

Reflections

by the
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How to describe the life of a diocese?

As you know, one of the requirements for the visit by Bishops with the Holy Father every five years is the preparation of a report on the life of a diocese. It consists of responses to specific questions in almost every area of Church life. It took a great deal of time to prepare this report which is made up of facts, statistics, numbers, etc. However, when I returned home from Rome, I reflected on what perhaps is another way in the life of a local Church can be described.

One of the requests I have made of pastors for the past four years has been to share with me the names and addresses of individuals and families who experience a baptism, a marriage, a death or a wedding anniversary - or some other significant event in their lives. On one or two evenings a month, I take the time to prepare letter to those individuals and families and I try to add a personal note. When I returned home from Rome, a great number of letters were waiting for my signature and a short note.

As I sat down to catch up on these letters, I became very aware of the real life of a diocese - the life which takes place in those significant moments of human experience when we celebrate God's presence through sacraments and liturgy. The real measurement of the vitality of life present in the Church is not found in financial statements or the number of buildings which comprise a parish plant. Rather, we measure the life of the Roman Catholic faith community in our contact with the Lord through liturgy, prayer and sacraments.

Each month as I write letters to people of our Diocese, the whole panorama of human and religious experience unfolds before me. One can't help but be overjoyed when you write a letter of congratulations to parents on the occasion of the baptism of a child and the priest adds a note saying, "This couple has been waiting for a child for ten years." Or on the occasion of a death, you discover that the deceased has been suffering a long, painful illness and the family of the deceased has shared tremendous faith, hope and courage as a result of the experience.

Such human experiences are definite high points in our awareness of God's presence. But God's presence is not restricted to isolated moments. God is present in every action, thought and encounter we experience if we allow space for God to enter our lives. As thousands of people come together these weeks for RENEW, we are given the opportunity to reflect on the presence of God within our lives through His Word and Sacrament. This is a great gift being offered to us here in the Church of Eastern Montana. I pray that as many people as possible will be a part of RENEW.

As I travel through Eastern Montana, I am very much aware that the Church is alive and well. This life comes from that basic desire of people to be in contact with the Lord. May we never take that contact for granted. May we invite others to be part of that experience.

Five years from now when I visit the Holy Father again, I just might bring the listings of those special moments of human experience when people sought the presence of God. They reflect the real life of the Church. Thank you for making such life possible.