

Synod offers path to reconciliation

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

The days of Advent have evolved into another Christmas season, rich with the message of God alive in our midst. Truly, the night silence has given the world its Savior, and we are transformed.

As we celebrate the birth of our Lord, we must take time to appreciate the transformation that has taken place, and that which must still happen. If we are to be truly Christian people, we must participate in the continuing story of salvation. God has given us a wonderful opportunity to bring the Living Word to the hearts of all men and women. We are not a world awaiting a Savior, but a graced people proclaiming His Presence.

We are a people of dawn. We rejoice in the rising sun. We look to the hope-filled challenges of a new day. Let this Christmas be a morning star that guides your way and invites all to "wonder at the nearness of God."

As our local church surveys the challenges of this new day and of the years ahead, we find in our ongoing diocesan Synod an extraordinary medium for enriching our efforts to proclaim God's Word. My fondest hope for our community of faith is that when we conclude the Synodal process in October, 1992, we will have realized more deeply who we are as a local church, and will have developed a pastoral plan to express that realization and grow in it.

We are still in the early stages of the Synodal process, but already we see encouraging signs that we have set out in a good direction. Among those signs are: 1) the high level of response you gave to our diocesan-wide survey, 2) the quality of the six themes you raised for our common considerations and, 3) the generous response we have received from those whom we invited to develop the six theme books around which our parish synods will gather late next year.

In the past few months we have begun the work of enlisting the commitment and support of parish leaders throughout the diocese. Throughout this fall, for example, synod director Father Joe Hart and associate director Marcie Holtz organized meetings for

our pastors and other leaders in each of our diocese's 11 regions.

On December 10, nearly 300 parish leaders from all parts of our diocese gathered at Christ the King Church in Irondequoit to learn more about the synod. In addition to a presentation from Father Hart, they heard from Sister Ann Rehraver, OSF, from the Diocese of Green Bay, and Father Don Thimm from the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. Both have had rich experience in Synods in their local churches. Both helped us in very practical, experiential ways to appreciate the challenge involved in organizing a Synod and the benefits that can be realized from one.

That same night, 70 women and men — also from all parts of our diocese — gathered for the first time at St. Stephen's, Geneva, to begin the preparation of the six discussion books around which our parish synods will gather in late 1992.

I had the privilege of attending a great number of meetings about our

only if we approach the challenge in a spirit of faith and with a willingness to work with others for the common good.

Let me devote the remainder of this brief article to an expression of some of my concrete hopes for all of us as we move deeper into our Synodal process.

I hope:

1) that all of us will incorporate into our daily prayer the explicit hope that God will bless, guide and lead each one of us and all of us together through every remaining step of this experience;

2) that we will try to be attentive and deeply respectful listeners all throughout the process — that we will listen to the Word of God, the voice of the church and the voice of our neighbor with reverence and respect;

3) that we will regard the Synod not as a political process in which we seek the adoption of some agenda we hold dear to our hearts, but as a faith journey in which — with the help of sisters and brothers — we seek the will of



tion that the church does not exist for itself alone, but for the building up of the kingdom of God — that we never will become self-absorbed or closed off from our commonly shared call to offer the justice and peace of Christ to all who yearn for it;

7) that you will give very serious consideration to participating in your parish synod meetings late in 1992 and during Lent of 1993, and that you will judge your participation to be an irreplaceable, important gift to us all as we share this experience.

8) that you — having made a commitment to participate in the process — will encourage one other person who has left our church, is angry with it or yearns for reconciliation with our community to attend the parish synods. I hope deeply that this will be a time of healing and reconciliation for all.

I could add many others to this list of hopes for our diocesan Synod, but I offer these to you with the request that you think about them and add your own hopes to the list I have begun. If you should be moved to share some of your hopes for our Synod with me, I would be very pleased to receive them.

May this Christmas season be rich in blessings for you and those whom you hold dear. May the blessings of the Christ Child fill your hearts and minds so that you are renewed in your strength and commitment to His work. May the mystery of the incarnation — proclaimed through you — bring healing, confidence and peace.

Peace to all.

'We will shape the future as God wants only if we approach the challenge in a spirit of faith and with a willingness to work with others ...'

Synod, including one of the 11 regional meetings and both sessions on December 10.

I can tell you honestly that although I hear some material often, I do not tire of the meetings. Why? Because my experience has been that when people have the opportunity to learn about the Synod and to ask questions, they tend to become excited about the extraordinary opportunities it will offer to us all. That gives me confidence to believe that as the process continues, more and more people will participate in a manner that will benefit them and all of us.

But however confident I may be about the future, I am mindful that we will shape that future as God wants

God for our community of faith;

4) that we all will be willing to make proper connections with the past so that we can distinguish between the values and principles necessary for Catholic life in all ages, and the concrete ways — some of which may need to change from time to time — of expressing and living out those values and principles;

5) that we will make proper connections with sisters and brothers within our local church in a way that will allow us to test our own designs and preferences against theirs — all with a view toward witnessing more effectively Christ's loving care to one another;

6) that we will grow in our realiza-



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