

Babies highlight gift of life for all

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

For me, the moment of the introduction of Julie Katherine Neff and Declan Mahady Carter was the high point of the 30th-annual reunion of the Bills' family.

These two beautiful children — four days apart in age and in their seventh month of life — would have been welcomed warmly under any circumstances. But when their parents introduced them to the assembly at the end of our Eucharistic liturgy on Saturday morning, these marvelous infants were greeted with a special enthusiasm. I think that warm greeting arose out of our common realization that we were saying goodbye to one generation and now needed to offer wholehearted welcome to a new generation.

For 30 years the descendants of my maternal grandparents, Nelson and Helen Bills, have gathered to celebrate our common heritage and thank God for the many blessings we have experienced through family. Now, with the death of my mother, all of the children of Helen and Nelson, 13 in all, have gone on to eternal life.

Believe me, we who gathered for the reunion at Saratoga State Park were very much aware of this new moment. There was some sadness attached to the awareness, but no gloom. Rather, our energy and our vision were ordered to continuity and new life. Hence the affectionate greeting offered to Julie and Declan.

Part of my own musing that day and since has been about what we have



A LONG THE WAY

experienced during those 30 years and how that experience has changed us. Photographs produced at the reunion demonstrate that we have changed physically — some notably so, others, only slightly.

Other changes are less visible, but no less real. In such a limited time, one can only catch a quick sense of them. But, when you've known people for many years and meet them again after some time apart, it takes little time to get in touch with what remains the same in them and with what is changing in them as well.

The members of my generation, now senior in the family, had some fun reflecting on our new status. One of my cousins and I were reminiscing about one of our uncles, now deceased, who gave much spirit to our early gatherings. We were remembering how very old we

thought our uncle was at that time, and realized together that both of us are older now than he was then. We allowed as how we still feel pretty young, but wondered how we look through the eyes of today's 10- and 12-year-olds. We think we know!

I had a very concrete reminder of generational differences and of how we change over years when I went home at the end of the day. It had been a wonderful reunion. But after being out in the air all day and moving about quite a bit, I was tired and ready for a quiet evening.

As I was settling down after we got home, Grace and Margaret, who both had been much more active than I had through the day, began to formulate plans about what time they would be going out for the evening and where they would go. As I was kidding them about their energy, I was very much aware that 30 years ago I would have been doing exactly the same thing.

Julie and Declan have many years of life ahead of them. How many of those years my generation will share with them remains to be seen. But when I think of their introduction to us at our family reunion, I realize that their lives are precious gifts to us and that we have a responsibility to love and support them to ever fuller life.

I am convinced also that their beautiful presence is a special invitation to each of us to cherish every moment of life God gives us — even when our knees begin to creak or when we have difficulty remembering our own middle names.

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Give them true humility, meekness, prudence, and a burning zeal for souls. Fill their hearts with the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Teach them to know and love the Church, that they may always and everywhere speak, act and think, with her, the glorious Spouse of Christ. Teach them generosity and detachment from the miserable things of this world; but above all, teach them to know Thee, and to love Thee, the one and only Eternal Priest. Amen.

We pray there may be increased vocations to the priesthood.

SEPTEMBER, 1995

DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER, NY

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