

# Themes emerge from proposals

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Approximately 1,400 delegates from around the Diocese of Rochester are gathering October 1-3 at Rochester's Riverside Convention Center for the general session of the diocese's Seventh Synod.

During these three days, the delegates will consider 48 recommendations developed and approved through a three-year process of parish/community and regional synods, noted Father Joseph Hart, the synod's director. Delegates to the General Synod will be the same individuals who participated in regional synod sessions in Dec., 1992/Jan., 1993, and in May, 1993.

The recommendations focus on six themes announced at the beginning of the synodal process: marriage and family life in all its forms; faith-filled celebrating communities; violence, addiction, burdensome pregnancy, terminal illness; youth, young adults, the elderly and their caregivers; faith development and evangelization; and racism, poverty, unemployment, housing, health care.

The General Synod's task is to select from the field of 48 the top three recommendations for each of the six themes, Father Hart explained. An additional process in the General Synod will ask delegates to suggest recommendations for needs not addressed by the 48 recommendations. The top recommendation emerging from this process will be added to the 18 developed previously, and the resulting 19 recommendations then will be prioritized further.

Ultimately, five of the 19 recommendations will be selected for submission to Bishop Matthew H. Clark for his approval.

If approved, these five recommendations will guide diocesan priorities into the 21st century, the synod director declared. "The diocese is publicly committing to implement the top five," Father Hart stated.

Meanwhile, the recommendations not selected for the final five recommendations will still serve as general guides for

**EDITORS' NOTE:** Reprinted below and on the three pages that follow are the texts of all 48 recommendations developed through the synodal process to date.

We have endeavored to publish the 48 recommendations in their entirety. Due to space constraints, however, we could not present them in the "Who? ... What? ... Why?" format being used by the General Synod.

In addition to omitting those question words, we have combined the four short paragraphs at the start of each recommendation into one longer paragraph.

parish and diocesan activities in the years to come, he noted, adding that a number of parishes have already begun implementing recommendations made at their parish synod sessions.

In settling on 48 recommendations to be considered at the General Synod, the Synod Commission opted to alter its original plan of selecting only 30, the synod director acknowledged.

"In a number of cases," Father Hart explained, "between the five, six or seven recommendations' (vote) tallies in the original synod meetings, the tallies were too close."

General Synod delegates thus will be faced with the formidable task of evaluating 48 recommendations already made, and with developing additional recommendations they might deem necessary.

Even though delegates will face a broad field of recommendations, they likely will discern some clear patterns, Father Hart observed.

Two major needs consistently identified by recommendations were for more religious education and better communication.

Indeed, of the 48 recommendations, more than half contain some mention of education — ranging from workshops to full-fledged programs, and covering Christian formation from cradle to grave.

Meanwhile, communication is mentioned specifically in four recommendations, but is implied or suggested in a number of others.

Looking at the number of educational recommendations, Father Hart noted, "In some sense, this is the adult community envisioned by the Second Vatican Council, always aware that it doesn't have all the answers."

Thus the recommendations include calls for programs of moral education; lay ministry training; liturgical and spiritual education; death and dying education; Bible study programs; support for Catholic schools; greater use of media for evangelization and education; a program to explain church teachings in light of Vatican II and the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*; and education to combat racism.

Father Hart agreed that some of these areas are already being addressed.

And the fact that programs already exist to provide education and services in some of the areas cited by recommendations suggests that the people of the diocese lack an awareness of what already is being offered, Father Hart suggested.

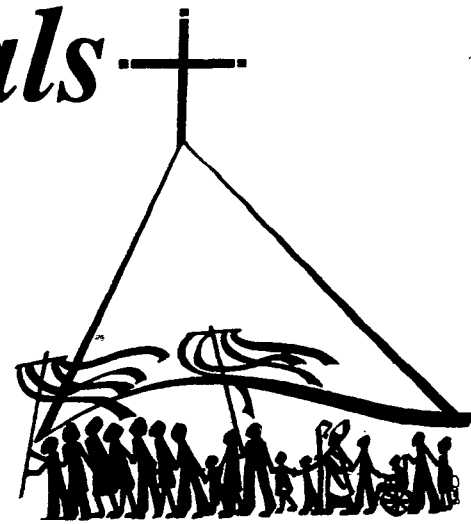
"The original synod book did an excellent job of saying that many of the pieces are already in place, but that they are not joined together in any consistent way," Father Hart added.

This is where some of the communication recommendations come into play, he acknowledged.

Thus in the area of social ministry, for example, one of the recommendations calls for "a more effective communications plan for informing parishes of the diocese and the Catholic public at large of all programs and services, whether church-sponsored or not."

Improved communication would not necessarily mean more newsletters, Father Hart cautioned. Rather, it means creating ways to help people become aware of what is available. In some cases, this could be done through such means as providing parish staff members with lists of contact numbers, he suggested.

Beyond education and communication, a number of recommendations call for the creation of parish positions and committees — volunteer and paid.



Among the areas covered in these recommendations are adult and family ministry, spiritual life, volunteer coordination, youth ministry, young adult ministry and the formation of small Christian communities within parishes.

Again, Father Hart noted, some parishes are already doing some of these things. But not all are doing so — for a variety of reasons, including limited personnel and resources.

At a diocesan level, the only new position called for explicitly is that of a coordinator for adult and family ministry.

Instead of creating positions, the recommendations seem to focus more on carrying out ministry in the parishes, Father Hart observed.

"What people want is support for what they do in ministry, not for people to do ministry for them," Father Hart observed. "What we don't need is a larger and more expensive bureaucracy."

Thus — once again — many of the recommendations call for training and education for individuals at the parish level to carry out these ministries.

As for implementing the recommendations that will ultimately be approved by Bishop Clark, Father Hart said he was confident of the diocese's ability to carry them out despite financial limitations. He linked this confidence to the way the diocesan staff has responded to personnel and budget cutbacks over the past few years.

"The creativity that the Pastoral Center has shown over the last few years is the same creativity that the diocese will show in implementing the Synod priorities," Father Hart predicted.

## Theme 1: Marriage and Family Life in All Its Forms

**A ISSUE: Adult and Family Ministry** — We recommend that: the Diocese of Rochester establish an Adult and Family Ministry position filled by a culturally sensitive professional qualified to provide training, support and resources for ministers and volunteers who will address adult and family issues at the parish level throughout the diocese.

We make this recommendation because:

1. Many Parish/Community Synod recommendations acknowledge that the parishes cannot make much headway in developing adult and family ministry to respond to family needs without the ideas, encouragement, resources, training, support and coordination which a diocesan office can provide.

2. Parishes need staff and volunteers trained in the area of family ministry; pre-Cana leaders feel abandoned without ongoing training and support; both staff and volunteers need training to effectively minister to the diversity of adult and family lifestyles.

3. Such an office could support research to determine unmet adult and family needs, design workshops and programs to help meet these needs, supply printed materials and audio-visual resources in support of parish programs, and establish an information network to communicate the services available through the diocese.

**B ISSUE: Catholic Moral Education** — We recommend that: Parishes, or clusters of parishes, in cooperation with the diocesan Faith Development Ministry and Adult and Family Ministry, design and present ongoing programs on contemporary moral issues, especially life issues, and on



the formation of conscience.

We make this recommendation because:

1. Many Catholics in the diocese say they lack even a basic understanding of conscience formation, have no solid framework for personal moral decision-making, and feel helpless when trying to educate their children.

2. The teachings of the Church concerning sexuality, contraception, abortion, sterilization, marriage, divorce/annulments, and their rationale are not being communicated effectively or consistently by pastors and teachers. Moreover, there is limited understanding and acceptance of the Church's teaching of a consistent life ethic which includes euthanasia, capital punishment, war, and economic and societal justice.

3. Many Synod recommendations expressed the feeling that their priests or religious education personnel need assistance to

satisfy this need.

**C ISSUE: Family-based Spirituality** — We recommend that: Parishes, with the help of the diocesan Office of Liturgy and Adult and Family Ministry, develop ongoing programs to support the prayer and spiritual life of all families included blended, multicultural, interreligious and other non-traditional family units: workshops, retreats, small group gatherings, family oriented religious and liturgical events, family programs, etc.

We make this recommendation because:

1. Family spirituality must be a real, ongoing daily experience which is based in the home and is realistic about the pressures of everyday life.

2. Much evidence supports the adage "the family that prays together stays together." Families need regular programs at the parish level which help promote family spiritual growth. Parents need to learn how to teach children to pray and the value of prayer. Couples also need to be taught how to pray together and need encouragement to use the Bible in prayer.

3. Parishes need help in planning weekend liturgies and other prayer experiences which involve and support total family involvement.

**D ISSUE: Marriage and Family Counseling** — We recommend that: Parishes or groups of parishes, in cooperation with the diocesan Social Ministry Offices and Adult and Family Ministry, establish counseling programs and systems of referral to offer Christian Pastoral counseling with a sliding fee scale to individuals, couples and families in need.

We make this recommendation because:

1. There are many pressures today on marriage and family life that need to be addressed before individuals are harmed and relationships are destroyed. Many people do not know where to go to seek help or are afraid to go to public agencies.

2. Many people seek qualified Christian pastoral counselors who bring a spiritual dimension to their ministry. Such services are totally unavailable for most of the rural part of the diocese and are seldom offered through the parishes or financially supported by them elsewhere.

3. Many parish priests no longer have the time nor the skills to devote to this ministry and yet our parishes still should be seen as caring deeply about the problems of marriage and family life.

**E ISSUE: Marriage Preparation Process** — We recommend that: Diocesan Adult and Family Ministry, with the help of the Parishes, improve the marriage preparation process by designing a core curriculum and utilizing experienced couples, compatibility testing and group process. Programs should begin earlier in the marriage planning period and emphasize a follow-up phase.

We make this recommendation because:

1. Many parishes reported in their Synod discussions that the diocesan pre-Cana process as now constituted is ineffective because of lack of training of priests, deacons and pre-Cana teams, the lack of use of any psychological instrument, and the lack of a clear and consistent curriculum.

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