

Meetings inspire much reflection

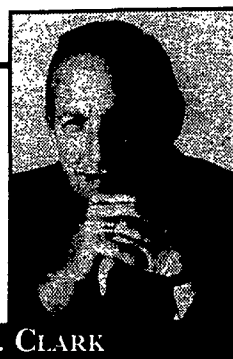
I am writing to you from Washington, D.C., where I am participating in a meeting of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. You may recall that we meet here every November, and that we meet in a different city every June. Last June we met in Atlanta. In June of 2002 we'll travel to Dallas for our session.

Washington is the second stop on my travels this week. The first was at Baltimore, where I offered a workshop at a convention sponsored by the National Pastoral Life Institute. I was asked to offer some thoughts on a practical theology of priestly ministry today. The two-hour experience was an enriching one for me. I got to share some ideas about a theme that is very important to me. More important, I had the privilege of exchanging ideas about this topic with the 60 who participated. Most were priests but also present were a few women religious, at least two lay women and a couple of permanent deacons.

The folks at the convention came from all parts of our country. They are deeply committed to their faith and quite excited about the life of the local communities from which they come. At the same time, they were searching for more, realizing that God is always calling us to something deeper. I am always impressed by such company. Their lively faith gives me life. The stories they tell about their local churches both spark my admiration for them and make me more grateful than ever that I can serve among you.

along the way

BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK



Here in Washington, in quite a different way, I find strength in the communion I enjoy with the bishops of our country. They come from every state in the union and from widely divergent sets of circumstances. Some bishops of our conference serve the great urban centers of our nation; others come from sparsely settled rural dioceses. Some come from areas of the country that are experiencing rapid growth; others from areas whose population is stable or even decreasing.

Demographic and economic differences among the dioceses of our country are not the only ones that make life interesting here. There are also notable differences among the bishops. There is among us a notable range in theological thought, pastoral approach and priorities.

At times that can be frustrating. There is a part of most of us, I suppose, that wishes everyone else thought like we do. But, over the long haul, it is a blessing that we do have differences that need to be worked out in open discussion. It has been my experi-

ence that our community and the USCCB are enriched when we have a forum in which we state our honest views, listen respectfully to one another and search together for the best way to honor our great tradition of faith. I am grateful to be part of that in so many different ways as I minister as a bishop in our church.

I suppose I am especially aware of how precious our communion of faith is to me in light of the schism we have experienced in our local church. I dearly wish it had never happened and I pray daily that it might someday be healed. But it has happened. I just hope that this difficult reality leads us all to continued thought and prayer about what it means to live in the communion of the Roman Catholic Church. We have our faults and failings, to be sure. But, we also have a tradition that roots us in life. It nourishes and heals. It puts us in touch with life's deep meaning and helps us to cope with its complexities. Our faith joins us with those who have gone before us. It bonds us with our family of faith all over the earth.

September 11—so many tell me—has led many of us to be in touch as never before with life, its purpose and what we mean to one another. It has impelled us to review our values, reconsider our priorities and think about new ways of living. I am very grateful that we are part of a faith family that allows us to support one another in faith and in the good works we do to build up the kingdom of God.

Peace to all.

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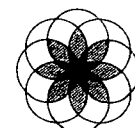
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