

Synod provides time for reflection

By Marvin L. Krier Mich
Guest contributor

What would it be like to win the lottery and then discover that you couldn't tell anyone? How would it feel to know that a war just ended, that your son was just born, that you finally passed physics but there was no one with which to share the good news?

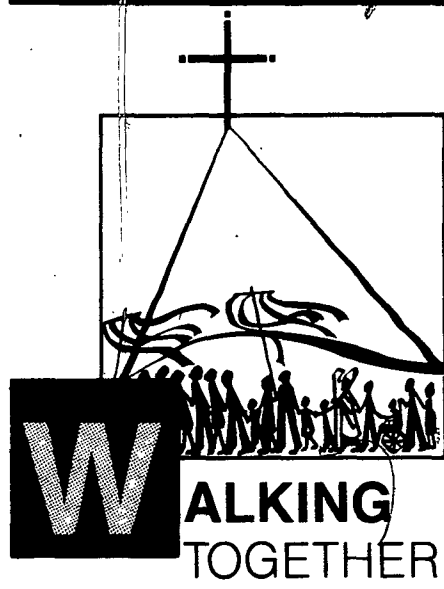
I feel like that sometimes.

Lately, I've been listening to people who have shared quite a bit with me, people who could use lots of help and support from a loving community, but there seems to be no easy way to share what I've heard.

I've listened to friends who fear for their marriage. They've been in counseling for a year but things are still shaky and tense and not getting much better.

I've listened to a 33-year-old woman who was recently divorced and has to care for her two children, ages 6 and 10. She wants to go back to school to finish her undergraduate degree, but she also needs to continue working as a full-time cashier at the supermarket while juggling her role as a single parent.

I've listened to a young man who joined a single group at church and found some fun, much needed com-



panionship and even a special friend.

I've listened to a graduate student who is gay and is trying to find a way to serve others and maintain a loving commitment with another.

I've listened to the parents of young children who realize that they both need to work outside the home and yet feel guilty and concerned about quality child care.

These are some of the voices and stories that I've heard in the last few weeks. I'm sure you have heard similar stories from your friends and family. These are the concerns of peo-

ple who are trying to be family, people who are trying to find and maintain intimacy in their lives.

What do we do with these stories, with these concerns, with these fears?

One place where we can bring these concerns is to our church, to the community with whom we worship. In our faith community we should be able to share these concerns and find a way of helping. But sometimes this discussion never takes place.

To make sure that we have a conversation around the topic of family and intimacy, Bishop Matthew H. Clark has set up a structured listening process called the synod. The first topic for our parish/community synods is "How can we as Church help strengthen Christian marriage and family life in all its forms?"

The first step in the synod process is to reflect on the stories we have heard, including our own story, and then be willing to listen to the stories and concerns of others in our parish. We will be listening in order to discern how we as church should respond to these concerns as a parish and as a diocesan church. By listening and responding we will become a community of hospitality, vision and practical assistance.

The listening process has already begun in the 1991 diocesan-wide synod questionnaire, which gathered the sentiments of almost 20,000 respondents. The survey revealed that 85 percent give a very high priority to the task of the church maintaining and enriching Christian marriage.

The survey also reveals that we are not happy with how well we as church are responding to the needs of families, especially single-parent families as well as the divorced and separated. The poorest rating was given for how the church is serving the needs of single adults.

If we listen to ourselves, as reflected in the survey, we have some work to do in these areas. And that work begins on Sept. 20.

In discussions all over the diocese next week, thousand of people will be telling their stories and listening to others as we as church gather together for the first week of the synod.

Don't be frustrated that there is nowhere to share your story, to voice your frustrations, fears and concerns, to share all that you've heard. Come join us!

EDITORS' NOTE: Mich is a professor of Christian ethics at St. Bernard's Institute in Rochester.

All can learn from manager in parable

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 16:1-13; (R1) Amos 8:4-7; (R2) 1 Timothy 2:1-8.

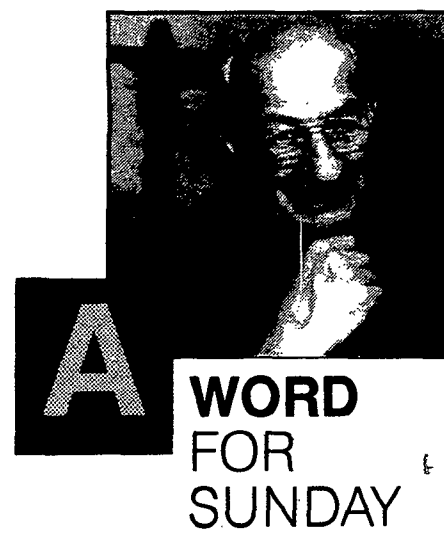
The Malayan mantis is a very pretty insect, which birds and lizards like to eat, so it uses a disguise to escape its predators.

When the insect is frightened, it will unfold its body and stand very still so that it looks exactly like a flower. Birds and lizards pass right by the mantis, and it stays safe. What a smart feature nature has given the mantis to stay safe.

The Gospel parable about the clever and crooked manager was a humorous story. When word reached his master that he was squandering his property, the manager was called on the carpet. "Get your books in order," he said, "You're fired!"

The manager was panic stricken. "What'll I do now? To dig I am not able; to beg, I am ashamed."

He thought that in the little time left he'd make friends with the master's debtors. He called them in one by one and reduced their bills: a hundred jugs of olive oil to 50; a hundred



measures of wheat to 80; and so on through the list of people who owed crops to his master.

Guess what happened next? Each of the debtors were so relieved that their debts had been reduced, they went to the master and wanted to make him "Man of the Year" for his generosity. Of course the master knew nothing of this.

When the master realized he had been outsmarted by his manager, he

had two options: he could throw the manager in jail and tell the debtors who had been praising his generosity that there had been a big mistake; or he could say nothing and gain a reputation for being a most understanding and generous man.

The master decided to keep quiet and accept the "Man of the Year Award."

By the time the master caught up with the manager, he was no longer angry with him. Rather, he commended him for being so enterprising. His cleverness paid off. Instead of firing him, the master gave him a second chance. And very likely he would no longer squander his master's property.

A lot of people have trouble with this parable. It seems as if the crooked manager was rewarded for his dishonesty, but he wasn't. Jesus was simply telling His disciples and us that people in the business world are more clever in dealing with their own than are the children of light. Jesus expects us to use our brains.

We all know too well that we shall die one day, but not when. We also know that after death comes the judgment. And after the judgment,

an eternal heaven or hell.

We know the day of reckoning is coming for each of us as for the crooked manager. But he did something about it. What are we doing to get a favorable judgment? That's the parable's point. The manager acted, what about us?

Look what people do to make money, or to improve in golf, bowling or football. Of course, there is nothing wrong with pursuing these things. But, proportionally, how much time do we devote to achieving goodness and holiness?

Somebody once figured out that if a person lived to be 70 years old, he or she would have spent 24 years sleeping, 11 years working, 11 years watching TV and in amusements, six years eating, six years walking, five-and-a-half years washing and dressing, and six years in school.

If that person went to church every Sunday and spent five minutes a day in prayer, he or she would give five months to God. Five months out of 70 years for the salvation of one's soul.

Does it make sense to live as though this world was going to be our home forever?

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