

Bishops considering variety of issues

This week I send a quick word from Washington, D.C., where I am attending the fall meeting of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

We just finished our first day (Monday) and will be in session until Thursday noon. There seems little doubt at this point that we will be fully engaged these days. Several important matters claim our attention.

The center of gravity of our session — and the focus of media interest — will be our consideration of the Joint Commission's recommendations concerning the norms the USCCB developed in Dallas last June regarding the sexual abuse of children by clergy. We began that consideration today and will not complete it much before we adjourn on Thursday.

I can tell you now that there will be no change in our commitment to protect our children and to be sure that no bishop or priest who



Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Along the Way

does so will ever have a chance to repeat the offense. Improvements will include clear and explicit protection of clergy from false or fictitious allegations of abuse and, in any case, a process that respects the rights of all involved, alleged perpetrators included.

While continuing work on this painful issue will take a good portion of our time and receive much attention, it is not the only matter of substance before us these

days. A couple of examples: we hope to complete a statement, jointly developed with our Mexican counterparts, commenting on the condition of migrants to our country from Mexico, and our mutual pastoral responsibilities to them. We will also be doing some serious work on response to the needs of the poor and our responsibility to ensure that all have a full place at the table of the human family.

Although our General Assembly did not begin until this morning, I came to Washington on Friday evening. Our Administrative Committee met on Saturday to refine the agenda for the full body and to decide on the processes by which we would handle the sexual-abuse matter.

On Sunday, I participated in an enriching workshop on young-adult ministry. It lasted for nearly three hours, but seemed to go more quickly than that — probably because of the importance of the topic and the quality of the presenters. A panel of young adults, another panel of those engaged in the ministry and two experts in the field interacted with us. We have been working on this theme at home. I look forward to telling co-workers about the experience and also sharing with

them some of the resources made available to participants.

Two other commitments will round out this week. One is a meeting of the bishops' Committee for the American College at Leuven, Belgium. I wrote recently about my visit to that seminary on behalf of the committee and will have a chance to speak about the experience during the USCCB meeting. This will be my last meeting with the seminary group. After six years of service, my term has come to an end. I will miss that direct association, but will maintain my interest in and support of that seminary program.

The second remaining responsibility is a meeting of the bishops who serve as liaisons to the National Association of Catholic Chaplains. This is an organization in which the bishops have deep interest. More and more often, lay persons are serving as chaplains in health-care institutions. The NACC is deeply interested, as are the bishops, that these women and men be as well trained and strongly supported as possible.

I enjoy the work here and the wonderful association with old friends. Even so, I'll be glad to get home.

Peace to all.



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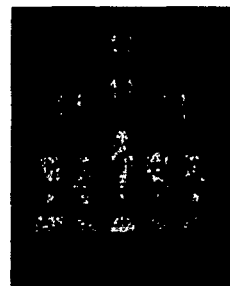
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