New year brings excitement with it

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

A LONG THE WAY

Some brief reflections, passing thoughts and questions that have been in the back of my mind lately:

• How generous are the people of this diocese! Time after time I have seen you respond to the needs of your parish or diocesan community when they have been presented to you; and I have seen you stand generously with your community as they have extended care to sisters and brothers in need.

• I am always puzzled when people say of the Catholic community that we care a lot about unborn babies and little about them after they are born. Given the history and current reality of health care and human-services agencies developed by the Catholics of this country, it seems not a thoughtful statement.

• And I wonder where those who call us single-issue people are when we're talking about a whole range of life issues like care for the terminally ill, the death penalty, the importance of quality care and education for all children and the dignity of the poor.

• If strong family life and the example of good priests are two of the strongest factors in the development of vocations to the priesthood, I wonder why we do not enjoy a higher number of candidates for such an important and rewarding vocation. We do have many great families and beautiful priests.

• I know that millions of people have raised this question before, but I still wonder why rumors spread through a community with little effort and at lightning speed while it generally requires a lot of work and considerable time to communicate the truth.

• Are we sufficiently aware that there is a notable spiritual hunger in the hearts of a wide range of people today? Our Synod process has certainly indicated that is true of us. Other research data indicates that the same is true among the general population. Will we have the will, imagination and commitment to offer good bread in response to that hunger?

• I remember well the joy of anticipation when I was waiting for each of my five beautiful nieces to come into this world. I am happy that such joy is still there as I await the arrival of my niece Jane's and her husband Scott's first child. Her due date is Feb. 3. My bet is Feb. 2 and my guess is that the new baby will be a 7 lb., 4 oz. girl.

• Katie Mantelli turned 98 years old this week. Her smile is like the sunshine – warm and for everyone. I am always curious when I meet people like Katie, what it is about their human story and their inner life that yields such a beautiful, life-giving person. I imagine you know Katie or someone like her. How do you explain it?

• When brother priests and good friends like Kevin Murphy, Tony Valente and Dave Mura experience illness it makes me much more aware than I usually am of how fragile we are and of how little control we have over such important things as life and health.

• I am always fascinated by people who are able to adapt to and grow with the challenges and opportunities that arise in their lives. One of the common factors I find in such individuals is that they have friends who allow and encourage such change. Is it possible that we can resist change in those near to us because such change means that we, too, will have to change?

• There is little more delightful in my life than to be with families or in communities in which all present are treated with respect and affection, and are invited freely to contribute to and participate in common activities. So many factors in our culture and, often, our decisions fragment families and communities. It is a joy to be among those for whom a sense of the whole is a living reality.

• These early days of 1995 find me joyful about our church. There is much happening that is enlivening and exciting and I very much look forward to living this year with you.

Peace to all.

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December, 1994

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