

# Council representatives favor further study of Saginaw model

By Teresa A. Parsons

Last Saturday's joint meeting between the three diocesan consultative bodies was a day of discoveries.

Representatives from the Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC) and the Priests' Council who gathered in Geneva November 22 learned that members of the Diocesan Sisters' Council no longer consider themselves a consultative body.

Several sisters' council representatives noted at the meeting that through a recent discernment process, members of the group decided that although they plan to make recommendations when appropriate and when requested, consultation is not their primary role.

"I think the members felt that they were not in reality a consultative body," said Sister Muriel Curran, SSND, diocesan vicar for religious. "I think this was a healthy acceptance of that reality in order to get on with what we're really about."

Members of all three councils were surprised to a lesser degree by how much they didn't know about one another's purpose and function, and even about the history of their own groups.

Tracing the development of all three diocesan councils at their first joint meeting in nearly five years was the DPC's former executive secretary Judith Kollar, currently the diocesan director of continuing education.

"I wish we could have heard this when we first came on (the council)," one DPC member said after hearing her summary of the history of consultation in the Diocese of Rochester.

It was no surprise, however, that in their evaluations at the end of the meeting, members of all three councils favored further study of the model of consultation used by the Diocese of Saginaw, Mich., and its possibilities in Rochester.

Barbara Walkley, a consultant to Saginaw's Diocesan Council for the past three years, outlined the history and structure of Saginaw's council at Saturday's meeting. In contrast to Rochester's separate consultative groups, she explained, the Diocese of Saginaw, Mich., has a single 24-member Diocesan Council. To fulfill the requirements of canon law, the diocese also has a Presbyteral Council of priests, but all seven of its members belong to the Diocesan Council as well, which is the diocese's primary policy-making and priority-setting body.

Saginaw is a much smaller diocese than Rochester — both in population and in area. It serves a total of 158,000 Catholics through 106 parishes and 11 missions, located for the most part in rural areas.

Delegates are selected, rather than elected in Saginaw. Each of the diocese's 11 vicariates

(regions) are headed by a vicar, who may be a priest or parish council member. Vicars are charged with seeking a former parish council chairman or someone with solid pastoral experience to serve as a lay member of the council for a three-year term. Vicars also convene regional meetings when necessary.

In addition to seven priests from the Presbyteral (Priests') Council, the Diocesan Council includes two sisters' representatives and several members appointed by the bishop.

Saginaw's Diocesan Council considers only those matters that affect parishes throughout the diocese. "Any diocesan office or committee can originate a policy. If it affects parishes, it has to come to us," she explained. "We ask ourselves if something will affect parishes across the board. If so, it goes on our agenda. If it's a regional concern, it goes to regional groups."

In all but rare instances, the Saginaw council avoids voting and operates by consensus. "Usually a decision is made right there at the meeting with the participation of the bishop," Walkley said.

"This didn't happen all at once," Walkley pointed out. "We've gone through years of trial and tribulation to get consultation to work without bloodshed."

Until Bishop Kenneth Untener arrived in 1981, the diocese had both a Diocesan Pastoral Council and a Senate of Priests. Both were required to agree on diocesan policies, but their working relationship was virtually halted by delays and infighting.

In 1978, the councils met jointly twice and established an executive committee, which met quarterly. In 1981, the council began meeting jointly each month. Council members spent all of 1982's meetings redesigning the consultative process one month at a time. In 1983 the new Diocesan Council was launched.

Saginaw's system is not perfect by any means. Parishes do not supply as many agenda items as they could and should, Walkley said. Nor does she consider the link with diocesan offices ideal, since it depends almost exclusively on the chancellor as liaison.

"I think that our model puts a lot of the burden on the bishop and the chancellor to make it work," she said. "But what we have now is definitely better than what we had before, and we're grateful for that."

In her presentation, Judith Kollar claimed that Rochester's model is perfect — at least on paper. In practice, she added, effective consultation depends on how much those involved believe in it.

She recalled that each of the consultative groups in the diocese has gone through peri-

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Bishop Matthew H. Clark

# Along the Way

## Monday of Thanksgiving Week.

As I write this morning, I am aware that 40 days from today, I begin the 40-day Spiritual Institute at the Jesuit Center at Guelph, Ontario.

I have started my body clock so that I'll be conscious during the coming weeks of just how long 40 days are and what it will be like to have that period of time for quiet and prayer.

Since I first asked your prayers for those days, many of you have expressed interest in the program. This week I received some further correspondence and thought you might be interested in hearing in more detail just what our group of retreatants will be up to from January 3 to February 12.

The experience begins with five introductory days called Days of Disposition. This period of time is designed to allow retreatants and directors to relax, settle into the rhythms of prayer and direction, and generally prepare for the Exercises of Saint Ignatius.

Following the Days of Disposition, we begin the 30-day experience of the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius. Each retreatant will pray for five hours each day and daily will articulate his/her experience of prayer with her/his director.

The third phase of our time will be devoted to a reflection and discussion on the experience of prayer of the 30 days. This will be done in small groups of retreatants under the leadership of one of the staff. The purpose of this portion of the program is that we might appropriate and understand the experiences of the spiritual exercises.

The dynamics of the exercises occur in the individual's relationship with God. For that reason, the institute, save for the third phase, is carried out in communal silence.

For the same reason, we are asked not to engage in correspondence, receive or make telephone calls, read newspapers, listen to the radio or watch television. The format is designed to help us to be still and listen to God.

As the institute draws closer, I become more excited about the prospect of living those days for prayer and contemplation. The joy of anticipation and preparation had been heightened by the enthusiastic support you have given to the idea and by your prayers for me that it will be a time of grace and renewal. Thank you all very much.

As we enter the Advent season, let me encourage you to remember and name your own the season's themes of expectation and joyful hope.

I realize full well that these weeks will make special demands on you, but I hope that you will not allow them to obscure the rich spiritual values to which Advent invites us.

It is a challenge to keep those values in the fore, especially since the special attentiveness to which we are called in Advent seems so incompatible with the rush of preparations for Christmas. I don't know the answer to that in my own life — but I am grateful to be aware of the hurried people during these weeks. Of them — I ask myself — "Why do we rush so? Is it all worth it?"; "Is there some pressured way to honor and offer hospitality to one another?"; "Do we have ways of celebration more humane and rewarding than the ones to which our culture directs us?"

I wish you a rich, life-giving Advent season.

Peace to all.


## Perinton chorus, orchestra schedule 'The Messiah'

The Perinton Community Chorus and Orchestra, under the direction of Virginia Hogan, will honor the Rochester community with a gift of music at two free presentations of Handel's "The Messiah." The concerts are scheduled for Friday, December 5, at 8 p.m. in the Palmyra-Macedon High School

auditorium in Palmyra, and Sunday, December 7, at 4 p.m. in the Church of the Resurrection, 63 Mason Road, Fairport.

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