

Consult broadly, move in unity

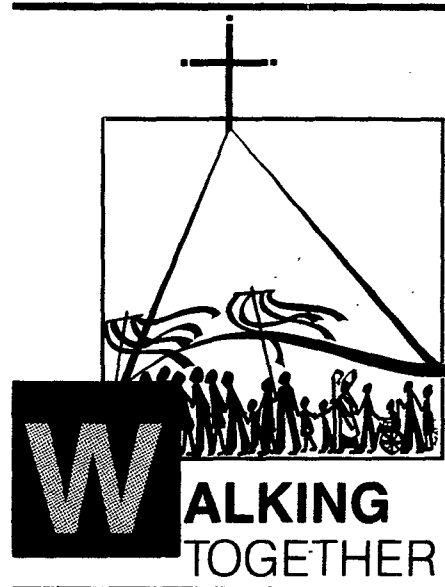
By Father Joseph A. Hart
Guest contributor

"The more things change," the French maxim says, "the more they stay the same." Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee, writing in *The New York Times*, has suggested recently that the Roman See and some U.S. prelates were too critical and too confrontational in their approach to contemporary society's problems.

In reply, Cardinal John O'Connor accused the archbishop of being too optimistic about this world's programs and structures.

Neither archbishop in this controversy accused the other of heresy, dereliction of duty, or moral turpitude. Their public disagreement is not about the substance of the faith. It is a philosophical one — about approaches. They are both good and holy men and hard-working pastors. But they disagree completely about which program to preach the Gospel is more appropriate, more Christ-centered, more promising of success.

Almost exactly a century ago, another Midwestern archbishop, John Ireland of St. Paul, Minn., carried on a similar public controversy with Michael Corrigan, New York's archbishop. Bishop Bernard McQuaid, the first bishop of Rochester, inserted himself into the middle of the controversy by publicly accusing Archbishop Ireland of meddling in ecclesiastical and politi-



cal affairs outside his diocese and of fomenting rebellion against church authorities. A public storm ensued.

The real disagreement between these two men was over parochial schools. Bishop McQuaid insisted on free standing parochial schools that were equal to or better than public schools. Archbishop Ireland, however, wanted the state to lease the church-owned school buildings for most of the school day, paying the teachers to give secular instruction. Religious education would take place after the close of the state-controlled academic day.

Both believed in Catholic schools, but so passionately were they wed to their own philosophy of Catholic education that neither would accept

the other's plan for structuring these schools. As a consequence, neither had much respect for the other as a person. The controversy raged publicly and privately for many years, even requiring the Holy See's intervention at times to maintain the peace.

There is a lesson here for our synod process.

As Roman Catholics, we all wish to see the church grow and prosper. We wish to see the Gospel preached and the poor relieved of their suffering. We wish to celebrate the sacraments in the midst of a faith-filled, supportive community and to have our children grow to love the church's traditions. As a community we wish to grow in faith and love in union with our bishop and pope, whose special ministry it is to keep the churches throughout the world in unity and peace.

But how is all of this best done? That's the rub.

Laity and religious, theologians and pastors, bishops and catechists, priests and sociologists, writers and practitioners, all have their own ideas about what will be best for the church. All have different ideas, structures, programs, approaches and instruments to move the church to more effectively carry out Christ's mission. The church cannot do them all. Not only are some too costly and others too cumbersome but many are mutually exclusive.

Our task as a local church, under

the Holy Spirit's guidance, is to listen and learn from each other, and to choose those approaches that seem best for this time and place given our limited resources. That's what our Synod is trying to do.

For our Synod to be effective, however, we have to learn how to let go. No matter how strongly we are convinced of the correctness of our philosophy, the wisdom of our programs, the rightness of our solutions, once the Synod has set our priorities as a church, we must let go so that the diocese may grow. If we do not let go — if we let our person get in the way of something much greater — we will undermine the Gospel's work, jeopardize Christ's mission, and threaten the church's very vitality we love. As church, we need to consult broadly, decide prayerfully, and then move in unity.

Bishop McQuaid and Archbishop Ireland were old men when they reconciled. It took many years and many unproductive words before they understood they were working for the same end. The historian Zwiwerlein recounts that the archbishop, on a courtesy visit to Bishop McQuaid in 1905, quipped that before the Suez Canal was cut through "many wondered whether the Mediterranean and the Red Sea were on the same level."

For the good of the church, how unfortunate it was that this insight came so late. May it not be that way with us.

God sees potential in those we miss

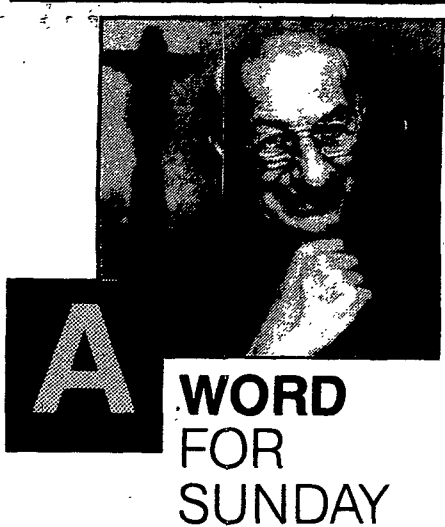
By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 5:1-12; (R1) Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13; (R2) 1 Corinthians 1:26-31.

After the Christmas season, the second readings are from St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (chapters one to four). Paul founded the church in Corinth and stayed there 18 months (A.D. 50-51). He loved this community as a mother loves her troublesome child. Although devoted to the faith, the Corinthians were a disobedient lot.

Greek thought and philosophy gave them an inflated view of worldly wisdom. They thought human reason alone was sufficient to find God. Paul told them that "the wisdom they deemed so highly never led to Christ nor saved them from their sins. It was the cross that did this — the cross their philosophers branded as foolishness."

Then to deflate their pride, Paul asked them to take a look at themselves. "Who were you?" he asked them. "Were you philosophers? Were you of the mighty and powerful?



Were you of the rich and upper class? You were laborers, slaves, low-born. By the world's standards, you weren't a very promising lot. But God saw what the world could not see. He chose you to make you realize that salvation is all His doing."

Zephaniah foretold the same thing: God's people would be the humble and the lowly (R1). Our Lord also echoed the same thought: "Blessed

are the poor in spirit" (R3).

Have you ever noticed that some rather ordinary people sometimes achieve extraordinary success?

As a child, Lawrence Welk was fascinated by his father's accordion — an heirloom brought over from Europe. In the summer after fourth grade, Mr. Welk suffered a ruptured appendix and nearly died. He spent seven weeks in the hospital and three months at home in bed. During this time at home, his parents let him play his father's accordion as much as he wanted. Within that time he taught himself many tunes.

As a teenager, he bought a mail order accordion for \$15. The instrument soon broke so he asked his father for \$400 to buy a good accordion. In return, he promised to work the family farm until he was 21 and gave his father all the money he earned playing his prized musical instrument. He played at weddings, birthdays and dances while keeping his promise. Once in a while he would return from playing early in the morning to do his chores.

One of his life's low moments occurred after a dance in South

Dakota. He overheard one of the band members complain, "Did you get a load of that accordionist? If I had to play every night with him, I'd go back to jerking sodas."

By normal standards of success, Mr. Welk seemed like a failure destined to go nowhere. But he never gave up. Soon he played on a couple of radio stations and won a small following. Before long his band became popular on radio stations across the country. In 1955, "The Lawrence Welk Show" premiered on television.

Most people would have rated Mr. Welk as a somewhat ordinary musician, yet 40 million people watched him every Saturday night. *Life* magazine called Mr. Welk "the most popular musician in U.S. history."

Mr. Welk would have fit in well with Jesus' disciples. If we had to pick disciples for Jesus, we would be tempted to choose the brightest and best. We probably would never have considered ordinary fishermen.

God is able to see potential in people that we often miss. He keeps us from pride by choosing "nobodies;" and He says that each one of us is a building block for His kingdom.



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