

Divided by regions, together in faith

By Father Joseph A. Hart
Guest contributor

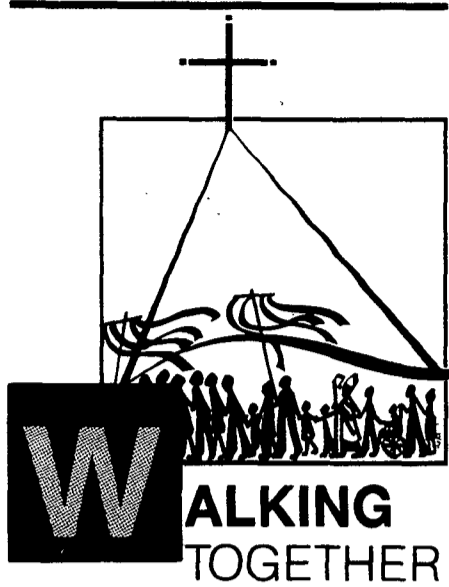
When Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen was serving as bishop of Rochester 25 years ago, his education vicar, Father Albert J. Shamon, formulated a plan to help parishes cooperate regionally in both educational and ministerial endeavors.

Father Shamon's pen divided Monroe County into five, pie-shaped slices so that each region would include both urban and suburban parishes. The diocese's remaining 11 counties were formed into six additional regions: Livingston, Steuben, Seneca-Cayuga, Chemung-Schuyler, Tompkins-Tioga and Yates-Ontario-Wayne.

Thus was born regionalism, regional coordinators, and regional assemblies. Bishops have come and gone since 1967, but Father Shamon's regions continue.

This Saturday, Dec. 12, our synod journey continues as delegates gather throughout the diocese's 11 regions. These daylong gatherings will draw delegates from every parish and community in a particular region as well as representatives of religious men and women, deacons and priests who are active in that area.

After the fall synods, each parish selected at least five delegates to attend the regional synods. A few larger parishes have as many 12 to 15 representatives. Deacons as well as religious men and women and Pastoral Center ministers selected delegates



last summer. Every pastor was appointed a delegate by the bishop at the beginning of the process. Some delegates, such as the vicar general and the judicial vicar, are required by church to law to be present. About 1,500 delegates in all will attend the regional gatherings.

The regional synod in Monroe County's southeast region will be the largest with 185 delegates participating. The Livingston region will have the fewest delegates with 80.

The 11 regional synods will each consider the same 42 recommendations, based on the reports submitted by local synod teams after the fall parish/community discussions. These teams submitted about 1,500 recommendations, which were read, sorted

and categorized by volunteers who grouped similar recommendations together. This was done so they could be rewritten in the form of a new recommendation, capturing the sense of many originals.

The Theme Writing Committees spent many hours writing and rewriting these draft recommendations to make sure that the final product submitted to regional delegates fairly represented the parish/community recommendations.

Delegates will work in small groups of 8-10 people at these regional synods. They will be asked to recommend to their fellow delegates those recommendations they consider the most important for carrying on Christ's mission in the 12 counties comprising the Church of Rochester.

In the end, each delegate will be expected to prioritize the five most important recommendations in each of three categories: "marriage and family life;" "faith-filled celebrating communities;" and "violence, addiction, burdensome pregnancy, terminal illness."

The top recommendations from around the diocese will be submitted to the General Synod when it convenes Oct. 1-3, 1993, at the Rochester Riverside Convention Center.

Although the delegates are meeting in 11 different locations, they are not meeting with separate identities or separate agendas. Father Shamon's boundaries are a legal fiction — lines drawn for convenience. We are not 11 dioceses but one local church.

Although delegates were selected by parishes, religious communities, or from a particular body of ministers, we are one and all representatives of the Church of Rochester.

Even our name tags will reflect this concept. Mine will say: "Father Joseph Hart, Webster, N.Y." and not "St. Paul's Parish," because delegates no longer represent a single parish, a definite region, or a particular viewpoint. We are the local church's delegates, who have to think globally about our 12-county diocese as we discern the most important recommendations.

The delegates will be challenged to remember: the old and the young; the married, single and divorced; the poor, the middle-class and the wealthy; the perspectives of Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian/Pacific Americans, and European Americans; the needs of the rural regions, as well as the small towns, cities and suburbs; those who attend church regularly and those who seldom make it; those who are angry at the church, hurt by the church, or have given up on the church.

To remember all of this and to keep it all in perspective is a gigantic task. One could say it is an impossible task. But again we remind ourselves that we do not discuss alone, we do not discern alone, we do not vote alone. It is our firm belief that God's Spirit guides us. And in God all things are possible.

Father Hart is director of the Synod.

Learn to take people as they are

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 11:2-11; (R1) Isaiah 35:1-6,10; (R2) James 5:7-10.

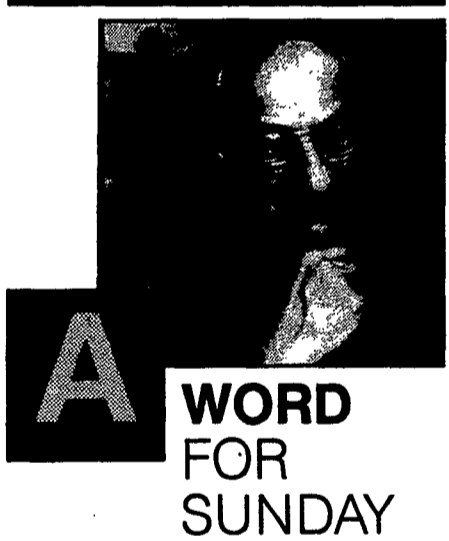
Isaiah speaks of joy eight times in the first reading: rejoice, be glad, sing.

A small child asked his downcast father what he wanted for Christmas. The father answered, "Happiness and joy, and you can't give me these."

On Christmas Day, the boy presented his father with a great big cardboard card with the words "happiness and joy" printed on it. The boy said, "You see, Daddy, I can give you happiness and joy." That shattered the father's depression.

One child has brought more joy into more people's lives than any other — the Christ child. Isaiah foretold what His coming would mean. "The desert ... will exult; the steppe ... rejoice ... those whom the Lord has ransomed will enter Zion singing."

Jesus alludes to this irrigation of withered lives in His answer to John the Baptist's emissaries. John asked,



"Are you 'He who is to come?'" Jesus answered by pointing to His works as fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy: the blind see, cripples walk, lepers are cured, the deaf hear and the dead are raised to life again. Imagine the incredible joy Jesus' deeds must have brought to those He healed, and to their friends and relatives as well.

Christ's hallmark was love and service of the poor. It is the mark of the true church and the true Christian also. Just look through a Catholic almanac and marvel at the church's many social and missionary works: 5,946 hospitals; 12,815 dispensaries; 656 leprosariums; 10,920 homes for the aged; 7,754 orphanages; 7,471 nurseries. Mother Teresa of Calcutta walks in the footsteps of St. Vincent de Paul, St. Louise de Marillac, St. Camillus de Lellis, Damien of Molokai.

St. James defines what love and service should be for us. First, they call us to be patient like the farmer. All farmers can do is plow and sow. God provides the harvest, so they must wait for Him. James tells us to be patient with life's daily problems, misunderstandings, crosses and ailments — knowing that to those who love God all things will work unto good.

Secondly, James says, "Steady your hearts." In other words, don't have an up-and-down disposition. Be a joyful person, like the sun that always shines no matter what clouds fill the sky.

Thirdly, do not grumble, especially

against one another: the boss or fellow worker, the children, husband or wife. Take them as they are, not as you wish them to be. That is what God does, and that is why He can change us. To change people — including ourselves — we must take them as they are. Only then can we and they change.

Lastly, imitate the prophets. What great men of faith they were. How strong, fearless and loyal to God. They had thankless jobs. Often they were rejected by their own, or persecuted and martyred, as was John the Baptist.

Yet they held firm to their calling. They did what they were supposed to do, no matter what the cost. They saw beyond the present. They saw the present as an opportunity to grasp the future, the eternal life beyond this life.

Christmas — the shining star, the angels and the carols — reminds us of this vertical dimension to life. The Christ child brought heaven to earth to bring earth to heaven. And He wants us to help Him and His Church do this through our love and service to others as well as our patience, strength, cheerfulness and steadfastness.

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