

# We must 'strike while the iron is hot'

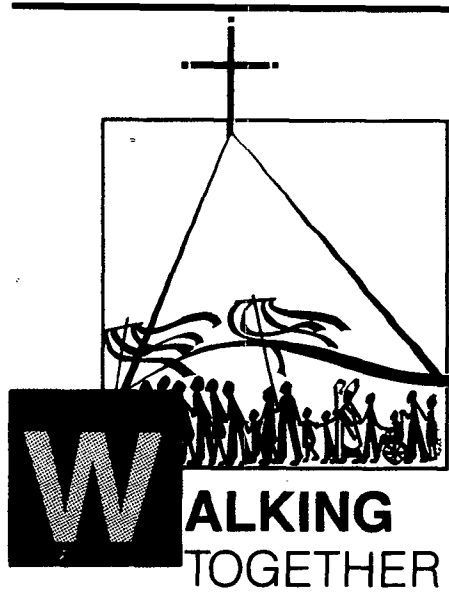
By Judith Ann Kollar  
Guest contributor

Have you had a chance to see or hear the recommendations made by participants at your fall parish synod meetings? These recommendations are thoughtful and faith-filled ways our people see their needs and those around them. Many are now wondering what is going to happen with these recommendations?

Many of these suggestions will be discussed at the upcoming regional synods as well as the General Synod, but what will happen at the local level? Some parishes may be waiting to see what will come out of the synods before looking at the local scene. I say: "Strike while the iron is hot." A parish should do what it can while people's enthusiasm runs high. There's no need to wait for someone to say it's OK to begin.

A woman recently told me her fellow parishioners recommended that their parish have greeters at all Masses. Apparently the synod discussions revealed to participants that their church was not a welcoming community. That parish could do something about that problem before Advent or Christmas. Using planning and an open invitation for volunteers, that recommendation could be in place in no time.

Some parishes discovered through synod discussions that groups they



thought were in place were not. Some parishes apparently have not had an active parish pastoral council for a couple of years. People were amazed because some remembered days when the council was a very active and vital force in the community. That parish may now want to take some time to consider renewing a council, deciding the type it wants and needs. Parishioners might invite Deacon Claude Lester, director of diocesan Pastoral Council Formation, to some meetings to explore how to proceed. In any event, they should begin now while the idea is fresh.

These concerns do not have to wait. During parish discussions we have

had an excellent experience, listening to the church speak to itself about itself. Whether we want to wait or to act now is up to us, but I say: "Strike while the iron is hot."

Ask questions if nothing is happening yet at your parish. Push a little. Ask to begin the process of addressing the issues today. Don't wait until the enthusiasm has died down.

A few pastors told me that their parish formulated so many recommendations that they will have more than enough work to do until the kingdom comes. I say, "Better to wear out than to rust out." Besides, if the recommendations are prioritized in some way, they can be taken seriously one at a time. Rather than worrying about what you can't do, do what you can — but do something.

To do nothing is an insult to those who have given so much of themselves in participating in the discussions and sharing their wisdom. To do nothing is to fail in our shared responsibility to build God's kingdom where we live. To do nothing is to be slothful about the church's mission.

A minister said to me, "Our recommendations are trite; the people want things we could do without a Synod." Well then, what's the harm in doing them now if parishioners believe their lives might be enriched. Just as "one person's garbage is another person's treasure," what one person considers trite may be very important to some-

one else.

Addressing the recommendations in each parish may be an act of humility for the parish staff; what they thought they were doing well may be misunderstood or not noticed by some people.

But rather than beginning a new program, the staff may have to look at how it communicates with parishioners. Also, it may take some patience to explain to parishioners that what was thought of as a new idea has been taking place at the parish for years.

What matters most in our synod process, I believe, is that 25,000 of us in the Rochester diocese cared enough about the church to gather with friends and neighbors to suggest better ways to build God's kingdom where we live. We may have missed the mark with some of our recommendations, but I believe that we have hit the nail on the head in most instances. In the process we learned many things about ourselves and the way we are church together.

An energy, excitement and momentum has swelled with all of us working together. If we take advantage of this momentum, we can begin to do much more about building the kingdom.

But we must "strike while the iron is hot."

Kollar is director of professional development for the Rochester diocese.

## Our salvation is closer than we think

By Father Albert Shamon  
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 24:37-44; (R1) Isaiah 2:1-5; (R2) Romans 13:11-14.

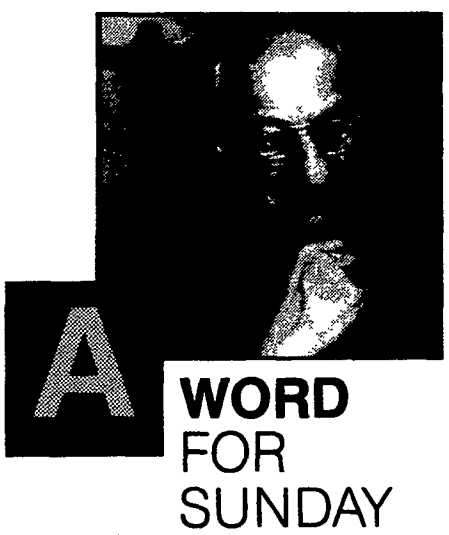
The first Sunday of Advent begins the church year. Advent means "coming." The word "coming" occurs five times in the Gospel.

Isaiah speaks of "days to come." He was looking ahead to the future coming of Christ to Jerusalem. Our Lord speaks of "the coming of the Son of Man." He, too, looked to the future, to His return at the end of the world.

St. Paul, on the contrary, looked neither to the past (to what had happened), nor to the future (to what will happen), but to the present (to the now, to the time in between Christ's first and last coming), to our time.

In his blunt way, Paul says, "Wake up!" He echoes Jesus' words, "Stay awake!"

Sleep is a blessed thing, but not when one is supposed to be awake. A guard asleep on duty can cause a city to fall. One asleep on the job may well lose it. People asleep are not aware of what is going on. Our Lord said that



was exactly the way it was with people at the time of Noah and the flood, or when a thief burglarizes a home.

So the clarion call from both Jesus and Paul: "Wake up! Stay awake!"

Being awake means "being with it." Paul says the first place for us to "be with it" is morally. When Paul talks of morals, he pulls no punches. He says children of the light shouldn't do what pagans do: no getting drunk, no impu-

riety, no gossiping and jealousy. Forget the cravings of the flesh.

Our Lord cautioned us not to repeat the carelessness of Noah's day. Then, the people ate and drank, took wives and husbands. In other words, they were concerned just about the things of the flesh.

Jesus did not fault people for eating, drinking and marrying. He blamed them because that was all they had on their minds. They had no thoughts for the things of eternity. They weren't with it; they were asleep.

Secondly, both Paul and Jesus wanted us to "be with it" intellectually: to understand that when Christ comes at the end, a judgment will occur, that is, a separation of good and bad. This will happen in the twinkling of an eye: two men will be in the field and one will be taken to heaven, the other left to destruction. Two women will be grinding meal and one will be taken to heaven, the other be left to destruction. One in each group had been too busy to take God into consideration.

Finally, both Jesus and Paul want us to "be with it" by being smart. What Jesus stresses about the end of the world is not atomic destruction, but its

suddenness. Our Lord knew people. He knew our problem is not so much our badness as our carelessness, not so much our thinking ill as our not thinking at all, not so much our sinning as our being asleep.

The conclusion: Be awake!

Recall Aesop's fable about the ant and the grasshopper. During the summer, the grasshopper hopped around idly and sang in the sun. He saw an ant trudging under a grain of corn. The grasshopper asked why he was working so hard and not enjoying the summer sun. The ant replied that he was preparing for winter. The grasshopper laughed at the ant. Winter came and the half-starved grasshopper pleaded with the ant for food. The ant said, "You played all summer, you can now dance all winter."

Jesus did not hesitate to liken Himself to a thief, to someone trying to break into a house and steal. Maybe He was implying that it is easier for thief to burglarize than to break into our carelessness and heedlessness to wake us up to do something about things eternal.

Now is the hour. Our salvation is closer than we think.

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