

# Women religious offer wide experience

Several weeks ago I wrote about five women religious who taught me in high school and who had a lasting impact on my life. I named each one and cited briefly the reasons why each had influenced me so positively. I also noted that although I had written of sisters who had influenced me when I was a young man in high school, I just as easily could have named many others who have had similar impact on me all through the years and to this very day.

At the end of the column, I said I believe women religious have made generous and courageous efforts since Vatican Council II to respond to the church's call to renewal. In my estimation their continued work in pursuit of that goal has been of great benefit to all of us in the church.

Let me offer some examples:

1) The church strongly encourages bishops to draw upon the wisdom of the community in their work of pastoral administration. Our church norms give some specific directions in this regard. For example, I am required to consult with our Stewardship Council on certain financial matters and with our Presbyteral Council on others. But, for the most part, it's left to the bishop and the community to work out practical, fruitful ways to work together for the building up of the Kingdom.

Women religious in our country, including those in our diocese, have taught us much about how to sort through tough issues in a peaceful way with the involvement of their membership. We are taking a major step in that direction in our Synod experience, but we still need to work on ways continually to get solid grass-roots input as we look at deci-

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the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

sions that shape our future.

2) Our Synodal process has evidenced a strong desire on the part of the people of this diocese to grow in their faith and to give witness to the faith in small Christian communities. Our women religious have a rich history in that kind of experience and have much to offer as we search for ways to implement that Synod goal.

I am hoping that the sisters' know-how will help us a great deal. Their assistance will be not so much telling us exactly how they live community life so that others can do precisely the same. Our small Christian communities, after all, will not be religious communities. Rather, the women religious will help by sharing with us the values they have learned through their continuing efforts to live a community life that brings strength, hope and encouragement to its members.

3) As we continually sharpen and refine our understanding of and commitment to the Consistent Life Ethic, I hope we will keep in mind the immense contribution our women religious have made in support of life in all of its stages. That contribution goes back to the earliest days of the church in our

country and continues with great vigor to this moment. Their history and present commitment demonstrate that when life is threatened or fragile, our sisters are there to defend its dignity by their words and with their work.

4) Last — for now, at least! — I mention the significant contributions our women religious have made and are still making to our church's understanding of the dignity of women and their full and active participation in the life of our community of faith. Recently, Pope John Paul II expressed regret that the church has not always been what it should be in this regard. I am grateful for his statement and am certain that the quiet witness of women religious was a significant factor in its development.

As we move forward with our Synod priority on the Dignity and Value of Women in the Church and Society, I am happy in the knowledge that we will continue to draw deeply on these wise and strong friends.

I thank you for attending to these words and invite you to think about the women religious you have known in your life and the impact they have had on you. If you're inclined to do so, drop me a note and tell me about your reflections. And if you have any questions about religious life, I'd be happy to ensure you receive informed-responses to them.

Have you made a pledge to the Thanks Giving Appeal yet? No? Oh, please do. Your participation will bring a charge of life to our Synod and help us do lots of good things for people all over our diocese. Thanks.

Peace to all.

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