

Synod recommendations belong to all

By Father Joseph A. Hart
Guest contributor

Our postman probably is not very happy with the diocesan Synod these days because we've certainly increased the quantity of mail he delivers. Scores of recommendations have been arriving daily at the Synod Office, with many more to come.

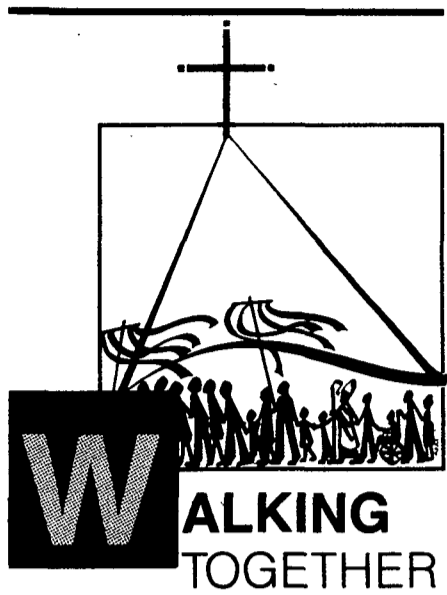
While sorting out the morning's new arrivals one day last week, a woman called to ask, "Will Bishop (Matthew H.) Clark really implement the recommendation that my small group wrote?"

First of all, let me put this question into context.

As most of you already know, each small synod discussion group in every diocesan parish and community was asked to formulate recommendations answering a question a Synod theme proposed.

Theme one, for example, asked, "What can we as Church do to strengthen Christian marriage and family life in all its forms?" Some groups recommended some changes in the Pre-Cana format, others called for support groups for married couples, and still others envisioned programs to reach out and include non-traditional families.

The small groups wrote out specific recommendations such as these and submitted them to a larger group, committing all the members of the various small groups, where they were assigned a priority by the vote



of everyone present.

In this process, every recommendation is important because it is a window that opens onto a perceived need in the local community. For this reason every recommendation made by a small group will be forwarded to the local parish pastoral council, which will study the implications of these recommendations over the next year and seek ways to implement them on the local level.

The local synod team also sent the top three recommendations on each theme from each parish and community to the Synod Office to become part of the diocesan Synod process. The synod team's job was not an easy one if your parish or community had more than one session on a given

theme. The top parish priorities would not have been clearly evident. The team had the burden of combining similar recommendations, and prioritizing the rest to arrive at the nine to be sent to our office.

Once the recommendations from the diocese's 170 parishes and communities reach the Synod Office, they are sorted by category, then resorted by specific recommendation. Similar recommendations are combined by a staff of volunteer lay people — most with professional backgrounds in various fields.

When this basic combining process has taken place, the recommendations will be forwarded to the writing committees who were responsible for authoring the theme papers printed in the Synod Discussion booklets. There the recommendations will be rewritten when necessary to keep the recommendations clear, crisp and understandable without changing the original intent.

Finally, the recommendations are ready to be sent to the regional synod agenda committee, which has the task of reviewing all the recommendations and sorting them into several groups. Those recommendations suggesting some change in church structure, law or discipline which Bishop Clark cannot by himself affect, will be placed in a separate document titled "Prophetic Voices." The General Synod will vote on and prioritize those responses.

All the remaining recommenda-

tions will be reviewed for their wording so that all the recommendations forwarded to the regional synods and General Synods can be implemented as written.

During the regional synods, the top recommendations in each theme area will be determined after discussion and vote and then forwarded for consideration at the General Synod. At the October, 1993 General Synod, these 60 recommendations from the regional synods will again be prioritized. The top 10 recommendations will become the backbone of the pastoral plan to guide the diocese's future course.

Now to answer the woman's question: "Will Bishop Clark really implement the recommendation that my small group wrote?" Yes ... but perhaps not in the way that you might first imagine.

Bishop Clark is committed to implementing the work of the Synod. All of our voices, from small groups to large groups, from rural region to urban regions, from parish synods to regional synods to the General Synod, contribute in concrete ways to the final plan which the General Synod will turn over to the bishop.

However, it is as a church that we plan for the future and not as individuals. So it will be the Church of Rochester's recommendations that Bishop Clark will implement and not those your small group or mine because the recommendations are no longer yours or mine ... but ours.

Don't reduce prayer to wanting something

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

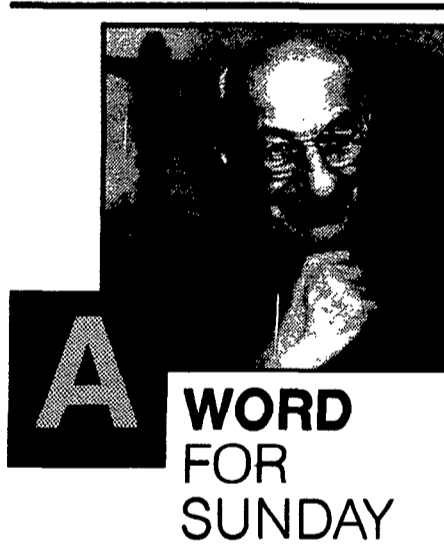
Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 18:1-8; (R1) Exodus 17:8-13; (R2) 2 Timothy 3:14-4:2.

"Please, God," the man prayed. "You know me. I'm always praying to you and, yet, I have had nothing but bad luck, misery and despair. Look at the butcher next door. He's never at prayer in his life, and he's nothing but prosperity, health and joy. How come a believer like me is always in trouble, and he is always doing so well?"

A voice boomed from beyond, "Because the butcher doesn't bug me, that's why!"

That, of course, is *Readers' Digest* theology — not sound theology at all. If Our Lord taught anything about prayer, it was that we be persistent in prayer. That is the theme of next Sunday's first reading and the Gospel.

When Moses was leading his people out of Egypt through the desert to Mt. Sinai, God gave them water from a rock. Water in a desert is more pre-



ious than gold. That was why the Amalekites attacked the Israelites.

Although Moses watched the battle from a hilltop, he did more: he raised his hands in the traditional posture of prayer. As long as he prayed, the battle turned in Israel's favor. When he dropped his hands from weariness and stopped praying,

the battle favored the Amalekites. So Aaron and Hur supported Moses' arms so he could pray uninterrupted. Persistent prayer won out.

The Gospel parable is one of contrast. Jesus teaches that if a wicked judge answers a widow's persistent plea, how much more will God answer the persistent prayers of those He loves.

Businessmen are told that "consistent applied action to a predetermined goal is the key to success..." As the old saying goes: "The constancy of the dropping water weareth a hole even in the rock."

But you might wonder, why does God want us to pray? Does He not know our needs before we ask Him?

Too often we reduce prayer to getting something. According to St. Thomas, we have two reasons for prayer. First, not to make known our needs to God, but to make known our ourselves our need for God. Secondly, not to change God's will, but to change our wills to conform to God's will. We should pray to be changed. If we are not being changed by prayer,

then we are not praying correctly. Jesus prayed and was transfigured (Luke 9:29).

A third and more basic reason is that prayer opens the door of our hearts to God. Prayer is an invitation to God to enter our lives. I don't think we fully appreciate what it means when we are told that God has made us free. By our free wills, we image God. He will never violate our freedom. He respects it and submits to it.

The Scripture presents God as standing and knocking at the door of our hearts. Only prayer opens that door. Prayer says in effect, "I want you, God, to enter into my life and to help me. I cannot go it alone."

During the "Our Father" we pray, "Lead us not into temptation." Do you know what that temptation is? It is the temptation of depending totally on our own resources — trying to go it alone, without God. We are saying, "I don't need God," when we neglect daily prayer. If Jesus taught anything about prayer, it was this: persist in prayer and pray daily, because you need to pray.

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