

# Church's leaders tackle issues that affect all

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops is in session this week in Washington, D.C. (See story, Page 4) It is good to be here with all of the members of our conference. Our association reminds each of us sometimes in very practical ways of the bonds of faith and charity to which we are called as pastors in the church. Our association also offers much that fosters good friendship, informal sharing and mutual encouragement.

I know that I have appreciated very much the concern and good wishes expressed to me by so many here at the meeting who are aware of my recent health problems. I have a sense that we all share a conviction that such kindness bears curative powers. It really does make a difference to one who is ill that others do care, do pray for the one in need.

Our agenda will involve us in a fairly wide range of pastoral considerations. This morning we discussed the question of the celebration of the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord. For several years many dioceses on the West Coast have celebrated that great feast on a Sunday. The bishops of these dioceses report very good results from that experience. This morning we passed a motion that will allow, if our vote is confirmed by the Holy See, the bishops of each ecclesiastical province to celebrate the Ascension on a Sunday. The Diocese of Rochester

## along the way

BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK



belongs to the Province of New York, along with the Archdiocese of New York, and the Dioceses of Albany, Brooklyn, Buffalo, Ogdensburg, Rockville Centre and Syracuse.

This afternoon Bishop Paul Loverde gave an encouraging report on the state of vocations to the priesthood and religious life in the United States. The Bishops' Committee on Vocations has developed, after much consultation around the country, an excellent Strategy for Vocations. We have participated in the development of that strategy and look forward to implementing it and, certainly, to enjoying the fruits of its success.

Between now, Monday afternoon, and our adjournment on Thursday morning we will deal with a number of issues: the plans, priorities and budget of the NCCB, a discussion of the role of the church in combating racism, the election of conference officers and committee chairmen,

and a pastoral plan for adult faith formation in our country.

The item in our agenda which, I believe, will draw the greatest attention will be a draft document entitled, "Living the Gospel: A Challenge to American Catholics." That document takes on a number of issues that are of great importance to all of us. It directs itself to the church's teaching about the sanctity of human life, and to the obligations we all have to defend that principle in all ways possible to us.

The discussion will not be around our belief in the sanctity of life or our convictions concerning the dignity of each person. Those are held in unanimity. Rather, the discussion, at least as I anticipate it, will center around the scope of the life issues contained in the draft and about how directly and by what means we can seek to influence the vote of Catholic legislators about these issues. Both questions carry some sensitivity and much importance. I look forward to the discussion, which should be quite thought-provoking. One of the interesting lessons one can learn here is how to deal with issues that are important to all but that people of good faith can approach in many different ways.

While in Washington I remember you with great fondness and gratitude. Peace to all.

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