

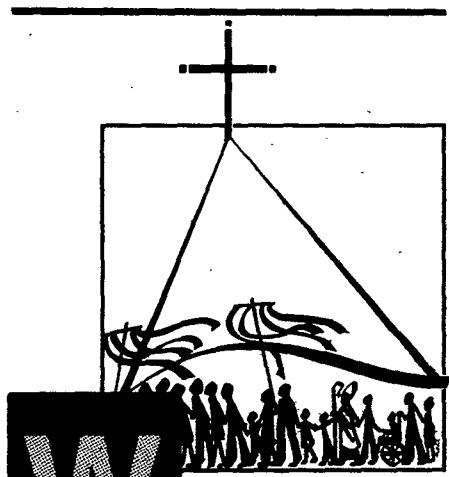
## Difficult solution can be the best

By Father Joseph A. Hart  
Guest contributor

You can learn a lot from other people's mistakes. One of the criticisms we heard over and over again from other dioceses when we began to plan our Synod more than three years ago was that their General Synods ended up excluding the priests' voices. While lay delegates were numerous, priest delegates were so few that they felt silenced, isolated and their key role in the church's life downplayed.

Part of the problem is the change in church law. In revising the Code of Canon Law in 1983, the framers of the new legislation incorporated Vatican II's understanding that all the Christian faithful — laity, religious and clergy — must "to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world." (LG 31) Consequently, though the 1917 Code required that all the diocese's priests be present at a diocesan synod, the current code requires only that "at least one presbyter be selected from each (diocesan region) by all who have the care of souls there." (463.1.8)

But the greatest part of the problem lay elsewhere: with the timing of the Synod itself. If a Synod is planned



**W**ALKING TOGETHER

during the middle of the week when all the clergy can be present, the number of laity who can attend without grave inconvenience is small indeed. But if a Synod is planned for a weekend when the laity can be present in representative numbers, the clergy are excluded because they need to be elsewhere — gathering their parish communities for the celebration of Sunday Eucharist.

The Synod Commission decided that the solution to this dilemma was

simple: Bishop Matthew H. Clark would call all pastors to the General Synod to ensure that the voice of those who preside over the local communities of our diocese could be truly heard. And the General Synod would take place on a weekend when a large cross-section of the laity and religious could be present. We would simply borrow sufficient priests from the neighboring diocese to cover Sunday Eucharist in all the parishes.

When I visited the personnel directors of the Buffalo, Syracuse and Scranton dioceses to test their willingness to help us during our General Synod, they all reported their bishop's enthusiasm to issue a call for help but predicted that no more than eight to 10 priests would respond — if we were lucky. What was worse, the number of clergy we needed began to climb as healthy priests became sick, moved away in retirement, or died. Almost overnight our need climbed to 40, then 50, and finally this past month began to approach 60. Where would we ever find 60 priests?

This week Bishop Clark mailed out to every pastor the name of the priest who will take the pastor's place during the weekend of the General Synod. Some of these replacements will be parochial vicars who will be

asked to cover a more distant church. Some will be our own generous retired priests who — drawing on amazing energy reserves — will preside at Eucharist more often than they normally do. Some will be our religious priests who continue to support their diocesan brothers whenever they are called upon to help.

Most amazing of all, however, will be the 13 priests from Scranton, 19 priests and one bishop from Syracuse, and 27 priests from Buffalo who will give up their weekend and drive many miles to help our parish communities celebrate Eucharist, while their pastors and parish representatives gather to plan for the future of our diocese in General Synod.

During these past three years many parishes have paused often to pray for us in their General Intercessions. When suddenly this week, against all expectations, we found 60 priests to take the place of 60 pastors, I had the sure conviction that your prayers have been heard. And mine too.

Please continue to pray that our October Synod will be a success: that we will move with courage toward the future, trusting in God's guiding hand, not being afraid to choose the difficult solutions that so often turn out to be the best.

## Academic liberalism runs only so deep

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

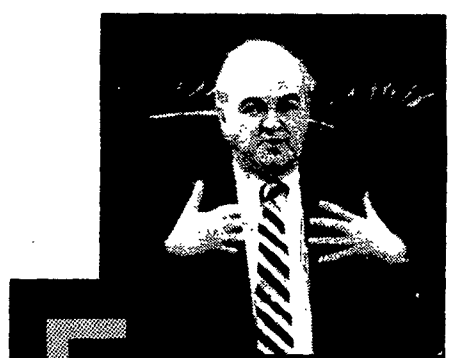
Conservative Catholics frequently deplore the liberal grip in which Catholic colleges and universities are supposedly held. They shouldn't worry so much.

It is undoubtedly the case that, as Catholic institutions go, Catholic universities and colleges are among the more liberal — more liberal certainly than the Knights of Columbus, the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars, Opus Dei, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and The Wanderer Forum.

But conservatives misperceive the situation when they portray these universities and colleges as liberal from top to bottom.

It's probably true that in most such institutions the faculty tends to be politically and socially liberal, if you leave out schools like business and engineering. But there are significant differences at the student level.

Throughout the 1980s at least, most students at Catholic universities and colleges tended to be career-oriented and politically conservative. They voted in large numbers for Reagan (twice) and Bush.



**E**SSAYS IN THEOLOGY

As the job market became more constricted, the students began to drift away from the Republicans, but it remains to be seen whether this trend will continue into the next presidential election.

Conservatives may also find it hard to believe that the liberalism of the academic administrators is generally more apparent than real.

To be sure, Catholic college and university presidents, vice-presidents, and boards of trustees are, for the

most part, committed to academic freedom and institutional autonomy. But their stance is largely dictated by the need for institutional survival.

The illiberalism — some might call it pusillanimity — of Catholic educational administrators shows through nowhere more clearly than in their self-imposed censorship in the case of faculty appointments and honorary degrees.

When Father Charles Curran became an academic "free agent" a few years ago, following his unfortunate experience with The Catholic University of America, not a single Catholic university or major Catholic college offered him a faculty appointment.

Their posture had nothing to do with his scholarly stature in the field of moral theology. Indeed, Father Curran is the only Catholic theologian who has been elected president of three major professional associations: the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA), the Society of Christian Ethics, and the American Theological Society.

Notwithstanding his considerable personal and professional merits, Father Curran was declared untouchable — not by the church officials (even Cardinal Ratzinger refused to

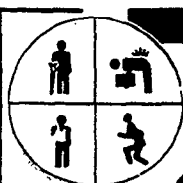
say that no other Catholic university could hire him), but by the university administrators themselves.

The self-censorship, motivated by the fear of criticism and reprisal, has been carried over now to the conferral of honorary degrees.

Even though Father Curran is securely installed in an endowed professorship at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, no Catholic institution has granted him an honorary degree in recognition of his achievements as a theologian and his stature as a voice of independent thought in the church — the kind of independent thought academic institutions are supposed to foster and treasure.

One of Father Curran's problems is that he is a diocesan priest — a priest of the Diocese of Rochester. If he were a member of such a religious community as the Jesuits, he undoubtedly would have received at least a few such degrees from colleges and universities operated by the order.

Another commencement season has passed, and still no gesture of recognition. Our Catholic universities and colleges honor only those theologians who are safe or, if not completely safe, at least fellow members of the sponsoring religious community.



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3. walked
4. sea
5. wine
6. living
7. washed

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