

Southern Tier visit nourishes faith

On this last day before Lent, I bow in gratitude to the faith communities in the southeastern section of our diocese with whom I spent most of the last three days — All Saints Parish in Lansing, St. Catherine in Ithaca, Immaculate Conception in Ithaca, and members of the Catholic communities of Cornell University and Ithaca College.

My gratitude goes to them because the events in which I participated were important reminders to me of the communion of life to which we are called, and to which we are meant to contribute.

Let me offer some concrete examples of how that happened:

1) **Weekend liturgies:** I presided and preached at three weekend liturgies — on Saturday evening at All Saints and twice on Sunday morning at St. Catherine. In every case, I noted and was deeply nourished by the engagement of the ministers and assembly in the mysteries we were celebrating. The readings were beautifully proclaimed and, because of that, those in the assembly were deeply attentive to what they heard. In similar fashion, there was a vitality to the liturgical music. Two adult choirs and one children's choir en-



Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Along the Way

riched our prayer. The cantors in every instance drew the assemblies to prayer. As I observed it, their musical dialogue was mutually enriching for them. It was for me, too.

The enthusiasm, the radiant excitement of the young altar servers was delightful. It is so good to observe that their communities encourage their participation by good training, ongoing support and generous encouragement.

At one of the liturgies it seemed, until the very last minute, that one boy of 9 or so years of age would be the only server. I asked him if he was OK with that. In response he indicated that he is accustomed to multi-

2) **Parish events:** Part of the

evening at All Saints was a dish-to-pass supper in the parish center. I have always maintained that it is at such affairs that one enjoys the best food in the world. No exception here.

But the food, great as it was, took second place to the spirit of the event. I had the pleasure of sitting next to a young man who told me he had recently been participating in the life of the community after being away from any church group for 17 years. I asked him what drew him back. He turned to his left where a young woman sat, and said with a great smile on his face, "She invited me." The young woman triggered his return, but the young man added that, once there, he became deeply impressed by the life of the community. Something very important is happening in his life because others cared for him. I will be curious to follow his continuing journey.

A second event was a Mardi Gras-type celebration organized and carried out by the middle-school age group at St. Catherine's. This event, held after the 9 a.m. Mass on Sunday, was designed for fun and celebration but also to draw attention to two causes selected by the children: the prevention of cruelty to animals and the support of endangered children.

The kids had games, raffles, face painting, an information booth, a bake sale and raffle to raise funds. All these events tied into the outreach in some way. I had a wonderful time. But what impressed me so

much was the level of engagement among the 200 or so people who were present. It was a pleasure to observe the way in which adults of all ages were drawn into something important by the creativity of children.

3) **Confirmation:** Last night candidates, their families and friends from the five communities mentioned above gathered at St. Catherine's for confirmation. Once again all ministers and assemblies present enriched the liturgy by their presence and active participation. The particular feature of the celebration that most fed my prayer was the way the diversity of the assembly drew me to an awareness both of the diversity of our church and of the deep realities that make us one.

Some examples: I confirmed a 7-year-old and a woman just a bit younger than I am. One candidate, a woman from Italy, is a professor of mechanical engineering at Cornell University. Several candidates are elementary school students. There were people in the assembly who came from Hungary, Korea, Italy and Canada.

For all of the above, I am most grateful to everyone from these five lively faith communities.

4) **One final note of congratulations and thanks:** Once again to a parish in the Southern Tier. You may be aware that Father John Mulligan, pastor of Sacred Heart Cathedral, invited all of the youth groups in our diocese to prepare a decorative plywood panel to adorn the construction fence now surrounding our cathedral property. The idea is to remind people that the cathedral is the Mother Church of the diocese and so, in a special way, is home to all.

Father John has had a very positive response to that request and now the first sign is in place — a bright and beautiful one prepared by the youth group at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Elmira. Great job kids! Many thanks.

Peace to all.

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