

Tioga excels in planning process

Some of us have been privileged to attend — and great numbers of us have seen on television — the great outdoor liturgies celebrated by Pope John Paul II during his visits to the nations of the world. They are impressive in so many ways and offer us an opportunity to reflect on various aspects of the church's life: its diversity, its emphasis on community, the richness of its symbols, and its orientation to the service of those in need.

Yesterday, I had an experience akin to those of John Paul II, and for it I thank nearly 1,000 girls and boys, women and men from our Tioga County parishes. These parish communities gathered at the Hickories town park in Owego to celebrate a significant step in their county-wide pastoral-planning process — their movement to become one canonical parish with several worship sites all served by one pastoral team.

The parishes of St. James, Waverly; St. Francis, Catatonk; St. Margaret Mary, Apalachin; St. John the Evangelist, Newark Valley; and St.



Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Along the Way

Pius X, Van Etten are merging to become Blessed Trinity Parish, which also is clustered with St. Patrick, Owego. The process is not totally complete, but it is close enough to completion that the communities wished to come together to thank God for blessing their work to date and to ask God's grace for what is yet to be accomplished.

The celebration at the park was deeply moving. A splendid choir and musical group helped us to express our praise and thanksgiving. There

was attention on the importance of joyful and reverent movement in all phases of the liturgy. All gave loving care to those with special needs. Children were active in the liturgy in appropriate and enriching ways. People attended with obvious interest to the sights they saw and the sounds they heard all around them. The circumstances made the orderly and reverent distribution of the Eucharist a challenge, but those who prepared the celebration met that challenge beautifully.

I cannot say enough good about that liturgical experience. I took great encouragement from the strong faith of the people and from their joyful spirit. They were there with concern for one another, and realized how much they and all of us owe to the mercy and grace of God.

The spirit manifested in the liturgy yesterday was much like the spirit they have brought to the pastoral-planning process. They have tackled the difficult questions with vision and courage. And through the process — precisely because it

brought them together in new ways — they have grown in respect, love and trust for one another.

That does not mean that there have not been tough moments, or times when those involved did not need to step back, take a deep breath and start afresh. If you promise not to tell anyone, I'll whisper that there also were times in the process when they were angry with the bishop — and, I must confess, not without reason.

But they have done wonderful work — work that they beautifully offered to God yesterday. Through these written words I want to repeat the thanks I expressed yesterday — to pastors, pastoral administrators, parish staff and volunteers past and present, and all of the people. And I would like to add a word of thanks here to a person I intended to thank yesterday but forgot to mention. That is Karen Rinefierd from our diocesan Pastoral Planning Office, who serves as liaison to the Tioga planning group.

Peace to all.

The Lord Hears the Cry of the Poor...



Each morning, the poor children of ESPWA homeless shelter in southern Haiti gather together to lift their voices in prayer to the Lord. Your donations will help Theo's Work, Inc. provide nutritious meals, medical care and education for these needy children. Let them add you or your loved ones to their Daily Prayer List. Give these children the gift of hope when you give this thoughtful gift of prayer to your family or friends!



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