

An invitation to Easter Vigil

I have come to the chapel at the Pastoral Center on this first day of spring to write this week's "Along The Way."

It is good to be here just now. It is quiet and peaceful and very relaxing. I welcome that with gratitude. Beautiful and rich as recent days have been, they have also been quite full. It's good to have a moment to absorb it all — to put it all together.

Still very much in my grateful awareness is the experience of our Rites of Election. I wrote last week about the Rite of Election we celebrated on March 12 at St. Mary Our Mother in Horseheads for catechumens and candidates from parishes in the Southern Tier.

Since then, we have celebrated four others — three at Sacred Heart Cathedral for parishes in the greater Rochester area, and one at St. Stephen's in Geneva for our friends in the Finger Lakes Region.

One of the aspects I enjoy about the rite is the moment when I offer an embrace of welcome to the newly elect. That embrace is not a prescribed part of the rite, but I have been doing it for a number of years.

I am not even sure exactly when, how or why I started doing it. But I am glad I did. Why? Because it seems a warm,

along
the way

BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK



human and appropriate way of expressing in gesture our verbal commitment to hold the elect in our prayers and our affection as we prepare for the Easter feast.

Another reason I enjoy the moment so much is the reminder it provides that God's good favor is not limited by our age, size, gender, achievement, status or ethnic origin. I embrace the tiniest of children and some huge men; women who are agile and fit, and those who need a wheelchair or a three-legged cane to get around.

It is a great source of joy to me that I have embraced persons of African-American, Korean, Vietnamese and Hispanic heritages. In short, the moment seems a constructive one for all because it reminds us that God's embrace is very wide indeed, and is always there for us.

I am very grateful to all on our dioc-

san staff and to all in Geneva, Horseheads and at Sacred Heart Cathedral who worked so hard to make the Rites of Election the joyful experiences they were for all of us.

If any of those communities could have done a better job or been more hospitable, I would have a very difficult time saying how. I thank you all most sincerely.

Mindful as I am of the strength and joy the newly elect have brought to my heart in these early days of Lent, I look forward all the more to the Easter Vigil.

On that night, our catechumens will be baptized and our candidates who are already baptized will be received into full communion with the Church. It is a special moment in the life of the Church.

For that reason, I'd like you to think about this possibility: If you have never celebrated the Easter Vigil with your parish community, why not think about doing so this year?

It is usually longer than the other Easter liturgies, but it has a special beauty and is rich in symbolism. Your participation will allow you to be intimately involved in the Christian Initiation of some beautiful people whom you will be holding in your prayers and affection all through Lent. Please think about the possibility.

Peace to you.



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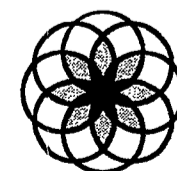
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