

## Reunion a time to relish beloved family

I had a great time at the Bills family reunion last Saturday. Descendants of my maternal grandparents, Helen and Nelson Bills, gathered at Saratoga State Park on that beautiful summer day. We celebrated in prayer and in story those who have gone before us. We renewed acquaintances with one another. And there were the very young whom we all met for the first time.

We began with the Eucharistic Liturgy. It was such a beautiful morning that we were able to celebrate in the open air. People gathered around the altar table in their folding chairs. We began by remembering the deceased members of the family for whom we wanted to pray. That was a special moment of prayer. Nelson and Helen Bills had 10 children who grew to adulthood. Nine of their offspring married and raised families. Only my Uncle Jim remained single. All of them are gone now save for Ann Bills, the widow of my Uncle Joe. We named all of them and added the names of the many in succeeding generations who have joined them in eternal life.

The rest of the day was filled with picnic food and drink, games for all, raffles and a brief meeting to plan next year's event. Most of all it was for renewing friendships and sharing memories about family life. It was a joy to catch up with people and to hear about what has been happening in their lives. And, as you

### along the way

BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK



might expect, we all look forward to noting the remarkable changes that occur among the young in the 12 months between reunions.

One moment in the reunion that I remember with special gratitude is a conversation I had with my cousin Marion Billingham, the daughter of Edward and Margaret Bills. Uncle Ed was the second- or third-oldest of his siblings; my mother was ninth. Marion came along 14 years before I did and lived in a neighboring town, so I never got to know her very well in our growing-up years. But I was always aware of my mother's affection for her. For that reason, I was delighted to hear Marion talk about my mother and their early years together. A detail I remember is that Marion baby-sat for me the day my mother brought my newborn sister, Helen, home from the hospital. Marion remembered with obvious delight that she gave my sister her first-ever at-home bath.

I remember that conversation because of the way in which it connected me to my family and my own history. An hour before, Marion and I were praying for my mother, who died six years ago at age 85. Then at age 78 and 64 respectively, she and I were conversing about a time when my mother was 28, Marion was 14 and I was 18 months old.

That moment with her was and remains for me an invitation – almost a prodding – to remember all of the years between the bath and the reunion. Just trying to imagine my mother at 28 years of age and what the world looked like to her then has been fascinating. And, somehow, it all got me thinking about being 64 and how best to invest myself in whatever number of years I may have before the Lord calls me home.

In case you are wondering, I want to tell you that all of my beautiful nieces and their children were at the reunion. I think Margaret's son, Liam, may have been the youngest person there. He's 15 months old now and quite mobile. It was a delight to watch him charge around, drinking in yet another new experience.

I am mindful that this is my last pre-Labor Day column. I hope that the summer has been good to you and will continue to treat you well as we all shift gears in the week to come.

Peace to all.



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-Fred and Margaret Spangler

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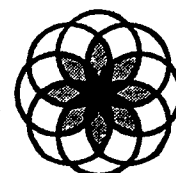
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