

Pastoral Center is ready for Synod

By Judith Ann Kollar
Guest contributor

Psychologists tell us that our expectations control our perception of reality. We see things from our own points of view and the way we see things begins to determine reality for us.

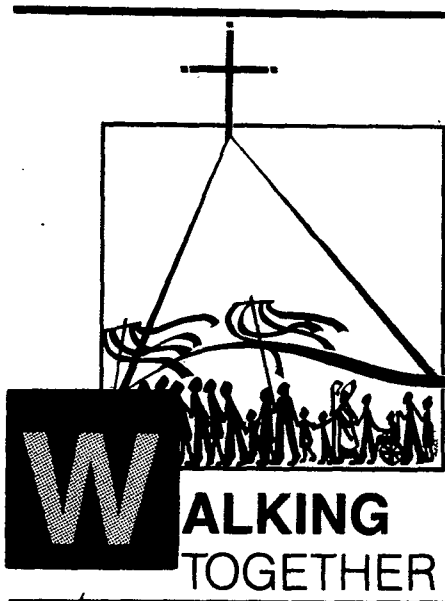
Consequently, when someone asks whether the Synod will have any impact on the diocesan Pastoral Center staff, the answer depends very much on their expectation.

Some people said right from the beginning, "The Synod won't change anything." This kind of thinking affected the process in so far as those who expected nothing from the Synod didn't participate and in their own minds — true to form — nothing has happened. Their lack of expectation affected the outcome.

On the other hand, some people had such high expectations for the Synod that they see its successes everywhere and — as a result — expect to see a radically transformed diocesan support structure.

The reality is somewhere in between. To say that the Synod will accomplish nothing is to ignore the evidence all around us. But to consider it the last word in pastoral planning until the Second Coming is to expect far too much.

Will it impact the Pastoral Center? Of course it will. But people have lots of misconceptions about the diocesan Pastoral Office staff and these misconceptions distort their expectations.



The Pastoral Center staff is not large. We are only 75 dedicated people who attempt to implement the local church's mission under the direction of Bishop Matthew H. Clark. We are janitors, printers, secretaries, accountants and ministry coordinators who use our gifts to serve the diocese. We are men and women of good will who offer programs and services to support the work of our parishes and institutions, attempting to use the diocese's resources to the best advantage, and who also offer daily support to Bishop Clark as he carries out his ministry.

But we are ordinary human beings as well. Some of us are enthusiastic about the Synod and some of us are

not. Some of us are delegates who are delighted that synod recommendations support the work we are already doing and offer us creative options for the future.

Some of us, however, are afraid that the Synod's priorities will force us to change our own established priorities and abandon projects that we feel are most worthwhile. We feel frightened by the prospects of change. We are also afraid that a large body of "outsiders" will be making decisions for us by controlling our future and setting our directions. Humanly speaking, this loss of control is most difficult indeed.

And, frankly, we are afraid for our jobs as well. Recently, some large corporations in the area began announcing layoffs as board members from the outside forced these corporations to implement new ways of doing business. The Synod Implementation Commission began meeting this week and naturally there is much speculation about whether diocesan personnel would likewise be removed at the advice of these commission members.

These are scary thoughts for Pastoral Center employees even though we already know that decisions will have to be made that will make the Synod's implementation a reality. It is no consolation to know that in many dioceses across the country radical changes were made to chancery office staffs immediately after their Synods. Can you blame us for wondering whether the same thing will happen

here?

Although the diocesan Synod may close on Oct. 3, 1993, it will be just beginning at the Pastoral Center. We will be asked to accept the prioritized recommendations approved by the delegates at the Rochester Riverside Convention Center and to read through each original parish recommendation in order to fully understand the needs to be addressed.

On the basis of this study, we will brainstorm as departments, attempting to create the best possible programs, initiatives or services to respond to the delegates' priorities. These projected plans will be forged into a strategic plan for the entire Pastoral Center, and they will be approved by the Synod Implementation Commission as truly honoring the synod priorities.

Despite our concerns and fears, we are very hopeful as a group. We love the church and feel honored to be serving Bishop Clark, the parishes, and the diocese's ministers. We are creative and resourceful. With bare-bones budgets and meager staff support, we have been able to work miracles in the past. And I have every expectation that these new challenges will bring the best out of all of us for our entire local church's benefit.

I realize that my expectations control my perception of reality, but if you were to ask me, "Is the Pastoral Center staff ready for the General Synod?" I'd have to say, "You bet we are!"

Forgiving person will earn great blessings

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 18:21-35; (R1) Sirach 27:30-28:7; (R2) Romans 14:7-9.

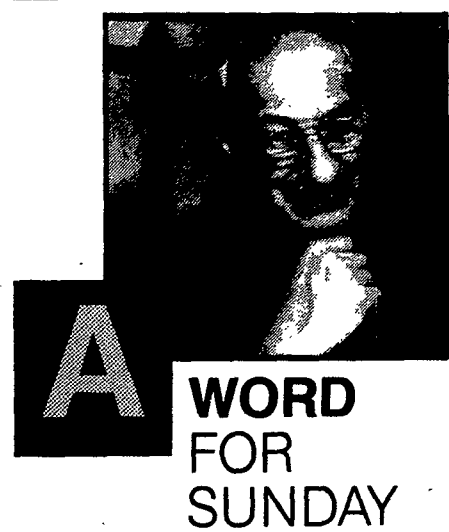
The theme of Sunday's liturgy is forgiveness.

We are told to be forgiving, because God is forgiving. "The Lord is kind and merciful; slow to anger, and rich in compassion ... He pardons all your iniquities."

The gospel parable illustrates how foolish it is for us not to forgive. Our offenses against God are like owing a million dollars. Yet He forgives us at the asking. Our neighbor's offenses against us are like owing one dollar. Not to forgive such offenses condemns us to God's judgment. We burn the bridge over which we must pass.

In other words, God's forgiveness will be dependent on our forgiveness. He taught us to pray, "Forgive us as we forgive ..." He said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." Sirach summed it all up when he wrote: "Forgive your neighbor's injustice; then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven."

God tells us to forgive one another



because we never know the whole story. We cannot read the human heart. The French have a saying: "Comprendre tout, c'est pardonner tout," that is, "to know all is to forgive all."

Have you heard the story of an old Persian king who wanted his four sons to stop criticizing each other? During the winter, he sent his oldest son on a journey to see a mango tree. When spring came, he sent the next oldest son on the same journey. During the

summer, he sent his third and then in autumn his youngest — all on the same journey to see the mango tree.

When the youngest son returned, the old king called the four of them together and asked one to describe the mango tree.

The oldest son, who had seen the tree in winter, said it looked like an empty vase with bare branches. The second oldest, who had seen it during spring, said that it was beautiful, laced with leaves as green as emeralds. The third son, who had seen the tree in summertime, said that it had blossoms like roses. And the youngest, who had seen it in autumn, said that it was laden with fruits sweet and succulent as pears.

"Each of you is right, for each of you saw it in a different season," the old king said to his sons. "Remember this, then, don't criticize each other anymore or judge one another, for you may not know the whole truth."

A woman was always complaining about her neighbor's untidiness. One day she gleefully drew a friend to her window and said, "Look at those clothes on the line — streaked and gray!" The friend replied gently, "If you look more closely, I think you'll

see that it's your windows, not her clothes, that are dirty."

Henry Ford said, "Don't find fault. Find a remedy."

To forgive does not necessarily mean that you have to like the person you forgive or to become bosom companions with one. To like is a feeling. We have no control over our feelings. Forgiveness is more than a feeling, a feeling good about someone. Like love, forgiveness is a decision — a decision to do good to an enemy; to do, as our Lord taught, to pray for your persecutors.

Not to forgive is so terrible because it is usually the offspring of two of the worst human traits possible: pride and hatred. Holding a grudge is often a sin that brings its own punishment right along with it. The person who cannot forgive often becomes narrow, bitter, cynical, suspicious, ill-at-ease, and generally miserable. As Sirach put it: "The vengeful will suffer the Lord's vengeance, for he remembers their sins in detail."

Nowhere does Jesus say it is easy to forgive. But He says that a forgiving person will earn blessings from God, including the forgiveness of their own sins.

Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.

John 20, 29

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