

## Changes can lead to growth

At this time of year, I am in touch with brother and sister pastoral ministers who are thinking about changing their ministry and/or their place of residence. That is because late winter is a principal time when ministry positions are posted and people are invited to think about applying for them.

Some pastoral ministers consider such opportunities on their own initiative. They judge that they have been in one position long enough and that a change might give them a wider experience and challenge them to new growth.

Sometimes our pastoral ministers make such a decision because they think that they no longer have anything fresh or stimulating to offer to the people among whom they serve. Their intuition is that new leadership might revitalize a community by offering different perspectives and raising up new possibilities.

Other pastoral ministers think about a change because they are invited to do so by others. For example, I might ask a priest to consider a new position because I think his experience and gifts might be particularly helpful in a given situation. I might also do that if I judge that things are not working out well for him or the community in his current assignment.

I think it is fair to say that our religious communities approach ministerial changes and personnel questions in some similar fashion.

### along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

Over the years I have come to respect more deeply the different ways in which such friends anticipate, effect and deal with changes in their lives. Some welcome opportunities for change at regular intervals because they find life and new possibilities in the transition from one community to another.

Others find change an unpleasant prospect, especially if things are going well for them and their community. Their understandable attitude is that, if all concerned are happy and peaceful and if progress is being shown, why change things?

On a more personal level some express the concern that the expenditure of energy required to get started in a new place is more than they can manage.

I am also aware ministerial change has great significance for and impact on our faith communities. Your generous and thoughtful response to our strategic planning process heightens that awareness. You

remind me that our parishes react to the prospect of changes in pastoral leadership in different ways. Not surprisingly, those ways strongly parallel the varied reactions of pastoral ministers described above.

For us, who try to be people of faith, all changes in our lives — the great and the small, the chosen or the accepted — can be occasions for growth. Why? Because in loss and uncertainty, in the excitement and new possibilities change often carries, it can put us in touch with the dying and rising of Jesus.

It seems an especially appropriate spiritual exercise during the Lenten season to be in touch in a prayerful way with the changes we are experiencing in our lives at the present time:

What are those changes as best I can know now?

What do they say to me in terms of loss, uncertainty or apprehension?

What hopes for new life and greater freedom might be in them?

Have I spoken with Jesus and other friends asking for the strength and guidance I need to negotiate these changes in the most fruitful and happy way?

Can we all pray for one another as we respond to the changes we now know in our lives, and keep a privileged place in that prayer for our sisters and brothers who receive the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil?

Peace to all.

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