

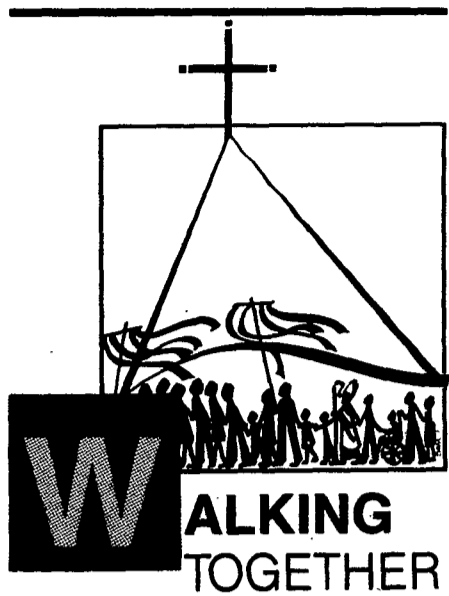
# We must remain open to possibilities

**Dr. Roslyn A. Karaban**  
Guest contributor

I have found myself delaying this column's writing. My task is easy enough: to focus on the Synod recommendations involving marriage and family life. I would like to see this theme become one of our diocese's top priorities. Why am I so resistant to choose just one of these recommendations? Perhaps it is because of what the Synod has been for me.

I have been involved in the synod process for two years now, serving as a member of the writing committee on marriage and family life and as an *ex officio* delegate to the Regional Synod meetings. I have attended numerous meetings during these past two years, mostly focusing on the writing of the Theme One document. Needless to say, I felt very invested in this theme.

When it came time at the inaugural Regional Synod to prioritize the 15 recommendations that emerged from the parish discussions on this theme, I remember having a few "favorites" for which I am sure that I spoke passionately in my group. But I can also honestly say that others spoke as passionately for their top choices. What occurred after that was truly amazing and unexpected. Instead of arguing with each other, I found that we really listened to each other and were able to hear each other's concerns.



In communication terms, we were using the basic skill of *empathy*, sincerely working on understanding each other's perspectives and checking with each other to see that we had understood. This does not mean we always agreed with one another, but it does mean we listened *respectfully* to each other, another basic skill of communication.

We often turned to prayer and continually sought God's guidance as we discussed and listened to each other. As a result, I found myself changing some of my priorities and re-evaluating what was most important for our local church. After speaking to many other delegates, I can say that this also

happened to others.

If you have not had the privilege of sitting around the table at a synod discussion, permit me to describe for you what my experience was like. I sat in groups in which I did not know anyone. I did not know them as liberal or conservative, heterosexual or gay, in favor of women's ordination or against.

I did not know what parish in which they worshiped or what work they performed. I knew them only as co-participants and colleagues in a process of discerning how the Spirit was speaking and calling us to respond. I found openness, enthusiasm, love, a deep commitment to the Roman Catholic tradition and to Jesus Christ, and an ardent hope for the church's future. I also discovered that despite the many differences I am sure existed among us, our concerns and hopes were more similar and alike than not.

When I look over the Regional Synods' top five recommendations in Theme One, I see that my No. 1 priority did not make it into the top five. This does not mean that I think the process has failed or that the suggestions that rose to the top are useless ones. Quite the contrary. As I look at these suggestions, two years after beginning to work with this theme, I see that they are all quite good suggestions and all worthy of our sincere and serious consideration.

For this reason, I've decided not to promote one of my "favorite" recommendations but to speak a word to the General Synod delegates. It is my recommendation and my hope that the spirit of cooperation and caring that has pervaded these last two years will remain with us as we conclude our prayerful deliberations. If we can continue to put the church's needs first and to listen both to each other and to the Spirit's promptings, the synod process will continue to be a faithful, loving response to this diocese's needs.

These needs and this response may include recommendations that are not the No. 1 priority with me or you. It may also include suggestions that are "prophetic" and seen by some as controversial, and by others that are well past their time. When the Spirit is allowed to speak within and among us and is not confined or thwarted by restriction of gender or marital status, amazing things can happen: in a stable a young girl may bear a child who grows up to be the Savior; a prophetic recommendation to ordain women to the priesthood may take root and grow and one day soon become a reality.

May we continue to be open to these amazing possibilities.

Dr. Karaban is a professor of ministry studies at St. Bernard's Institute and a pastoral counselor for the Samaritan Pastoral Counseling Center.

## Parable teaches about God's graciousness

By Father Albert Shamon  
Courier columnist

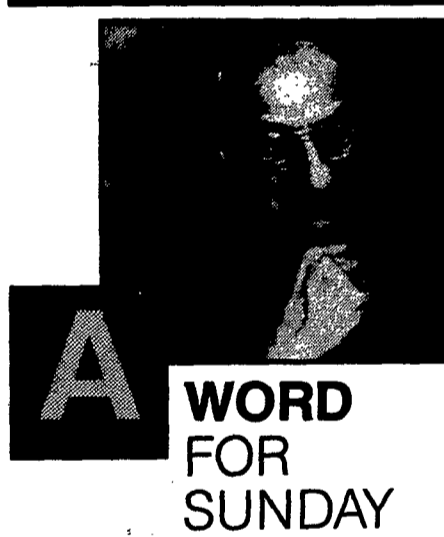
Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 20:1-16; (R1) Isaiah 55:6-9; (R2) Philippians 1:20-24, 27.

Like most parables, the one of the laborers in the vineyard is primarily about God and only secondarily about us. The parable teaches us about God's graciousness, that "my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways" (R1). Some have called this the parable of the generous boss.

I remember as a kid when I used to hear this parable at Sunday Mass. I used to side with the laborers who had worked the whole day and grumbled because they were given the same wages as those who had worked only an hour. It seemed a bit unjust to me.

Yet the more I thought about it, the more I realized that there was no injustice. The guys who had worked the whole day got a day's wages.

But why were those who had worked only an hour also given a



whole day's wages?

First, to teach us that God's ways are not like ours. God doesn't expect us to earn heaven. We can't. Grace means an undeserved gift. That is what baptism is meant to teach us; namely, that we didn't even choose to be Catholic — God called us before we could even think. Faith is God's gift.

If we cannot earn heaven, then why do good works? For the sake of others: to let our light shine before people and that by seeing it they might be drawn to God.

How do you think those men felt who got a whole day's wage for one hour's work? How do you think they felt toward the master when they learned he gave it to them out of the sheer goodness of his heart?

How would you have felt? How would you have thought of such a master? And suppose he continued to give you a full day's wages for one hour's work for the rest of your life? Just because he was so good and loved you so much? How would you feel about him?

That was the whole point Jesus was trying to make in the parable with the laborers. God our Father has given us life, love, time, the Earth with all its richness and beauty — everything. And to boot, He has promised us a fairy-tale ending to our lives — to live happily ever after with Him — if only we will go into His vineyard and work.

The time doesn't matter. The thief on the cross worked but an hour. St. Augustine worked half a day. The Little Flower of Jesus the whole day. Only one thing is necessary: don't stand idle all day, go into the vineyard. "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call him while he is near. Let the scoundrel forsake his way and turn to the Lord."

A favorite hymn among many is "Amazing Grace." God's grace is amazing, the way He welcomes all, forgives all, loves all. His grace is amazing. Thank God that He refuses to be just. If He dealt with us as our deeds deserve, who of us would see salvation? If one day, Christ summons us, "Come, blessed of my Father," it will not be because the Father is just, but because He is good ... a God whose name is Mercy.

Well might we pray: "Remind us, loving God, that we are where we are with you, not because of our merits, or the longevity of our time with you, or our good deeds, but only because of your grace, only because of your grace — your amazing grace. Amen."

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