

Rite embodies Lenten call to renewal

Yesterday at Sacred Heart Cathedral, God provided yet another reminder of the enduring, ever-renewing nature of his love for the human family. At 2 in the afternoon and again at 7:30 in the evening, we gathered for Rites of Election at which we formally accepted candidates for the Easter sacraments and invited them to join with us in this Lenten period of renewal and conversion.

The Rite of Election is an experience that always touches me quite deeply. Those preparing to enter our community of faith at Easter bring to the gathering an air of freshness and enthusiasm that flows into us who are privileged to be with them.

They remind us who have been Catholics for more years than we would like to count that our faith is a precious gift, a source of joy and life. Their enthusiasm is a reminder to all of us to enjoy this season as a time to look below the surface and beyond the routine for life's deeper meaning.

The variety of persons who come forward at the time of election invites us to be aware of the breadth of God's embrace. They are women and men, boys and girls, persons from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Some are well and some are ill. Some are quite well-off, and some struggle to make ends meet. Some have earned doctoral degrees, and others left school early

along the way

BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK



in life. Their diversity, visible in these and in so many other ways, is a reminder that all are called to the table.

The food of God's love is available to us, the hungry, not because of our achievements, stature or power. It is there because God is love, and God's love always flows into life.

Where the Rite speaks to me most tellingly is in the realization of how deeply God respects — even reveres — the journeys of faith, the stories of those whom God now calls to take this next step.

Think of it this way. All who gather for the rite do so for the same basic purpose and with similar hopes. Yet they come to the moment from as many different paths as there are candidates present.

All have experienced God calling them to take yet another significant step in their lives. No two have experienced that in quite the same way, but all in their freedom have decided to respond.

For me, there is something profoundly

beautiful in that mysterious, unexplainable intersection between the divine will and human freedom.

The human mind will never embrace it all. But I think it does challenge us to pray and think about such things as the dignity of every person, our call to respect one another, the power and meaning of our own graced life's story.

And so, dear friend, I renew my invitation to you to enjoy this Lent as a time of conversion and renewal. Wrapped in that larger invitation are many smaller ones. Among them:

1. To remember how you have grown and changed over the years, to think about the people, circumstances and experiences that occasioned those changes.

2. To think about the areas and the ways in which you think God now calls you to further growth.

3. To consider what you need to do and/or refrain from doing in order to make an honest and gracious response to what you identify in your response to number 2.

In the midst of all of it, please pray for and hold in genuine affection all those who were elected at Sacred Heart on Sunday and Tuesday evening; those elected at St. Mary's, Bath, on Wednesday; and those to be elected at St. Catherine's, Ithaca, this Sunday. They are gifts to us, and we should receive them with grateful hearts.

Peace to all.

Faith for all the Ages

Our perspective changes as we mature, and at every stage of life we and our children need to learn how to live our Catholic faith. The *Catholic Courier* has special pages devoted to children, parents, teens, young adults and senior citizens — pages on issues and events important to us and to our families. To keep pace with your growing faith, read the *Catholic Courier*.

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because life isn't always black & white

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An Afternoon of Sharing

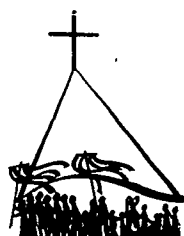
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Sunday, March 2
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\$7/person (facility fee)

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