What are the factors that hold us back?

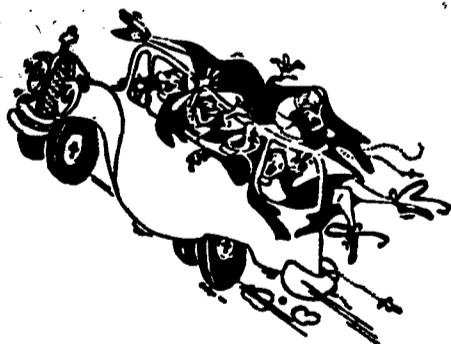
Thanks for your attention to these reflections.

Peace to all.

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