

Parish visits inspire appreciation

There are few activities on my calendar I enjoy as much as visiting our parish communities. One reason for my enjoyment is that each visit affords me a privileged insight into the goodness of people.

Another is that every visit reminds me that, while all of our parish communities are joined by deep bonds of faith, each of them has a distinct personality. Our parishes are large and small. Some of them are financially comfortable; others struggle to make ends meet. Some have large professional staffs; others rely totally on volunteers.

We have parishes in urban, suburban and rural areas. Each one has a proud history shaped by the faith and goodness of its members and by those who have had the privilege of serving as pastoral leaders among them.

When I think about our parish communities — the deep values they share and celebrate, and the ways in which they differ one from the other — I think of my five beautiful nieces. They hold so much in common, yet each has a distinct personality that continually develops through her experience of the daily ups and downs of life.

That's one of the reasons why reunion with them is so much fun. Family gatherings allow me to note the changes in each of them, and to appreciate anew the deeper realities that unite them and support

along
the way



By BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

their adjustment to one another in the midst of life's changes.

I think of this because since I wrote last week it has been my pleasure to visit three of our 170 parish communities. Two of them are among our smaller parish communities; the third is one of our largest.

The first of the two smaller communities I visited was All Saints Parish, Lansing. I went there on the Feast of All Saints to celebrate their parish feast day and to bless their marvelous new parish center.

The second was St. Pius X, Van Etten, where on Friday evening we confirmed 13 young candidates.

The large parish I visited was Our Mother of Sorrows, Greece, where I participated in all their Sunday liturgies.

It would be a joy to tell you in detail about each visit, but that is not possible. I can tell you that each one was deeply gratifying because of the vitality and warmth I

found in each community.

All three communities bring a sense of reverent joy to their celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy. They all manifest a genuine hospitality to one another and to visitors in their midst. The three parishes show interest in and concern for the wider community, and are mindful of those in the parish who stand in special need of their care. All three enjoy high levels of significant involvement by parishioners as they deal with present realities and work to shape their futures.

Experiences like these three visits make me deeply grateful for our Synod process, which allows us all to grow because we gather for common purpose; for our Thanks Giving Appeal, which supports our capacity to pursue the values we identify in our Synod work; for the privilege that is mine both to support our wonderful parish communities and, occasionally, to call them together for purposes that require the strength of all.

I hope that you find life through your parish. But I also hope that from time to time you have an opportunity to share the life of other parish communities. Such visits can offer a special opportunity to re-appreciate the richness of our Catholic heritage and, at the same time, help us to appreciate the beautiful diversity within the Catholic family.



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