

Sisters' lives bonded in two cultures

Last week I wrote about a few of the people we met and some of the things my niece Grace and I did while visiting our Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester in Brazil. And, I tried to convey to you some sense of their commitment and the scope of their work. The story is a rich one. It brings strength and encouragement to the people our sisters serve. It deepens and extends the life of our local church.

This week, a few reflections on the Brazilian experience.

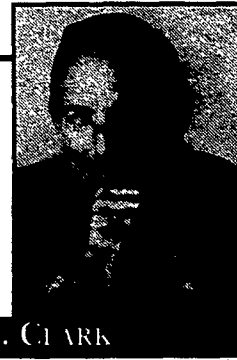
1. The sisters on several occasions asked me to express to you their gratitude for the financial, spiritual and moral support you have extended to them since they were missioned to Brazil in 1965. Since then, your generosity has helped sustain them and their work among the people of Brazil. Most of you have done that through generous participation in our annual diocesan mission collection. Others of you have done it through personal initiative and parish programs. You can be sure that the sisters and the people they serve are very grateful for all that you do on their behalf.

2. I admire these women very much. They are in a culture much different from ours, at a great distance from their family and their congregation. On the one hand, they want to honor those life-long bonds; on the other, they wish to share as much as reasonably possible the hopes and dreams, sorrows and struggles of their Brazilian communities.

You will agree that maintaining and nurturing such a network of relationships is not an easy task. People have limited amounts of energy and time. Both tend to be absorbed by the people and tasks closest at hand.

Yet the sisters in Brazil commit themselves to

along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

keeping alive their relationships with people at home and with their congregation; and are grateful that the commitment is reciprocated by their sisters, families and other friends at home. As I write these words, I realize they mean to express something we all know yet sometimes forget: Good, solid, loving relationships take much commitment and a ton of hard work.

All agree that e-mail is a godsend to them!

3. I have referred often to shifting vocation patterns and changing pastoral needs as they apply to our diocese. I do so out of the conviction that we need to deal with the reality in front of us, rather than ignore our problems or try to re-create a past that is gone forever.

Consider this: The Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester started their mission in Brazil in 1965. Since then 31 sisters have served there. Today there are 12 Sisters of St. Joseph on the mission. Eight of them are from Rochester; four are Brazilian women. The latter four are the youngest in the group.

You can just imagine some of the questions such a shift raises when the sisters deal with issues like the recruitment and formation of new members, and the bonds that unite the

congregation especially in light of the very small number of women entering religious congregations here. How best to recruit and train new candidates? How most appropriately to honor their respective cultures while living out the charism of the congregation and deepening its unity?

I do not know the answers to these questions, but have every confidence that our sisters will find the way.

4. The trip was a reminder of the deep things we share with our sisters and brothers in faith everywhere and all through the generations. It also made me newly aware that all local churches are embedded in a particular culture with all that that means in terms of blessings and challenges.

As I was privileged to share some small part of life in the Brazilian church, I thought often of how much we have to share with and learn from one another — even if not one penny flowed in either direction.

The challenge is to find ways to share that life. Our sisters do it on a daily basis, very much conscious that they have their feet in two worlds. We all know that we are united in our prayers and in those special moments — all too rare — when we see a chance to talk to one another about our experience.

5). Lastly, I express my personal gratitude to our sisters for allowing Grace and me to be a part of their lives for a few days. They were unfailingly generous and kind to us. They were a loving reminder to me that we are all missionaries by virtue of our baptism — called to proclaim the good news by our words, actions and the very fabric of our lives.

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