

College students evince powerful faith

To hear the college students speak about their experience of service to others was most encouraging.

One spoke of being nervous at the beginning of the day and how the nervousness subsided as he connected with the people he assisted.

Another spoke of the importance of the prayer experience the students shared before scattering to their several assignments in the Rochester area.

Yet another mentioned how humbling it can be to offer assistance to people whose gifts may surpass our own.

All noted in some fashion or other that at the end of the day they had learned a lot, and that they had received more than they had given.

The wonderful young people to whom I refer gathered for a weekend retreat from the Catholic communities of several area college campuses. The theme of the retreat was "Christian Service as Ministry."

The hope was to help these gifted individuals by providing a context in which they could pray, offer service to others and share with their peers their reflections on that experience.

Why was all of it encouraging to me? One reason is the fact that the young men and women who made this generous commitment are the kind of people who get you excited about life. They are

along the way

BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK



bright and generous and witty and love to have a good time. They were not at this retreat because they had no options. They were there because they are interested in life and want to live it with zest and solid purpose. How can aging veterans like myself not be encouraged that God continually renews our faith community through such exciting individuals?

A second reason was the quality and maturity of the sharing they did following the experience. During the day they had visited the sick, helped people with their shopping, done yard work and assisted individuals with general household chores.

In the evening, they were asked to speak about their experiences — first with two or three other students and then with the larger group. As they spoke, I was aware that some important themes were emerging: how they quickly

got beyond the particular services they rendered to a sense of the dignity and worth of the people they were helping; their sense that in the giving they were also receiving, sometimes in a measure greater than they offered; their sense of the importance of prayer as a foundation for Christian service; their articulation of how such dependence on God in prayer deepens, rather than diminishes, their capacity to recognize and share their remarkable gifts.

I told them when I had the opportunity to make some comments that the quality and content of their sharing rivaled that of people in groups in which I have participated who have been around a lot longer than they have. To me, that indicates not only that they are quick learners — and surely they are! — but also that they are people of faith who are open to the challenges their faith holds for them.

A final observation: I think that all of us who shared the Saturday experience will enter this new week with a heightened sense of the importance of service. Why? Because the privileged time of retreat, I believe, helped us all to realize that Christian service in the last analysis is not about what we do for others. It is rather about how people connect with others for the benefit of all.

Peace to all.



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