

Viewing changes in perspective

One of the happy events on last week's calendar was an evening celebrating the opening of a new academic year at St. Bernard's Institute. We celebrated Eucharistic Liturgy, always a beautiful experience with the community at the Institute. Following the liturgy we enjoyed a leisurely picnic supper together.

Wednesday night of this week I will be in Albany for another St. Bernard's Institute event. This time we will gather to celebrate the 10th anniversary of St. Bernard's presence in our sister diocese to the east. That agreement has been a good one for both the Diocese of Albany and St. Bernard's Institute.

I am very happy to be a part of Wednesday's program. The organizers have invited Howard Hubbard, Bishop of Albany, and me to reflect together on the church and ministry today. The format will be an informal one driven by the questions and interests of those who choose to gather with us. I do believe there will be a moderator for the program.

I find it attractive that the program does not include formal presentations. Bishop Hubbard and I will have ample time to make our comments, I am sure, but those will be ordered to responding to issues of particular interest to the audience.

Late last week I had the joy of hosting Howard during a brief personal visit. We chatted about many issues during those hours together. Some parts of our conversation had to do specifically with Wednesday's events in Albany. If my guess is right, many

along the way

By BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK



other portions of our interchange will be touched upon by those who share the night with us.

From what I have written here, I am sure you understand that we spent a lot of time reflecting on the church and our ministry within the community as we have experienced both since becoming seminary friends over 40 years ago.

We, of our generation, were in our late teens through our early 20s when the massive shift in our culture occurred in the late '50s and early '60s. It would have been hard to imagine in 1955 what the world was to be like in 1970. If you were not around in those days and are interested in the shifts to which I refer, ask someone who was. It is quite a story. At least it was for us who went through it.

Within those years of radical change came equally remarkable changes in our church. Vatican Council II began in my fourth and Howard's third year of theological studies. That four-year event marked a shift — unparalleled since the Council of Trent — in the church's self-understanding and its understandings of the world in which it is

immersed. On the head of those shifts in understanding, the pastoral practice of the church has changed in very significant ways.

So you might well guess most of us who were ordained in the early '60s developed a deep commitment to the insights that were crystallized during Vatican Council II, and to the forms that flowed from them. In my opinion they have been God-sent. I expect that in saying so, I speak for the vast majority of those who were ordained priests in that era. We know the church for what it was like before, and we loved it. But we fell more deeply in love with the reality of a renewing church and the new possibilities that opened for all of us.

Now it is the '90s. The work still goes on. Howard and I are no longer in our 20s. His next birthday will put us both in our 60s. He is in his 22nd year of service as a bishop in the church. I am in my 20th. We have seen wonderful things happen in the church because of the renewal brought about by Vatican Council II. And we've been around long enough to know that the sacrificial efforts so many have made have been touched by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We all know that progress is seldom linear and uninterrupted. We take steps ahead but there is also regression. We can get stuck. We can hurt one another. But occasions like the 10th anniversary of St. Bernard's in Albany allows a special moment to look at things in perspective, to reflect on growth and, above all, to place it all once again in the hands of the Holy Spirit.

Peace to all.

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