

## **BISHOPS**

I received four invitations to ordinations and/or installations of bishops this month, two in Pennsylvania and two in Michigan, including my home Diocese of Saginaw. Such occasions always take me back to my own ordination as Bishop of Altoona-Johnstown. I was reminded recently by one of our priests that I have served this Diocesan Church as bishop longer than any of my six predecessors. That, certainly, gives me pause for thought!

Bishop Howard J. Carroll had the shortest term, that being two years (1958-1960). The longest term of episcopal service (before me) was claimed by Bishop Richard T. Guilfoyle at 21 years (1936-1957). If we count time of being administrator, Bishop James J. Hogan would have tied that (1966-1987). I have now completed 22 years plus. My home Diocese of Saginaw has had three bishops during that same period of time.

I also have the distinction of being the first to be ordained in the Diocese for the Diocese. And, as I prepare to hand over the responsibility of shepherding this very fine Diocesan Church, my mind turns to things that I consider yet undone. But more importantly, I wonder if the Lord is pleased with what has been done.

It would have been nice to pass over to the next Diocesan Bishop a greater number of seminarians preparing for the priesthood. However, I have to remind myself that it is the Lord who extends the call, not I. It would have been nice to pass over to the next Diocesan Bishop a diocese that is building new churches and schools. However, that is not the complexion of the Allegheny Mountain area of Pennsylvania at this period of time.

On the other hand, while we have a lesser number of priests, we are able to provide regular celebrations of Mass and the Sacraments for all of our Faithful, thanks to our reconfiguration of parishes. While we have had our share of abuse cases, we have dealt with them pastorally and appropriately. While we do not have surplus funds like many other dioceses, we are not bankrupt and the Faithful continue to support our various diocesan ministries, as well as the parish faith communities of which they are a part. And, while the mountains and valleys make every area of our Diocesan Church unique to the others, a Liturgy that is becoming more and more uniform unites us, which it is intended to do.

As I have mentioned on occasion, I did not come to make life more difficult for others; Clergy or Faithful. And, yet, I know that I have done that. Such is the nature of tough decisions, made for the common good of the Faith Community. Someone always gets hurt. Or, better put, someone always feels imposed upon.

For me personally, it has been a great 22 years (so far), despite the challenges that awaited me. As we know, one cannot have the peaks without the valleys. I have been blessed by the Lord's call to be your Diocesan Bishop. Your prayers, support, and understanding have been my strength and encouragement. In one more year, I will be 75. That is the age at which bishops submit their letter of resignation from the responsibilities of overseeing a Diocesan Church to the Holy Father, as mandated by Church law. Your gift to me is the reality of being able to hand over to the next Bishop of Altoona-Johnstown a community of believers who, though varied, have a strong faith and a genuine commitment to the Church.