

Youths' support can 'jump start' system

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

If you ever feel that your system needs a jump start to get going, you might think about spending a weekend with our young people. I make the suggestion because my experience with the participants at our diocesan youth convention last weekend did just that for me.

Our theme for the weekend was "Alive in Christ," which we celebrated in song, story, prayer, study and friendship from Friday evening until Sunday afternoon.

In my opening comments to the assembly on Friday evening, I expressed the hope that all of us attending the convention could support one another in our individual and group efforts to reflect more deeply on what it means to live in Christ. My further encouragement was that each of us would approach our common theme, not in the abstract, but in light of the real questions, problems and dreams about life in our hearts at that moment.

To exemplify what I was asking of them, I shared some reflections and questions about the recent death of my mother. I told them that I believe with all of my heart that my mother is fully alive in Christ. But I added that the certainty of faith does not take away all human doubt, nor does it exempt us from the process of grieving. At the death of a loved one, we all need to go through a process that includes acceptance, adjustment and some new beginnings.



A LONG THE WAY

And I told them that Mom's death raised questions in my own heart: What did I learn from the experience about family and relationships and living? Is there anything I should change or put right or do differently? How do I make the best use of whatever number of years I may have left?

As I went through those comments, I was deeply mindful that they must have sounded choppy and awkward because I know the process of inquiry within me is far from complete. But I was also much aware that my words didn't have to be polished and complete for those kids. I knew just from the way they listened that they understood and that I could count on their support and understanding throughout the weekend.

And, sure enough, they gave those gifts to me and to one another in countless ways during our time together — in the way they treated one another, in the thoughtfulness of their participation, in the joy of their dance, in their hospitality, generosity and wisdom, in the beauty of their prayer.

As I write about those beautiful young people, I think of a pastoral letter the bishops of our country wrote some years ago about the laity of our church. That letter was entitled "Called, Gifted and Holy." The title was meant to, and does, describe you extremely well. How beautifully it also describes our younger generation of Catholics. They are sources of life and signs of hope to all of us.

Often during the weekend I thought with great gratitude about Pope John Paul II and his special love for the young. His visit to Denver in 1993 for World Youth Day had much to do with the genesis of our diocesan youth convention. I also remembered with great gratitude your commitment to our continuing Synod process, which has done much to spur renewed interest in and commitment to youth ministry in our local church.

Finally, a word of thanks to Michael Theisen, our diocesan coordinator for youth ministry; the members of our Diocesan Youth Council; and all the volunteers who worked so hard to make our convention the success it was.

Peace to all.

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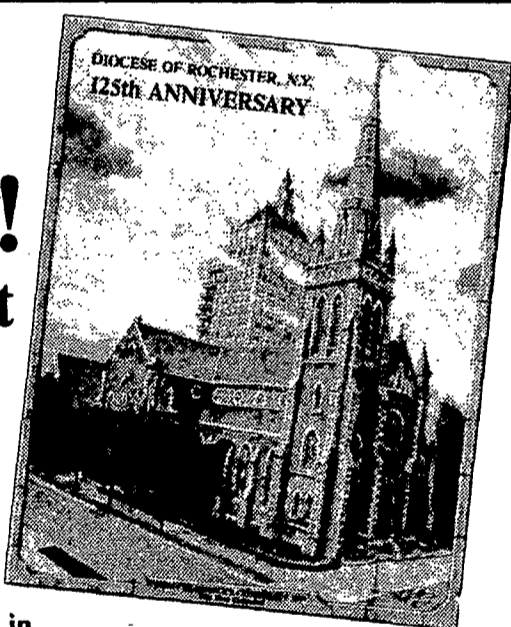
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