

Pastoral should be studied, discussed

At a meeting this week, I was trying to convey in a concrete fashion an idea of the kind of discussions, questions and interchange I am hoping for as a result the publication of my recent pastoral letter, "From East to West a Perfect Offering," which was contained in the *Catholic Courier* of Oct. 24.

I did so by suggesting to those at the meeting that when they attend church this week they ask themselves and those seated next to them questions like these: Why did you choose to come to church this week? Why did you choose to come to this parish and not another one? What are you looking for when you come to worship on Sunday and what do you hope to offer by your presence? What sorrows and joys, fears and hopes, dreams and disappointments rest in your heart this day? How can we help you rest in God's presence through it all? And how might we help you connect all that you experience here with the flow and rhythms of everyday living?

I was trying to be as concrete as possible with my questions because some individuals at the meeting raised legitimate concerns that the language used in the pastoral letter is quite technical. I do not quarrel with that observation. Indeed, in the preparation of the document we considered this question very carefully. We made the judgment that we would use time-honored and tested terms because they provide a thoughtful, common point of departure. But we were also deeply hopeful that, as you study the letter and join in discussions of it, you will

along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

understand the technical terms more fully and see the reasons for their use.

The pastoral letter, if it is to be a successful call to study, must first be studied. That is why I want to be sure that every pastor and pastoral administrator gathers the parish staff, parish pastoral council, liturgy committee and the like to spend ample time on the document and relevant follow-up material.

In addition, I am asking every pastor and pastoral administrator to encourage parishioners to study the letter and to offer them appropriate opportunities to gather for further reflection on Sunday celebration of the Eucharist as the very heart of parish life.

This past week I received a letter warmly commending a pastor for the quality of the Sunday eucharistic celebration in one of our parishes. The writer had been invited to the parish to speak in support of the Thanks Giving Appeal. I cite some phrases from the letter to convey some sense of what the writer ob-

served: "...from the moment I arrived I was greeted by the children at the door ... the interracial friendship was obviously the core to everyone in the congregation ... the congregation's willingness to receive my message ... the fellowship of the parish ... teeming with love ... repeated reminders of our roots, not only liturgical but diocesan ... celebrating TGA efforts, CYO activities, RCIA, the Synod ... doing it all with love and dedication to the larger effort of the Church."

I enjoyed reading the letter very much because it was so hopeful. It commented on the intentional, committed effort of a particular parish community to be welcoming, inclusive, warm and celebratory. And, it illustrated in the first person what a profound impact such a commitment can have in the lives of others.

Those are the kinds of experiences and connections we would like to get people thinking about when we invite them to spend some time studying "From East to West" and talking about it with other members of their faith communities.

You may not wish to ask your neighbor in church this Sunday the questions I posed at the beginning of this column. You may not be interested in writing a letter to your pastor next week in which you share your experience of this Sunday's liturgy. But I do hope you will find your own way to contribute to this discussion. We want to hear from you because your experience IS important to us.

Peace to all.

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