

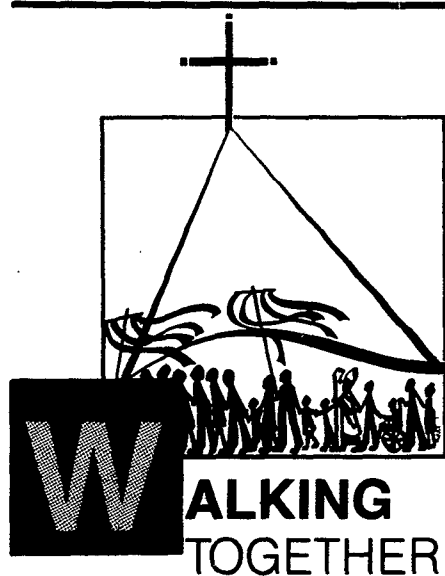
Sharing experience is Synod goal

By Judith Ann Kollar
Guest contributor

It was bitterly cold last Saturday morning. Not a few delegates to the four Regional Synods (rescheduled following cancellation due to a December snow storm) wanted to turn off their alarm clocks, roll over and stay in bed. Some even confessed this temptation to fellow delegates as they warmed themselves with a hot cup of coffee before the start of the meeting. Meanwhile, in the back of their minds, they still toyed with a secret plan: "I'll cut out of here right after lunch. The Bills' game is on! They'll never miss me."

Then the discussions began. It wasn't long before most delegates were so engaged in the discussion that they forgot they had not wanted to come. They were surprised at the depth of passion out of which their fellow delegates spoke. They were astonished to hear their own ideas coming from the mouths of others. They heard themselves say, "I feel that too — but I never dreamed anyone else felt as I do." At the first break, many phone calls were made: "Don't pick me up at noon. There's been a change of plans. I'll be staying until the end after all."

At the Yates-Ontario-Wayne meeting, regional coordinator Father John Philipps announced early in the afternoon: "Steelers 3, Bills 0." Groans went up from the crowd. A few wavering souls whispered a bargaining prayer;



for a decisive win they would keep participating as a sacrifice.

Even when we are deeply interested in things, we sometimes want to shut the whole world out or lose ourselves in a sporting event. The comfort of isolation is better than facing difficult problems. If we want to make a difference, however, we have to engage actively in dialogue that searches for solutions.

Those who attended the Regional Synods were rewarded. Some confided to me, "The synod process is so helpful. It is the first time I feel that we are really being heard."

Several delegates from the diocesan Pastoral Center were surprised to hear people asking for new programs when those programs already are

offered by the diocese. Others discovered that programs eliminated last year to balance the diocesan budget are still very much needed. One delegate said, "I would gladly give more money to the Thanks Giving Appeal to support this type of program; I didn't know that my contribution meant so much." Without exaggeration, everyone learned a lot.

Many, many people have become really enthusiastic as a result of the synod discussions this past fall and of the Dec. 12 and Jan. 7 Regional Synods. Instead of low expectations and high realizations, they may have had high expectations for the local church based on their own experience and the reports of other delegates.

There may be a down side to this enthusiasm, however. Some may be disappointed that, despite what others have said, the synod process does not work for them.

Have you ever gone to a film someone else raved about only to find it was the worst movie ever made? This is real life. We listen to others' opinions and follow their lead. Sometimes we have the same reaction and sometimes the opposite. Both reactions are real, and both have to be contended with. It is in coming together to discuss opposite experiences that we gain insights.

Some who went to the Dec. 12 or Jan. 7 Regional Synods were greatly surprised at the depth of sharing; others had expected it. Some were astonished by the misinformation about the

church held by others in their groups; others understood that this was the real-life experience of some individuals. Some people found themselves in ineffective groups. Some had poor facilitators, and others contended with negativism and delegates who tried to dominate the process. This, too, is real life. I believe that this is the wonder of the whole Synod process.

I confess that I didn't think the Bills would win. But Father Philipps just announced the final score: Bills 24, Steelers 3. Likewise, at the beginning I did not think that calling a diocesan Synod was a good idea.

I now believe it is the most wonderful thing to happen to our church in a long time. People are really involved: 20,000 cared enough to fill out the questionnaires in 1991; 30,000 read the first three Synod documents and participated in parish discussions; and now 1,500 have gathered to share their ideas and formalize recommendations.

I also bet that more people will read the next three documents for the spring parish/community discussions as a result of the enthusiasm generated by the first three.

It is always a wonderful experience when our low expectations become high realizations. I hope that this was your experience in regard to your participation in the Synod. It certainly is mine.

Kollar is the diocesan director of Professional Development.

Time is God's coin to buy eternity

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

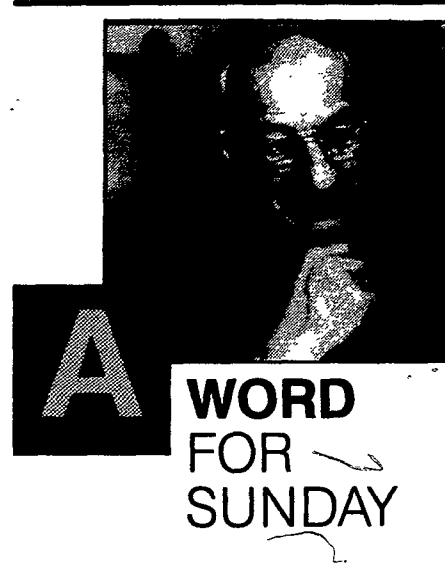
Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 1:29-34; (R1) Isaiah 49:3, 5-6; (R2) 1 Corinthians 1:1-3.

Apart from the seasons of Easter, Lent, Christmas and Advent, which celebrate particular mysteries of Christ's life, the year has 33 or 34 weeks in which no particular aspect of the mystery of Christ is celebrated.

This period is known as ordinary time, which begins the Monday after the Sunday following Jan. 6. It continues until Ash Wednesday and then picks up again on the Monday after Pentecost, continuing until the first Sunday of Advent.

Somebody said this period, which comes between the festive seasons, was called "ordinary time," because it was a "no-particular-reason season." Actually, there is a reason for the Sundays in ordinary time: they unfold various aspects of the mystery of Christ's life.

The word "ordinary" comes from the term "ordinal," a number indicating the place in a series: first, second, third, and so on. The Sundays outside the Christmas and Easter seasons are



numbered first, second, and third of the year, and so on, in order to help us locate the prayers and readings for those Sundays in the Lectionary and Sacramentary.

So this time is called "ordinary" — or numbered time. Thus, next Sunday is the second Sunday of the year.

Still, ordinary time is not so ordinary. Time is the precious coin God has given each of us to purchase eternity. The Sundays in ordinary time are

days of prayer and worship, relaxation and joy. They are days to offer to God the problems, pains, and crosses of the past week and to pray to God for the upcoming week. They are days to relax and enjoy each other's company in order to recoup strength for the week ahead.

The first reading is from second Isaiah (c. 545 B.C.), the second of his four servant songs. In the reading, God chooses a servant who will glorify Him and be a light to the nations, so that His salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

In the Gospel, John the Baptist tells us that this servant is Jesus. He calls Him the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." He calls Him "lamb" not only because of His meekness, but also because He is a victim. The blood of a lamb delivered the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery; the blood of Jesus would deliver, not just Israel, but the whole world from the slavery of sin and death.

He can do this, because He is the lamb of God: that is, the true Son of God, chosen by God, and sent by God. In money, the higher the denomination, the more buying power; a \$1,000 bill can buy more than a \$1 bill.

Because the Lamb is Lamb of God, Son of God, He can take away the sin of the entire world.

John spoke of the world's "sin," not its sins. The plural "sins" refers to acts; the singular "sin" refers to state or condition. Sins pollute, infect and contaminate the very air we breathe. They create an atmosphere of sin that surrounds us, like the winter cold, and affects our freedom.

The singular "sin" sums up the effects of sins on society. Personal sins establish "structures of sin," social attitudes that make sinning acceptable. For example, society has a contraceptive mentality today that makes abortion acceptable.

God wants us to help take away the sin of the world. A university student who was having a hard time getting his act together decided to take his frustrations out on God. He went into the university chapel, sat in a pew, looked heavenward and said, "All we have on this earth are problems and a bunch of dummies who will never figure out how to solve them. I could make a better world than this one."

Then somewhere deep inside himself the student heard God answer, "That's what you're supposed to do."

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