

# Bishop announces start of diocesan synod

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Using June 17 — the Feast of Corpus Christi — as the official starting date, Bishop Matthew H. Clark has announced the beginning of the Diocese of Rochester's seventh synod.

The synod, the first to take place in the diocese since 1954, is expected to conclude in September of 1993, coinciding with the diocese's 125th anniversary.

In a statement announcing the synod, Bishop Clark named Father Joseph Hart, a member of the faculty at St. Bernard's Institute, as director of the synod and as chairman of a synod commission that will oversee the three-year synod process.

Marcella Holtz, a member of Church of the Transfiguration, Fairport, and a former religious-education administrator at St. Paul's, Webster, has been named as assistant director.

An additional 20-24 members are to be

appointed to the commission. Their names will not be released until August, when the group is expected to begin meeting.

A diocesan synod is a process through which a bishop consults with representatives of the clergy, religious and lay people of his diocese. Current issues are discussed, a vision for the future articulated, and, in some cases, laws for the diocese are enacted.

In Rochester, the synod will consist of parish-level and regional meetings, and will culminate with a diocesan-wide assembly tentatively scheduled for September, 1993, at an as-yet undetermined site.

In his announcement, Bishop Clark said his hope for the synod "is that it will build from the grass roots; that it will involve as many people as possible in the discussions, that it will address some of the outstanding issues which face us as a local church, and that it will arrive at specific and

measurable recommendations for action, to which we will commit our energies and our resources."

In an interview with the *Catholic Courier*, Bishop Clark said the synod would provide a vehicle for doing "broad pastoral planning" for the Rochester diocese in the coming years.

Father Hart told the *Courier* that the synod will have three goals: to develop a unified pastoral plan, to "celebrate who we are as a diocese," and to educate people in the diocese about the questions and issues facing the diocese.

Neither Bishop Clark nor Father Hart wished to elaborate about what specific issues the synod might address, preferring to leave the choice to the commission and to the groups gathering in parish and regional meetings. In his statement announcing the synod, Bishop Clark observed that the synodal process will begin "with a grass-roots survey to arrive at

synodal themes."

In the interview, however, Bishop Clark acknowledged that during listening sessions conducted in the fall of 1989 to determine whether the diocese should conduct a synod, a number of general themes emerged, including education, the social mission of the church and the implications of baptism.

Many of these issues have been considered by other groups and projects conducted in the diocese in recent years, and Bishop Clark pointed out that the synod will build upon the work of those groups, not repeat what has already been done. He noted, "One of the virtues I see in the synod is to pull those separate streams together."

In selecting themes for the synod, the various groups determining topics will have to keep in mind what a synod of this sort can deal with, Father Hart cautioned.

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Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ  
June 17, 1990

## Seventh SYNOD

Is not the cup of blessing we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, many though we are, are one body for we all partake of the one loaf.

I Corinthians 10:16-17

My dear Sisters and Brothers:

Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Since I became your bishop 11 years ago, I have written to you hundreds of times. Some of that writing has been formal and official communication. But most often I have written of my experience of being with you: how you have encouraged, challenged and inspired me, and of the ways in which you continually reveal to me some new dimension of God's gracious love for us all. You have strengthened my faith in countless ways and helped me to keep growing as a human person and a minister of the Gospel.

Through the experience of these years, you have come to be a people whom I hold in the deepest love and to whom I am profoundly grateful for the love you so generously offer to me.

I write to you now on this Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ to announce to you and to invite your lively participation in the Seventh Synod of the Diocese of Rochester. My hope is that the process of the synod, which begins officially with this letter, will be brought to completion on a suitable date in 1993, during which year we will celebrate the 125th anniversary of our establishment as a diocese.

In this formal letter of announcement, I want to explain the notion of a synod, share with you some of the background that led to this announcement, express some of my hopes for this experience and raise some questions for your prayerful consideration as we begin this process.

The word *synod* comes from the Greek and means "walking together on a journey." This suggests what a synod is meant to be: the people of a diocese gathering with their bishop to "walk together." The walk includes conversation about our shared experience of being church, prayer and study about directions to be followed, and the shaping and savoring of our vision for the future. My hope is not only to develop a vision for the future and plans to realize that vision; my hope is, more importantly, that we will surrender ourselves to the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, the fruits of whose work in us are always deeper faith, stronger love, and greater eagerness to build the Reign of God.

Synods are not new in the church. In Acts 15, we read about one of the earliest such gatherings, during which Peter argued successfully that there be no unnecessary burdens placed on the shoulders of converts from among the Gentiles. Regional and diocesan synods are woven throughout the history of the church.

We have had six synods in the Diocese of Rochester. The first was called by Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid in 1875, and the last was called by Bishop James E. Kearney in 1954. These synods took a different form from synods that have taken place in the church since Vatican Council II, but they all gave testimony in their own way to the vitality of our local church.

My hope for this our seventh synod is that it will build from the grass roots; that it will involve as many people as possible in the discussions; that it will address some of

the outstanding issues that face us as a local church; and that it will arrive at specific and measurable recommendations for action to which we will commit our energies and our resources. We will not duplicate work that has already been done. Rather, we will attempt to integrate the fruits of that work into the synodal process and build on them in a systematic way.

I hope that in the process of the synod, all of the several ethnic, racial, political, geographical and theological points of view that constitute the wonderful living mosaic of our diocese will find a voice. This will help us to appreciate the synod as a time of grace and an opportunity for the church of Rochester to reflect on her life; to appreciate what calls us together, and joins us in faith and affection; to understand our differences; to establish priorities, and to renew our community as we move toward the year 2,000.

I have chosen this kind of widely participatory synodal experience because I think it best promotes the kind of church that Vatican Council II wanted us to be. No less important is the fact that it is the kind of synod that was unanimously recommended to me by our Priests' Council and supported with equal enthusiasm by our Diocesan Pastoral Council. In addition to the counsel offered by these bodies, we also sought the views of people from all parts of the diocese in a series of hearings held in the fall of 1989. At these hearings, the convening of a synod was given strong support.

Your testimony has, therefore, done much to bring us to this significant moment in the history of our diocese. In like manner, your participation will be critical in making our synodal experience one that will be fruitful and life-giving for us all. I invite you even now to think about the inner life of the church and about her mission. What are the dynamic aspects of our life that we should strive to deepen? In what way do we need to change? What are the critical issues that face us? Where should we concentrate our energies and resources over the next 10 years? By your responses to such questions as these, you will help to gather us as a community of faith and set our vision for the future.

For my part, I express the deep hope that whatever we center on as topics in our synod, we will keep in mind:

- our sisters and brothers who are materially poor, who lack sufficient means to live dignified human lives. They bear Christ in their hearts in a special way. We need to learn from them and help them escape from the oppressive burdens of the material poverty in which they live.

- our sisters and brothers who for whatever reason feel alienated from our faith community. I pray that we will be open in any way we can to healing wounds, so that we will be able to become more clearly the hospitable, reconciling community that God calls us to be.

- our sisters and brothers who merit the particular care of the community because of their special human conditions or circumstances. I think of those who mourn; those who struggle with long-term illnesses; women bearing undesired pregnancies; persons crushed by drug addictions; and so many, many others — young and old — who suffer in profoundly human ways.

- our sisters and brothers who are new members of our faith community — for example, Asian and Hispanic men, women and children who look to us for welcome, understanding and help. We need to embrace them and



their gifts gently offered to our local church.

While I hope that we will challenge ourselves with outward vision and stretch out our arms in love to all God's people, I also know that we cannot do everything in this one synod. We will need under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit to be selective in the focuses we choose. We will radically depend on God's Spirit, working through the prayer and wisdom of the whole community and so leading us to communion with the greatest needs and most precious resources of the Body of Christ. We will need with God's unfailing help to act carefully and reflectively, surrendering ourselves to what we discern Christ most asks of us at this time in history in this place.

In light of these reflections and after broad consultation — and begging the gifts of the Holy Spirit — I hereby convoke a synodal process that will culminate in the seventh canonical Synod of the Diocese of Rochester, to be held in Rochester in September of 1993, the 125th anniversary of the founding of the diocese.

The synodal process will begin in 1991 with a grass-roots survey to arrive at synodal themes. Parish synods followed by regional synods will discuss these themes, set priorities and formulate recommendations in the fall of 1992 and spring of 1993.

I have named Father Joseph A. Hart to be the director of the synod and Mrs. Marcella Holtz as assistant director. A Synodal Commission charged with guiding the synodal process and enlisting your thoughtful partnership in this endeavor will be formed. I wish to thank you from the beginning for your prayers, your efforts, your participation with me in our synod.

May God who is the origin of all that is good, the sustainer of all that is holy and the end of all that is worthy bring this synod to a fitting completion!

Your brother in Christ,

+ Matthew H. Clark

+ Matthew H. Clark  
Bishop of Rochester