

# Technology offers challenges, opportunities

In my mail today came a letter from an institution for which I have great respect and to which I make a modest annual financial contribution. The first line of the inside address read, "Most Reverend Matthew H. Clark." There followed my address in the usual format. Then came the salutation of the letter: "Dear Most."

I got a kick out of the way in which something intended to personalize one letter of a large mailing had exactly the opposite effect.

It is the first time that I have been greeted "Dear Most" in a salutation. But it is certainly not the first time I have been addressed in a way that demonstrated that a letter I received was something less than totally personal. I have no problem at all with that. I know the individual who wrote to me on behalf of the institution in question. He is an extremely busy individual who could not possibly be expected to do all of the letters himself or even to proofread them for accuracy. In an ideal world someone on the institution's development staff might have caught the faux pas. But, to be honest with you, my suspicion is that they do not assign staff time to proofread such letters to donors at my level of giving. The bottom line is that I will add a little to last year's gift as planned and send it in as usual.

I choose to write about "Dear Most"

## along the way

BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK



not just because of the amusement it brought. I comment on it also because it illustrates the possible down side of a great opportunity that presents itself to our faith community. I refer to the increased use of computer and communications technology to strengthen our community and to advance our common mission. The advice of experts, what I see every day in a variety of fields, the way our kids are trained, all convince me that we will be left far behind if we do not make a serious investment of time, energy and money in this field.

We simply cannot afford to fall too far behind in this regard. To do so would be to weaken our capacity to interact within our faith community in some very important ways. I am afraid that it would also weaken our ability to engage in a credible dialogue with the culture in which we find ourselves. Both would be very bad for us.

Does that seem scary to you? Or depersonalizing? Or like a distraction that, however worthy, leads us away from our main purposes? I think I can understand such concerns. My questions are not so much with the idea or the theory of it all. I am convinced that we need to move ahead in the use of technology if we are to be credible to the generations who will follow us.

My personal question is whether I will be able to learn the new set of skills I will need if I am to be able just to keep track of what will be happening. That seems intimidating to me and it will until I actually acquire the desired skills.

My pastoral question is how best this incredible technology can be used to free us for mission, foster our growth, bring us together, personalize our lives, help us to learn all through life, enable us to use our limited resources in the wisest possible way.

What do you think about the church and this kind of technology? What opportunities do you see for us? What concerns do you have? Any specific suggestions about ways in which the use of technology can help free us for the good purposes mentioned above? Any particular cautions you would raise for consideration before we go too far in this direction? Let us know what you think.

Peace to all.

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