

In the Heartland

Experiencing and Passing on the Faith

For nearly a year, the Presbyteral Council along with our regional gatherings of priests have been discussing the growing need to maintain opportunity for passing on the faith particularly among our adolescents, the young Church.

Several steps have been taken in order that this might be more easily accomplished. Beginning in July, the sacrament of Confirmation will be administered to sophomores or juniors throughout the Diocese of Des Moines. I am grateful to the religious education leaders in our parishes who have been preparing for this transition which will take place over the course of the next couple years.

At the same time, our parishes have been introducing or upgrading their high school faith formation programs so that they provide programming for the four years of high school. Essentially, this involves a two-fold approach – youth ministry and catechetics or learning about faith and religion. The diocesan office of faith formation reports that already this past school year there were 500 new participants in our parish based high school education/formation programs and 55 new adult catechists involved in this important ministry.

The most recent step taken to strengthen the ministry to our youth and families was the adoption by the diocesan Presbyteral Council and approved by me is a policy governing the scheduling of Wednesday evening and Sunday morning activities. Basically, the policy states there are to be no scheduled events apart from faith formation on Wednesday evenings after 5:30 pm as well as Sunday mornings until 1:30 pm.

The reason for this is to give priority to our faith, its importance in the lives of our youth and families and the need to have the requisite time in order to provide for these activities throughout our communities. There remains ample opportunity for our youth to participate in the myriad of activities that seemingly consume their days. Careful and coordinated scheduling should provide more than ample time to engage these pursuits.

This approach should also free up some invaluable time for our families to spend much needed unstructured time together and provide opportunity to have a pause in our often frantic daily lives.

I thank the priests, school administrators and our youth catechetical leaders and formatters for their advocacy and their formulation of this policy. Once implemented and then more importantly, experienced, I believe it will be a great blessing to our families and Church communities.

Visit to Holy Land

As a part of my role as Chair of the United States Bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace, I had the opportunity to visit the Holy Land from April 28th to May 5th.

It was an exceptional opportunity to utilize part of the days to be a pilgrim – celebrating Mass at the Holy Sites of the Birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, at his crucifixion site of Calvary and his resurrection at the Holy Sepulchre. Coming during the Easter season, they were particularly inspirational insofar as Jerusalem, in particular, also was the site of Pentecost from which location the Church took wings and has come to embrace even us in her life and ministry.

At each of these sites, I prayed particularly for the Church of Des Moines, that we may never lose focus of the centrality of Jesus and the paschal mystery, the death and resurrection of Jesus, as the core mysteries of our faith. These realities cast light on the continuing paths of our individual and communal lives.

The other dimension of my trip was to meet with religious representatives in the Holy Land. I visited with Catholic leaders, Jewish religious leaders and representatives of the Palestinians which included visits to the West Bank and Hebron and Gaza. Currently the West Bank and Gaza are being occupied by Israel.

Unfortunately, the “settlements” and security measures which the Israeli's have undertaken in the West Bank and Gaza are in some cases in violation of international law. They are also creating avoidable tensions and limiting the possibilities of a two state solution of the two peoples which is widely advocated in the international community. I invite your serious prayer that both sides pursue a path that honors the dignity of every person and achieves authentic justice.

Caring for our Retired Sisters

An individual in the diocese recently contacted me regarding retirement assistance by the Diocese of Des Moines for our religious sisters.

As became so evident in the celebration of the diocesan centennial, we owe an enormous debt of gratitude to our Sisters who founded and staffed our hospitals and our schools. They assisted in religious education and reached out to the poor and disadvantaged in service and advocacy in the name of justice. Indeed, we owe them an enormous debt of gratitude.

In terms of our provision for retirement benefits, I am happy to report the following. In 1988 a National Collection for the benefit of retired religious was begun. To date, \$643,842,019 has been donated throughout the United States. The generous faithful of the Diocese of Des Moines have given \$2,360,361.

In addition to these funds, many communities of Sisters have considerable resources for retirement provisions because of the sale of properties that were used in mission e.g. hospitals, education institutes, etc. which were originally donated by the people of God

for these purposes but can no longer be sustained by the religious orders because of the lack of personnel. In addition, a significant proportion of the Sisters benefit from social security.

Indeed, the Sisters are very worthy of these considerations and we are most grateful to all who honor and assist them in their retirement years.