



## In Joy and Hope

by

Archbishop Thomas J. Murphy

### To Travis, Michelle, Catherine, Toni and Andy

When people ask what I am doing most evenings during April and May, I always respond enthusiastically that I spend most weekday evenings, and weekends as well, celebrating confirmation with young adults here in the Church of Western Washington. I have to admit that these celebrations of confirmation are much different than my original experiences in Eastern Montana, where the number of candidates in each parish were often less than 10, and even one or two on occasion. The small classes gave me the opportunity to meet each of the candidates and to call them by name. As you might expect, this personal contact with young people was an enriching experience for me, and I hope it was significant to the young people with whom I celebrated this sacrament.

Recently, I had the wonderful opportunity to celebrate confirmation with five young adults whom I had met previously, and whom I could call by name on several occasions during the confirmation liturgy. For me, it was a wonderful experience of liturgy which emphasized the personal contact with five individuals in the midst of a community. And yet, these five young people represent the hundreds of young adults who are celebrating the sacrament of confirmation in the spring of 1993.

#### **The challenge of confirmation**

Young people who prepare for and request the sacrament of confirmation are an impressive group. They usually take part in a program which emphasizes a review of their faith, a retreat, and a commitment of service to the community. It is in the best sense of the word the completion of their initiation which began at baptism and which has been nourished in the Eucharist. In meeting these young people, I am impressed with how serious they are in the commitment which they are making. For so many of them, it is more than a ritual or a celebration in which they are expected to take part. Rather, it is the personal decision to seek an adult appreciation and development of their faith.

Religious values are not the most popular option in our society or culture today. Yet, again and again, I discover that young people are looking for "something more." It is far too easy to dismiss young people as being consumer-oriented and self-seeking. I believe that if we have the courage to present young people with the challenge of the Gospel through our teaching and example, we would be amazed at their response.

#### **The importance of being personal**

My experience with Travis, Michelle, Catherine, Toni and Andy made me very much aware of how important it is to relate to young people as distinct individuals. Like all of us, young people enjoy being called by name. In fact, when you look at the ministry of Jesus, his style was always to call people by name. Calling people by name gives us the chance to know them as distinct individuals with unique gifts and talents.

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## To Travis, Michelle, Catherine, Toni and Andy

As adults and parents, it is so important to recognize young people as individuals, to know their strengths and weaknesses, to appreciate their hopes and dreams. Young people today are preparing to be the leaders of the church and the community of tomorrow. It is so important to recognize them and appreciate them as unique and gifted human beings who can and will make a difference.

### **And thanks to the 'Joni's' too**

With each confirmation group, there is always one adult individual who has touched not only the minds of the young people, but also their hearts. For Travis, Michelle, Catherine, Toni and Andy, that person was Joni. She was their confirmation minister, but she really became the friend, the mentor, the person who shared her faith with the next generation.

It is so important to recognize the "Joni's" in our church today. So many of them are volunteers for whom this ministry with young people is a commitment in love and hope for the future. May I express my gratitude and appreciation to the "Joni's" in the Church of Western Washington. You share a magnificent and wonderful fight which makes such a difference in the lives of young people.

### **A moment of grace**

When I anoint the foreheads of young people at confirmation, and extend my hand and a greeting of peace to them, I look at them straight in the eye and I deliberately hold their hand until they look back. It might be but a moment's eye contact, but each time it happens, my hope for the future is renewed.

It is pretty obvious that I believe in young people today. I believe we have the rare opportunity to have an impact on their lives if we dare to believe in them, to trust them, to listen to them. They are the best resource we have. May we appreciate this resource to the fullest. So thank you to Travis, Michelle, Catherine, Toni and Andy and the hundreds of others who are being confirmed this spring. And thanks to all the "Joni's" in our church as well. May God's grace and peace be yours.