

Migrants seek local friendship and support

It is always good to visit our migrant community — the women and men who work through the growing season in area fields, orchards and food processing plants. Yesterday at the Church of the Epiphany, Sodus, I presided at their regular Sunday Eucharistic Liturgy. Following the liturgy we went to the parish center for food, conversation and entertainment.

These good friends — who come from Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras — do not have an easy life. The work is hard and long. The pay is low. One person told me that an average salary is about \$600 a week. For this wage a person works 15 hours a day. If this is true, the worker does this tough work for less than \$6.00 an hour. And it is not unusual for workers to have only one day off in 20.

Some bring their little ones with them. If you are a parent, you can appreciate far better than I can what this means in terms of travel, child care, preparing meals, health care and the endless attention the little ones require. You can understand well that ordinary needs can quickly eat up their wages. That is before we even think of illness, accident or other difficulties.

If care of the family is an issue for some, loneliness troubles others. One of the workers presented me with a basket of fruit to bring home to our household. I thanked him for the kindness and enjoyed the chance to speak with him for a while. In the course of our conversation, he told me that he worked in Florida during the winter season and in Wayne County during the growing and harvest seasons here.

When I asked him if he preferred to work

along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

in Florida or here he replied, "I prefer Florida because I am closer to my family. I am very lonely here." I did not have an opportunity to speak with him at length. I regret that because I think it would have been good for both of us to have stayed at it. I know it would have been good for me to know more of his story.

For the last 45 minutes of my visit, I sat at the table speaking with some of the workers. Padre Jesus Flores from the Diocese of Hermosillo in Sonora, Mexico, and Hermana (Sister) Luci Romero, a Carmelite missionary from Michoacan, Mexico, who work with the migrant community, also were there, joining the discussion and helping me with my feeble Spanish. During that conversation I asked those gathered to tell me how we could better support them. All offered some response, but quickly looked to Sister to represent their concerns.

Hermana Luci did not talk about long hours or low-scale wages or working and living conditions that often leave much to be desired. She did not even spend much time on the fear of deportation that haunts undocumented persons. Rather, she spoke about the yearning of the migrant community, in great

majority Catholic, to feel welcome in our local church.

When I asked her to give me some examples that might give me a clear idea of what we might do to deepen this sense of welcome, she first said, "You should come to be with us more often." Then she spoke with gratitude of the generous companionship shown to the migrant community by so many of our pastors, other pastoral leaders and members of our parish communities. These efforts mean more than you can imagine to our friends from the south.

They ask us to realize that their number and their needs grow every year. This summer there are an estimated 8,000 migrant workers in Wayne County. Our friends are not asking more from people they know to be very generous already. They are asking for more friendship, sharing, support and concern from area Catholics. You understand well that all of these imply a willingness to relate as friends to those who, while in our midst, are as much members of our local church as we are.

I encourage all to be attentive to these sisters and brothers, and to be alert for ways in which we can celebrate and support their presence. In particular, I ask all of our parish communities that host migrant workers to remember that the call to be hospitable to them rests not just with pastoral leaders but with the whole community — individual parishes and our whole local church. These sisters and brothers ask for our friendship and support. It means the world to them. And wouldn't it be a terrible loss if we missed the richness of their faith and friendship?

Peace to all.



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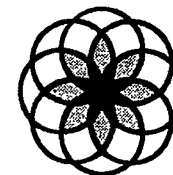
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