

Ways to be good stewards of God's gifts

Last week I wrote about new beginnings that make the post-Labor Day portion of the summer an exciting, if challenging, part of the year. In that context I mentioned the first session of our 2001-2002 Presbyteral Council, a festive opening of the academic year with the St. Bernard's Institute community, and another meeting of our Cathedral Renovation Committee. As it turned out, all of those events were as pleasing and constructive as I expected them to be.

Add to those a recent gathering of the executive committee of our Stewardship Council and a meeting of the Board of Trustees of St. Bernard's Institute and you will realize that life is returning to its normal pace. I'm happy to add that the activities I cite are purposeful and well-directed. They are signs of the vitality of our diocese and among the many sources of hope I see as we all try to be good stewards of the wonderful gifts God has given to us.

There are challenges we must meet. That is for sure. Our initial round of pastoral planning went very well thanks to excellent leadership of diocesan staff and in parish communities. Two signs of that success, at least as I see things, are the level of trust realized among those engaged in the process and the realization across the board that we have even harder work left to do.

Another challenge, one very much related to the first, pertains to our vocation

along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

picture, especially our responsibility to support vocations to lay ministry. We all need to do what we can to identify and encourage gifted men to actively consider the possibility that they may have a call to ordained priesthood.

We need also to encourage women and men whose vocation may be to lay ministry in the church. We have a long-established and fairly well understood system in place to support the initial and ongoing formation of candidates for the ordained priesthood. I am not sure that our need or our support systems for lay ministry are as well understood.

It is beyond question that in the years ahead the church in our country will depend more and more on well-trained lay ministers for pastoral service in our parishes. In St. Bernard's Institute, we have an institution of higher learning that provides excellent education in theology and ministry for such ministers. What we need to do to insure the future health and

well-being of our diocese is to understand and support the work of SBI as well as we can.

This means strengthening SBI's financial condition in every way possible to us. And it means recognizing our need to invest substantially in the initial and ongoing formation and the just compensation of women and men whose vocation is to lay ministry in the church.

We all know lay ministers in the church whose presence and ministry we treasure. But my judgment is that we have not yet come to a common understanding of the commitment we owe to them and to their successors if we are to maintain the high standards they are setting.

Our lay ministers do not look to make a fortune from their work. They do rightly look for decent and just wages for themselves and their families. I mention this not because you disagree, but to signal our need seriously to commit ourselves to meeting this challenge.

There are many other things to pray, think and be busy about if we are to be good stewards of the gifts God has given to us, if we are to be faithful servants and builders of the kingdom. We'll get to more of them in the weeks ahead. In the meantime, you have my thanks for your faithful witness to God's living presence among us and for your generous support of those in need.

Peace to all.

MISSION NEWS

“John's work needs the priest to complete it, but there is no doubt that the priest and the parish are in great need of John.”



Bishop Arap Korir of Eldoret is speaking about John Gicheru (pictured), a catechist for this East African diocese. John travels throughout the diocese

on foot or by bicycle to teach children about Jesus, visit the sick and prepare people for the Sacraments. The Bishop also noted that his diocese is in great need of the Propagation of the Faith.

“We would be very weak in many ways without your prayers and financial assistance, and we are very appreciative and very grateful.”



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