

# 'I'll pray for you' not always enough

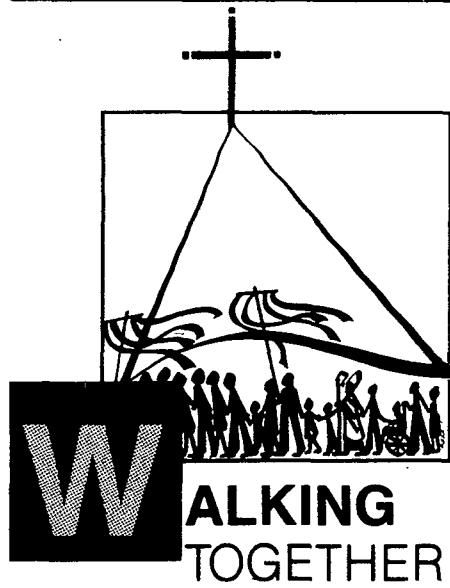
By Judith Ann Kollar  
Guest contributor

"I'll pray for you" is a common response when we face another person's pain and suffering. Our third synod theme — how can we help those facing violence, addiction, burdensome pregnancy or terminal illness? — calls us to do more than merely utter, "I'll pray for you."

Prayer, of course, is always an appropriate response, but prayer must be accompanied by action which goes to the heart of the pain and suffering. We are called to remove the causes of the pain, to provide protection to those who are victims and to walk the way of suffering with those who are in the process of preparing for death.

The 1991 synod survey reveals that 71 percent of diocesan Catholics considers such issues as abortion and child abuse very important but only 34 percent believes that we as church are adequately addressing these issues. Our challenge is to discover how we can improve.

Sometimes I feel so helpless when I read the statistics and stories of those on drugs, in abusive re-



lationships, or those experiencing a burdensome pregnancy. It seems like everyone I know has a friend or a relative dying of a terminal illness. Perhaps, like me, you feel surrounded by pain and suffering and yet feel helpless in the face of these overwhelming conditions.

Although we must pray, the synod theme prods us to ask ourselves what we can do in the face of these challenges. Have we as a faith

community even acknowledged that addiction and violence exist in the lives of the people with whom we worship on Sunday?

The synod discussion paper reminds us that "we are all victims of violence: we manipulate, we ignore each other, we take each other for granted. In a more tragic way, in far too many homes in our diocese, husbands, wives or children are victims of physical and sexual abuse.

We need to talk about this as a faith community, acknowledge that it exists, and explore concrete ways that we can do something about it. It may involve starting a support group, or providing respite for people who are confined to their homes, or relief for mothers of young children. But we must do something.

How do we deal with addiction in our parishes? Are we brave enough to acknowledge that people need to feel safe to speak about their problems? How welcoming are we of those whom we know are in recovery? Do we pretend no one has a problem? Why do all parish social and fundraising activities seem to involve alcohol or gambling? Aren't there more sensitive

ways to have fun that are also life-giving for everyone?

These days, life issues tend to divide us more than unite us. It seems as if we all know that "I'll pray for you" is not enough but there are many disagreements about what we as church should be doing. Whatever else, our parish communities have to provide support, understanding, compassion and assistance to those who are challenged with burdensome pregnancies or a terminal illness. We may think that social services should take care of such things but the Gospel calls us — not the government — to reach out to those in need.

The third synod theme certainly calls us to pray but it also challenges us to reach out, to act, to do what we can to alleviate suffering and the causes of suffering. It calls us through the synod process to make concrete recommendations about how we as church can address these needs. In the words of St. Ignatius Loyola we are called to work as if all depends on us and to pray as if all depends on God.

Kollar is director of professional development for the Diocese of Rochester.

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