

# Not every idea is a good idea

By Father Joseph A. Hart  
Guest contributor

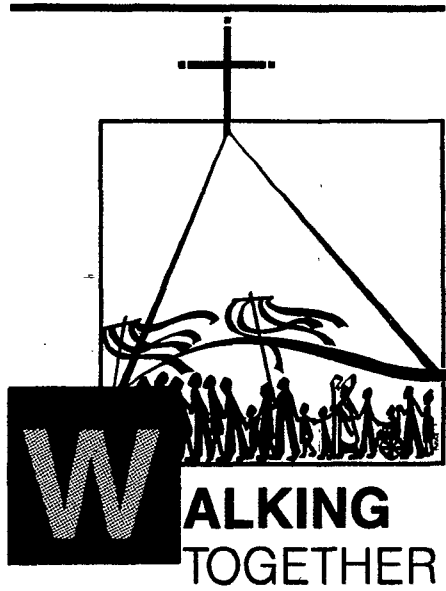
For many years, according to a recent news story in the Italian press, the city of Vincenza has hosted a trade fair for liturgical objects and furnishings during the month of May.

During the fair, manufacturers from all over Europe gather to display the latest styles and materials for Mass vestments. Artisans display carefully wrought sacred vessels and church statuary. Architects present the latest in church design.

Among the items prepared for display this year are state-of-the-art confessionals boasting high-tech soundproofing, traffic-control lights, air-conditioning, and electronically controlled sliding doors. What has proven to be most controversial, however, is a deluxe model featuring the possibility of convenient confession for the busy sinner: it offers the option of confessing sins by way of a built-in fax machine!

Fortunately, the church's discipline requires that there be a person-to-person encounter in the celebration of the sacrament of penance.

All this illustrates the principle that not everything which can be done should be done. Not every new idea is



a good idea.

Over the past three weeks parishes have been flooded once again with new ideas through the Synod process. How do they sort out the good ideas from the not-so-good ideas? How do they discern what should be implemented and what should be trashed?

Some ideas are so clearly good and useful, they can be implemented immediately. Some parishes have changed Mass times, redirected the flow of traffic, expanded religious-education times, added greeters or

acolytes, begun a social hour after Mass, started Bible study or organized a youth group because of fall Synod suggestions.

But some suggestions are more involved. They require a major commitment on the part of a parish and its resources. They touch the church's very mission. One parish is trying to discern whether to put its building campaign on hold in order to use more of their resources in ministry. Another is trying to discern whether in justice it should pay its religious-education teachers for their dedicated work. How do they decide?

As Americans we often think that the only way to decide a question is by a majority vote. But in the church and in our lives this should not necessarily be the case. Rather than asking, "What is everyone else doing?" we need to ask ourselves: "What does God want of us here and now?"

What God wants is often the thing that resonates in us as right. This resonance can occur spontaneously as we sort out the pros and cons of our decision. But sometimes it is not even necessary to sort out, argue out or reason out the decision formally. After praying for guidance, we find the answer not in a "faxed" response from the Creator but in a persistent "gut feel-

ing" that God is moving us in this direction or that. And in this decision we find great peace.

If, however, after praying for guidance the community is still unsure of its direction, then most likely prejudice has entered into the process. Such prejudices as "the former pastor told us never to do this," "I like the building exactly as it is," and "every important parish is doing this ministry" are examples of such prejudices. They put our likes and dislikes, our hopes and desires, our concerns and preferences, ahead of seeking God's direction for our lives, for our parish, for our diocese.

It is for this reason that, as we sort out Synod recommendations, we need to listen carefully to the small voices and not just to the crowd. We need to listen to the things that make us uncomfortable as well as the tried and familiar. We need to listen to the little people, not just the great ones. In all of this we need to listen carefully to the Spirit's voice.

Not everything that can be done should be done. Not every idea is a good idea. Not everything proposed is born of the Holy Spirit who guides us.

Father Hart is director of the diocesan Synod.

# Only those who will not see remain blind

By Father Albert Shamon  
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 9:1-41; (R1) 1 Samuel 16:6-7, 10-13; (R2) Ephesians 5:8-14.

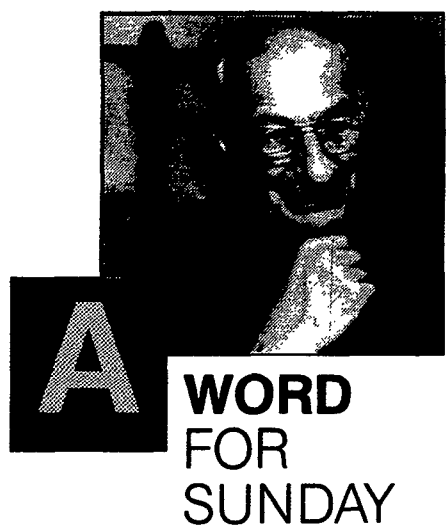
An insurance adjuster criticized a woman for not reporting a burglary. "Surely, he said, "you must have known when you saw all the drawers open and the contents scattered all over the room that you had been robbed."

"I only thought my husband had been looking for a clean shirt," the woman replied.

Our Lord told Samuel not to judge by appearances (R1). An old Chinese proverb says: "One-third of what we see is in front of our eyes, but two-thirds is behind our eyes."

In the Gospel Jesus gives sight to a man born blind. He gave him double vision: sight, so he could join the community of people and no longer be alone, and insight, so he could follow Jesus. After the miracle, the blind man was able to see not only the light in the world (daylight), but also the Light of the world (Jesus). The real miracle was one of faith.

The contrast between the cured blind man and the Pharisees is dramatic. They have sight, but not



insight. They see and yet they do not see. They are blind, because there are none so blind as those who will not see.

One of the oldest groups in existence is "The Flat-Earth Society," which claims roots from the Zetetic Society, a Greek school of skeptics from ancient times. In spite of the "eye-opening" photographs of the earth brought back from space by astronauts showing the planet as round as a bowling ball, the organiza-

tion's members refuse to believe it. "There are none so blind as those who will not see."

This was also the case with the Pharisees, who would not see even though the evidence before them was irrefutable. Jesus came to earth precisely to open the eyes of the spiritually blind. But He succeeds only with those of good will. Only those who will not see remain blind.

Our life is light; death is night. "Night is coming when no one can work." St. Paul urges us to walk in the light now.

I remember once seeing a film titled, *Without Reservations*. Four high school kids are swept into eternity by a car accident. Just a second before, they had been riding together in a car. A few moments before they had been alive. But suddenly, after the accident, they stood before the Judge of Eternity.

The students make all kind of protests. "I didn't have time to prepare;" "Why didn't someone tell me about this?;" "I always thought I'd have a chance—a hospital bed, a long ambulance ride, or at least one last minute to prepare;" "This was so unexpected, I had no time."

The judge says, "You had time. Just this Lent you had 40 days. At the

beginning of Lent, the priest reminded you that you are dust and would return to dust. Every Sunday God spoke to you in the readings. Confession was available to you. But you preferred to remain blind. You wouldn't see or hear."

"No time, you say? You had 40 days!"

"You died unexpectedly, you say? My child, no Catholic who practices the faith dies unexpectedly."

Three apprentice devils were talking with Satan about their plans to tempt and ruin people.

One said, "I'm going to tell them there is no God."

Satan said, "That won't delude many. Only the fool says there is no God."

The second said, "I intend to tell them there is no hell."

Again Satan vetoed that plan. "Sin is hell," he said.

The third said, "I plan to tell people not to be in a hurry, enjoy life now, repent tomorrow."

"Ah," said Satan, "go; that will ruin thousands."

Our most dangerous delusion is to think we have plenty of time, that we can do tomorrow what should be done today. So often tomorrow brings the night when no one can work.

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