



Saints socked

DeSales ran up against one of the best football teams in the state last Saturday, as Clyde-Savannah rolled to a 44-14 victory over the Saints. Page 16.

CATHOLIC COURIER

Diocese of Rochester Thursday, October 12, 1989 50¢ 24 pages

Synods offer vision of the future

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

While gathering for the Rochester diocese's third synod, May 15, 1924, diocesan priests voted to ratify a wide range of decrees fostered by 1917's revised Code of Canon Law and then-Bishop Thomas F. Hickey.

Among those decrees were bans on diocesan priests attending moving pictures or theatrical performances in public theaters, and on assistant pastors owning automobiles or driving those of others except in the course of parochial business.

At the diocese's sixth synod, April 6, 1954, the assembled clergy approved decrees requiring diocesan priests to wear hats in public and forbidding women religious to play the organ in parish churches.

Compared to the crucial issues facing today's church, concern over such trivial matters might seem foolish. But every synod — required every 10 years by the old Code of Canon Law — must have decrees, explained Father Joseph Hart, a faculty member at St. Bernard's Institute.

Prior to Vatican II, Father Hart explained, the church held that "the voice of the Spirit spoke only through the bishops in consultation with his priests." Thus, he observed, "the bishop gathered his presbyterate (the body of priests) around him and they voted on issues that had already been decided."

Today, however, the church operates under "a different ecclesiology," Father Hart remarked, and the notion of voting on predetermined decrees is outmoded.

Rather than focusing on the promulgation of rules and regulations, modern diocesan synods are pastoral in nature — "a way of asking where the Spirit is leading us in the next five to 10 years, so we can make adequate preparations," he said.

In contrast to the gatherings of 40 years ago, today's synods call together not just diocesan clergy, but also a cross-section of the diocesan people. And although the bishop ultimately determines what legislation will be handed down from the synod, the decrees considered in such assemblies originate not with the bishop but with commissions composed of religious, lay people and priests.

"The Spirit is given to the entire church," remarked Father Hart, a member of the diocese's synod exploration committee. "If you're really asking the people, 'Which way do we go?' it's in those voices we discern the will of the Spirit."

The Diocese of Tabasco, Mexico — Rochester's sister diocese — is in the midst of a such a pastoral synod. "A pastoral synod tries to involve the whole local church, so that decisions will come from the (grass roots)," Tabasco's Bishop Rafael Garcia Gonzalez explained in a recent interview. "Practically, all the people of God are the ones who create the synod."

Such grass-roots discernment is also underway in the Diocese of Rochester, as the local people of God ask themselves whether this is an opportune time to convene a synod and, if so, what issues the synod should address.



A series of listening sessions on this question have been scheduled throughout the diocese during October and early November. In addition, Bishop Matthew H. Clark has discussed the proposal with his two consultative bodies — the Priests' Council and the Diocesan Pastoral Council — and information about synods has been distributed to parishes throughout the diocese.

Bishop Clark will evaluate the input from these groups and the listening sessions and is expected to decide in early January, 1990, whether the diocese should undertake a synod.

The proposed time line for the synod process calls for completion of the synod in 1993 — to coincide with the diocese's 125th anniversary.

The proposed synod is expected to look at a number of issues affecting the diocese, and to place them within the context of a unified diocesan pastoral plan. Although the specific issues to be addressed by the synod will not be determined until much later in the planning process, the gathering might address such broad themes as the role of the laity in the church, formation for ministry, and liturgical practices.

Talk of the proposed synod actually began in October of 1988, when Bishop Clark — shortly before leaving on his Mexican sabbatical — asked the Priests' Coun-

cil to consider the question of unified pastoral planning.

An ad hoc committee chaired by Father Gerald Appleby was formed to study the issue, and the committee soon determined that a synod would be the best way to address the subject.

The time had come for another diocesan synod, Father Appleby said, in order "to produce a series of statements that would say, 'This accurately reflects the minds of the whole church of Rochester.'"

A synod would also help to pull together various diocesan planning initiatives already underway — such as the Commitment to Ministry process and creation of a Catholic school system — and "provide a context, so they would not happen in isolation," Father Appleby said. "One of the concerns that we had is that we not go off scattershot."

Because the synod will involve all the people of the diocese in developing decrees — and even in deciding if the synod should take place — it also will be a means of educating people about the church and its changed self-understanding since Vatican II, Father Appleby said.

The synod will also give people a sense of ownership of the diocese, he said, noting that, "the process is as important as the actual legislation that comes out of the process."

In taking this approach, the diocese will be following a pattern established in recent years by other dioceses. Since 1986, such dioceses and archdioceses as El Paso in Texas, Milwaukee, Miami, Helena in Montana, and Boston have completed synods.

More recently, the Archdiocese of New York completed its synod on January 8, 1989. The decrees of the synod are expected to be published in book form within the next few weeks.

A ccording to Father William Bedford, synod coordinator and archdiocesan director of the Office for Parish Councils, Cardinal John O'Connor first proposed a synod in the fall of 1984.

Plans for the synod were explained at more than 50 meetings of lay people and clergy during the fall and winter of 1985, and more than 2,000 people were interviewed by phone to help identify possible issues to be addressed.

Using the concerns that emerged in the phone interviews, a questionnaire was distributed to the people of the archdiocese in June, 1986. In the fall of that year, more than 61,000 responses were collated by the archdiocesan Office for Pastoral Research.

The results of this questionnaire were then distributed to archdiocesan parishes and Catholic organizations for study and discussion.

These parish-level discussions resulted in 3,809 opinion statements, which the Pre-Synodal Commission then combined into 534 proposals. In March, 1988, 243 delegates — lay, clergy and religious — were chosen for the synod.

The delegates first met April 9, 1988, with the main synod sessions taking place

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