

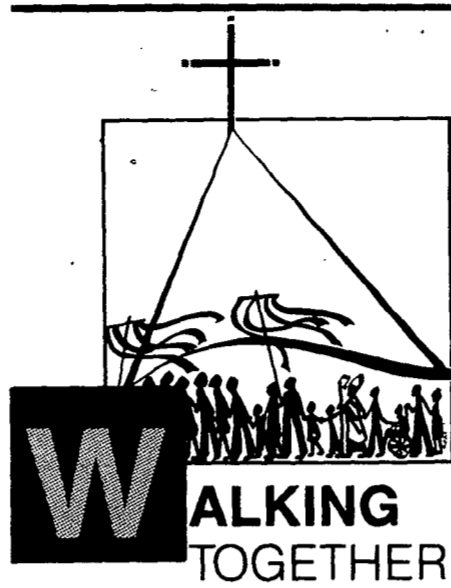
# Synod requires community involvement

By Monsignor William H. Shannon  
Guest contributor

I read recently the story of a father and his 10-year-old daughter who were watching the evening news on television as they ate their dessert. At one point, the broadcast showed a South African black man being forced out of his home by a group of young thugs. They followed the man, pelting him with stones and finally ended up stoning him to death. The little girl was quiet; then she asked: "Daddy, did this really happen or is this just make-believe on a TV show?" Somewhat uncomfortably the father told her it was real. Her next question made him even more uncomfortable: "Daddy, why didn't the man with the camera help the person who was killed by the stones?"

There is a great deal to ponder in that simple question. It forces us to face up to other questions: do photographers and the other media people cease to be members of the human community when they are out seeking "an objective picture" of the news? Does their role relieve them of all human responsibility to those whose story they are telling? Are they simply innocent bystanders watching a crime unfold, with concern only to tell the story, but with no concern to involve themselves in the story?

These are large questions, and I wonder if the father's discomfort may



not have come from the realization that he and so many others watching this scene of violence on TV were simply bystanders to a crime. Did he perhaps think that he had responsibilities toward the victims of injustice and violence that appeared so often on that TV screen? Did he also feel a sense of helplessness as he wondered, "What can I really do about all this?"

We live in a violent society, and TV has been able to bring violence into the otherwise non-violent atmosphere of our own homes. Two dangers arise from constant exposure to violence.

The first is that we become desensitized to it. The human psyche can take in only so much violence, then it sim-

ply tunes it out. We can experience that hardening of hearts the Scriptures warn us against. Secondly, this continual exposure to violence can make us bewildered by-standers — bystanders not because we don't want to be involved, but because we are frustrated in not knowing how we can become effectively involved.

One thing we need to realize is that if we are to do something about the social ills of our day, we need to have a vision that things can change and a faith that will work to make that vision a reality — a faith that, like Martin Luther King Jr., has gone to the mountain and dreamed of a whole new future where there will be no more war, no more cruelty, no more violence and oppression.

Besides the vision, we need the conviction that we can begin to right the wrongs in our society if we work together in community with courage, hope and compassion.

I bring up this topic in the context of our diocesan Synod because the synodal process will have serious faults if we deal only with in-church issues. We are a community of committed Christians who are part of a wider community — a community that is fast becoming the entire world. The Gospel calls us to concern and involvement in the issues that face that wider community.

Have you noticed how conflict areas in the world are teaching us a lot

of geography we never knew before? Two years ago hardly anyone could locate Kuwait or Iraq on the map. How different today. Or how many people a year ago knew where Somalia is? We all know now. We have seen its geography on our TV screens — strewn with the bodies of dead and dying children, women and men.

At the Eucharist in the general intercessions we remember the people of Somalia and people in other troubled areas of the world. We remember those who suffer want and abuse and violence in our own cities and towns. It is good that we do this.

But unless these prayers call us to some kind of involvement, they can easily become a liturgical cop-out. The only way we can keep liturgy alive is to relate it to the lives we live and to the responsibilities to which God calls us. G.K. Chesterton once satirized liturgical isolation in a brief limerick:

"The Christian Social Union was very much annoyed.

There are social problems we really must avoid;

And so they sang a lot of hymns To help the unemployed."

Striving to do all we can — as individuals and as community — to be the instruments of God's compassion, and concern reaching out to all who are in need is the only way we can keep liturgy honest. Uninvolved bystanders easily become guilty bystanders.

# Church should resolve to engage in dialogue

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

The making of new year's resolutions is a time-honored — if not always effective — way of engaging the rhythms and cycles of life. The end of one year and the beginning of another prompt many of us to reassess our goals and, where necessary, redirect our lives.

I propose one resolution for inclusion on each of our lists of for 1993: more dialogue in our lives — in the home, the workplace and, especially, the church.

"Dialogue" is a catch-word, but it's an essential ingredient of mature and healthy human relationships, particularly within family and church.

The late Jesuit theologian John Murray once defined a civilized society as a community "locked together in argument." In other words, a civilized society is one that is distinguished by dialogue — people listening to one another, learning from one another and enriching one another through public and private discourse.



At least twice the camera caught Bush checking his watch while one of the other candidates was speaking. When asked by a woman in the audience how the recession was affecting him personally, the president had trouble understanding the question.

Dialogue isn't easy because listening to other people isn't easy — espe-

cially when you think that you already have the answers, or that the other party doesn't know what he or she is talking about, or when you have little or no empathy for the other's experience and perspective.

I'll leave to more competent people than I the requirements of dialogue in the home and the workplace, and focus here on the need for dialogue in the church — dialogue of the sort that Milwaukee's Archbishop Rembert Weakland initiated a few years ago with the Catholic women of his archdiocese on the sensitive subject of abortion.

The archbishop was sharply criticized for that gesture by people who mistakenly believe that listening patiently and respectfully to another's opinion is tantamount to endorsing and promoting that opinion, and to upgrading a supposedly "closed" issue to an "open" one.

But Archbishop Weakland's initiative was fully consistent with the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, in which can be found more than 30 favorable references to the kind of

dialogue he invited.

In none of these many textual references does the council warn against opening a channel of dialogue with people who may disagree with a particular church teaching or practice, as if such dialogue would confuse or scandalize the faithful. On the contrary, the council offers a consistent and emphatic endorsement of the dialogue process.

The church would be well served in the coming new year if its pastoral leadership were to declare that no controversial issue or church constituency is beyond the pale of dialogue: whether the issue be the ordination of women, clerical celibacy, divorce and remarriage, birth control or abortion, and whether the constituency be women, gays and lesbians or married priests.

Dialogue requires a willingness to listen, a readiness to learn and a capacity to move beyond fixed positions. Like giving up smoking or losing weight, dialogue isn't easy.

And like them, it belongs on our list of New Year's resolutions.

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