

## Faithful should focus on what gives hope

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

At this time of year, I find myself preparing for meetings with groups that come together on a regular basis through the year, but do not meet during the summer. I think, for example, of the Presbyteral (Priests') Council, the Stewardship Council, the Board of St. Bernard's Institute and the Board of Catholic Charities, which all will meet in the next few weeks.

I enjoy preparing for these meetings because it affords me a peaceful opportunity to remember and to thank God for the people who give so much time and energy to the work of these groups. They are generous, gifted individuals who express their faith and commitment to the community in service that benefits us all.

There is another reason why this late summertime preparation is helpful to me. That is because it allows me to appreciate our work together and our progress from a broader perspective, an ability I can all too easily begin to lose when post-Labor Day activities heat up. When that happens, I discover in myself a tendency to become so absorbed in the problems of the day that I can lose sight of the quiet good things your goodness makes possible day after day.

As the years of my ministry as bishop



### A LONG THE WAY

lengthen, I come to realize more deeply that one of the key responsibilities of a person called to pastoral leadership is to remind the community of all that is hopeful and encouraging and available for the community's life. Related to that is the responsibility of the pastoral leader to encourage the community in hard times to remember that better things are possible — that the community that stands together in faith can find life in and through events and circumstances we would never choose for ourselves.

These days of review and planning leave me with a sense of optimism about who we are as a community and about where we're trying to go. In every

community of our diocese, in all aspects of our life, there are generous, gifted people like yourself who are committed to doing what they can to help build the kingdom of God for the life of all.

God knows well, and I think we do too, that we are not perfect, that we need humbly and honestly to recognize our need for ongoing conversion. But that recognition is meant to give birth in us not to discouragement and despair, but to a joyful hope born of our confidence that what God has begun in us God will one day bring to completion.

As you read these words, I hope you'll become more aware than you have been of what gives you life and hope and encouragement. It's so easy to lose sight of these things amid the pressure of daily activities. I hope also that you will understand more clearly that those things that trouble you — suffering or loss or uncertainty — are not the final word, nor do they ever separate you from the God who will always love you. Indeed, they may call you to an intimacy with God that is far beyond your fondest dreams.

My best wishes to you in this time so rich in transition for so many people, especially to those in new family, school or employment situations.

Peace to all.

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