

Young people want to be included

Awesome. Out of sight. Radical. The cat's pajamas. Depending on your length of years, you might choose another term when you want to express pleasure about some event or person that has been part of your experience. I choose all of the above and think of many others when I reflect on our diocesan High School Youth Convention at the State University College at Geneseo last weekend.

It was truly a delight to be there. I come away strengthened in faith and renewed in hope following those days with those beautiful young people. I also leave their company with a fresh sense of the Holy Spirit's presence and action in their hearts.

They are people of faith. They are people of service. They think. They search. They love. They trust. They want to be a part of our life — sharing with us the gifts with which God has blessed them, asking that we respect their gifts and dreams and hopes for our life together.

It has long been my conviction that the hearts and souls of the young are places rich with gifts for the strength of our common life and for our service of the kingdom of God. That is why I always encourage their full, active participation in the life of our parish communities. I mean this not just with reference to youth groups, but to the whole range of parish life — liturgy, service, community events, parish consultative bodies and the like. We lose — and so do they — when we do not include them in this fashion.

I realize that every parish is different. I do not expect the increasing inclusion of

along the way



By BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

young people in parish life and activities to happen the same way in every community. But I do expect it to happen in every one of our parishes, and to happen according to an intentional plan developed by each parish with substantial participation by young people. A common note among such plans should be that young people are included in appropriate ways in all aspects of parish life for which they are gifted and properly prepared.

At Geneseo, I had a workshop entitled "My Hopes for the Church." I named some of my hopes for the young participants and for all of us. But I judged it important to elicit their hopes and dreams for the health and well-being of our church in the years ahead.

I doubt you will be surprised when I tell you they talked about some ordinary things, things much like those adults discuss when they engage in conversations about similar themes. They spoke of the importance of a sense of welcome and hospitality. They mentioned an environment in which people can be just who they are and not have to feel sorry about others looking down on

them because they are different. They expressed a desire to relate to adults in ways that would allow youths and adults to share their faith experiences with one another. They realize the importance of our Sunday Eucharistic liturgies. They want to help shape them and minister at them. Ah yes, and they would encourage openness to music that is both appropriate to worship and appealing to them.

The young ones in that room mentioned several other such interests, all of them as mainstream and reasonable as the ones I named. I can't think of a single reason to oppose any of them. Can you?

They realize, more than you might guess, that as desirable as all of these directions might be, each one of them requires a commitment of time and energy and, sometimes, of money. They also know that not all good things can be done at once. Yes, they're astute, all right, astute enough to know the difference between the normal difficulties of effecting change and a stone wall placed in the way of change.

You have been kind enough to read this far. I thank you for that and ask for a further favor. Would you pray for our young people? Would you join to that prayer, if possible, some conversation with a youth, or with other adults about the youths of the parish? Talk about how we all might do a better job to make our parish communities places where all of us are at home, where we can sing God's praises, where we can learn and serve and grow together to the full stature of Christ. Thank you very much. Peace to all.

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