

# Children's beauty highlights reunion

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

One of my cousins beautifully summed up my experience of the Bills' family reunion when she said, "There's not a child here who is not beautiful." Those of us who had stood with her watching a large group of children playing games on a sunlit field could only nod in agreement. They truly were beautiful as they laughed, played, ran and bumped into one another.

My cousin's words were welcome and certainly expressed the thoughts of those of us who stood with her. But I noticed that her words came into our silence and invited us to even more silence as we continued to allow the beauty and activity of those little ones to touch our hearts. We remained like that for some time, but didn't speak again about the beautiful experience that drew and held us together.

My own thoughts at the moment went two ways. I thought of the day when the parents of these beautiful children were the ones romping on that same field. I also thought of my father, the anniversary of whose death is today, and of how much he enjoyed the exuberance of the children at our family reunions.

This was the 29th-annual reunion of my mother's parents, Helen and Nelson Bills, who bore 13 children. Ten survived to adulthood, and nine married and raised families. Of the 13, my mother, Grace Bills Clark, is the only one remaining. Of the spouses of the nine who married, Margaret Mitchell Bills, widow of Edward Bills, is the sole survivor. My mother was very much involved in the events of the day. Aunt Margaret, who always enjoyed the reunion, was unable to be with us this year.

About 150 people must have gathered for the day, which was filled with the opportunity to reconnect with one another, to tell stories and to rejoice in memories that renew life and enliven the spirit. I enjoyed that opportunity throughout the day and especially at the Eucharistic Liturgy, which was a rich experience of family. We had a chance to remember and thank God for the blessings we share and to pray for those who have gone before us in faith.

It won't surprise you that the heart of the joy of my weekend was the opportunity to catch up with my five gorgeous nieces. I could do that in person with Grace, Jane, Margaret and Kathleen. But I had to be content with reports about Mary Ellen, who was in Rhode Island attending a friend's wedding.

It's hard to believe that, except for Kathleen who



## A LONG THE WAY

turned 18 in April, all of them are now "twenty-something." The reunion weekend provided a special invitation to remember the ever-changing ways in which they have brought delight to my life over the years. Last week I promised to give you a brief update on their lives and times:

**Grace:** Grace started a new job in the spring — as did Jane and Mary Ellen. She has also been working on an MBA degree at the College of St. Rose in Albany. If all goes according to plan, she'll finish it next spring. We took a long walk together on Friday night. It was a great time to catch up with her. The walk tired me some, but hearing about all of the irons Grace has in the fire really exhausted me! But it was great fun, and I was able to escape the doghouse I've been in with Grace since I told you about her mascara melting when she opened the oven door to check the Thanksgiving turkey!

**Jane:** Her new job is not the only adjustment Jane has had to make recently. Not long ago she shared with the family the news that she and Scott are expecting a child in early February. We are all delighted about that. Jane's sisters have had considerable discussion about what it takes to be a really good aunt and, as you might guess, about possible names for the new baby. Jane is married to Scott Neff and, among the kids the favorite names are Stephanie for a girl and Jeffrey for a boy. If they have their way (and the

chances are slim to none that they will), we'll soon be loving a Steph Neff or a Jeff Neff! Thank God, Jane is in good health and remains her usual calm and peaceful self through all the goings on.

**Mary Ellen:** we all missed Mary Ellen at the reunion. But the brighter side of her absence was our common realization of how much laughter and fun she brings with her and of how much we miss her when she is not with us for such events. It's a joy to be with her, not only because of her sense of fun, but also for her pleasant way of inviting others to fun and laughter: Mary Ellen shares an apartment with a girlfriend and, while staying in touch with the family, seems to enjoy her new situation very much. I was honored to be a guest for dinner at her new home earlier this summer and can testify to her ability to put on a very fine dinner and to make it look easy.

**Margaret:** Margaret begins her junior year at the College of St. Rose this year. She is majoring in math and enjoys the challenges of that study a great deal. She has also been working at a local bank part time during the school year and full time during vacations. I am impressed by Margaret's ability to work hard at school and at the bank, to do her physical workouts, to lead an active social life and make it all seem so effortless. I admire her for several reasons. One of them is her ability to focus on the task at hand, get it done and then move on to the next challenge without seeming ever to miss a beat.

**Kathleen:** You first learned of Kathleen at my installation as bishop when she tried in every way imaginable to remove her father's necktie without loosening the knot. Now she is entering her final year of high school and she is as engaging and adventuresome as she was on that night more than 15 years ago. She has been working in a local pharmacy, both through school and during vacation time. Given her wit, creativity and imagination, her interest in a career in radio does not surprise me at all and I would not be surprised if one day she enjoys a national platform in radio from which to make comments like the ones I am making here. It just boggles the mind to think of the possibilities!

Thanks for your kindness in reading these words. I hope that these summer days have afforded you an opportunity to enjoy your family and that the coming Labor Day weekend will be happy for you and your loved ones.

Peace to all.

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