

Winter challenges allow travel, conversation

I hope that you have been able to manage well the challenges of a winter suddenly turned severe on us. It's hard to remember a weather system that changed so abruptly and wreaked such havoc in so many parts of our nation.

God was good to me through it all. I was able to travel to Baton Rouge, La., and back early in the week without any difficulties. We landed in Atlanta after the severe ice storm that city experienced; we left Baton Rouge just before another ice storm swept across that state.

The occasion for that travel was a board and membership meeting of the National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry, to which I relate as episcopal liaison. As always, I enjoyed the meeting very much. It offered an opportunity to spend time with some wonderful people — youth ministers from all parts of our country — and through them with the young people who bring such life and hope to our church.

What I heard there about youth ministry only deepened my gratitude for what is happening in youth ministry in our dioceses and for people like you who so generously support these efforts.

A most delightful moment during the Baton Rouge stay was an evening I spent with Al Hughes, the bishop of Baton Rouge. He very kindly invited me to his home for dinner. I have known Al for a long time and worked closely with him for

along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

several years on one of our bishops' committees in the late '80s and early '90s.

I have always enjoyed his company, but I realized during our evening together that it was the first time we had ever shared a meal alone, and the first time we came together outside a common work agenda.

Our conversation touched on a range of pastoral interests such as the well-being of our clergy, the promotion of vocations, youth ministry, the active participation of the laity in the life of the church and how a bishop best serves the local church.

But our chat also ran through another set of issues — the kind that, details changing as people's circumstances change — are part of most informal conversations.

For example, Al was interested in the state of Cardinal O'Connor's health, and in speculation in the Northeast about succession in the archdiocese.

I, for my part, had an opportunity to ask Al to tell me about his experience of

becoming bishop of Baton Rouge after spending all of his life until then in Boston. He made that change that when he was 60 years of age. I judge that to be very young! Yet it has always seemed to me a major challenge to make a change such as Al made.

It will probably not surprise you to learn that the continuing support and encouragement of Boston friends and the genuinely warm reception and continuing hospitality of the people of Baton Rouge were significant factors in Al's successful transition to his new ministry.

Even as he spoke about his experience, I came in touch with my memories of coming to Rochester more than 20 years ago. I can certainly identify with Al in his comments about the importance of the support of friends and the hospitality of the community.

Without being able to tie all of the pieces together, I can tell you that my evening with Al was enjoyable not only in and of itself. It also came with a delightful nudge to continue to reflect on episcopal ministry stimulated by the experience another bishop so kindly shared with me. It was the kind of gift a friend can give.

I will not be writing "Along The Way" for the next two weeks. I look forward to being with you again in the *Catholic Courier* to be published on Feb. 24.

Peace to all.

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The RPO is supported in part by grants from the New York State Council on the Arts, a State Agency