

Youths affirm vision despite violence

Since we celebrate our national Thanksgiving feast this week, I begin by offering my best wishes to you and your loved ones. I hope that the weekend will be a happy and peaceful one for all of you. And I hope that this holiday time will find all of us naming and thanking God for the blessings in our lives.

My own efforts in this regard begin with a remembrance of the wonderful young people I met over the weekend in Minneapolis at the National Catholic Youth Convention. They came from all over our nation to share and celebrate their faith, and, especially, to take a stand against the violence that is so much a part of our lives.

It was my great pleasure to participate at a working table with young people from the dioceses of Memphis, Little Rock, Philadelphia, Kansas City, Miami, Sioux Falls, Jefferson City and New Orleans. They were bright, articulate young men and women who were very much open to one another's ideas and experiences.

I would have appreciated their easy openness to one another under any circumstances. But I valued it the more in view of the fact that their initial task — not an easy one! — was to speak about their experiences of violence in their lives and/or in the lives of people close to them.

The kids at my table came from small

along the way

BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK



towns, rural areas, suburbs and cities. Not one of them had any trouble at all in naming the violence in their lives.

Not one of them had been unaffected by it. You will understand that it was no easy task for these young people to speak about such things. You also will understand that the challenge was made easier by the respectful hearing they offered to one another.

Their honest sharing reminded me of that which had taken place at our Diocesan Youth Convention in Geneva on the first weekend of August. There our young people, preparing for the Minneapolis event, were equally candid about their experience of violence in the communities of our 12-county area.

They, as did the participants at our table in Minneapolis, made me aware that none of our communities is violence-free. The violence may be quieter, more hidden in some communities than it is in others.

But it is everywhere.

If you would like to put that statement to the test, I invite you to sit down in a relaxed setting with some high school students and ask them to tell you about physical or verbal violence as they experience it in their own lives or as they are aware of it in the lives of their friends. My guess is that you will find it an enlightening conversation.

Notwithstanding the sobering content of much of the conversation at the youth convention, I came away from the gathering with a renewed sense of hope and some optimism about the future. That's because the young people who gathered there have a vision of what the world can be like, and much imagination and resolve to bring to the task of reducing violence in our society.

They know that the task will not be easy for many reasons. But they also have strong faith in the power of Christ's love and in our capacity, if we live in that love, to accomplish the impossible.

All of those young people are one reason I am happy for this national day of Thanksgiving, which invites us to be grateful in some specific way for the many gifts by which God gives us life, strengthens our hope and allows us to think about tomorrow with joy.

Happy Thanksgiving!
Peace to all.

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