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New encyclical

In the first-ever papal encyclical on the foundations of moral theology, Pope John Paul II said many moral theories today are failing because of a 'crisis of truth.' Six years in the making, the 179-page encyclical was released Oct. 5. It is titled 'Veritatis Splendor' ('The Splendor of Truth'): Page 7.



Religious education named top priority

'Life ethic' gets last-minute push

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Lifelong religious education headed the list of five priorities selected by approximately 1,300 delegates who attended the Seventh Diocesan Synod Friday, Oct. 1, through Sunday, Oct. 3.

The General Synod concluded a three-year process in which parishes and later regional groupings of parishes developed recommendations for diocesan action on six synodal themes. The themes were designed to guide Catholics in choosing priorities for the diocese in the coming years.

In addition to the five priorities — which the diocese is committed to implementing — delegates also chose two "prophetic recommendations." The term "prophetic recommendation" refers to a recommendation that falls outside the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Rochester and calls for action by the universal church.

One of these recommendations asks the church to consider ordaining women to the priesthood and diaconate, and the other recommendation asks the U.S. bishops to advocate with Rome on behalf of allowing priests to marry.

For more coverage of the Seventh Diocesan Synod, turn to pages 11-14.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark announced the five diocesan priorities to delegates and other members of the diocese at the end of an elaborate Eucharistic Liturgy, which closed the synodal proceedings

Sunday afternoon, Oct. 3. The liturgy, which took place in the Community War Memorial, also marked the Diocese of Rochester's 125th anniversary.

"I am willing — sight unseen — to commit my best energies with you to implement these," Bishop Clark told the congregation prior to reading the priorities. Synod delegates applauded enthusiastically as the bishop asked them likewise to commit themselves to implementing the priorities.

A 15-member Synod Implementation Commission will now be charged with overseeing implementation of the recommendations approved by the General Synod.

On behalf of the commission, Father John M. Mulligan, diocesan vicar general, sent out surveys to diocesan parishes on Monday, Oct. 4. Father Mulligan asked pastoral leaders to complete the survey within a month so that the diocese can plan and budget for implementation of the synod priorities.

The surveys contain questions that ask how parishes will respond to each priority; what staff and resources parishes will use in doing so; what a parish will need from the diocese in terms of training and programs; and what possibilities exist for neighboring parishes to work together on any of the priorities.

Synod delegates' votes on the five priorities were weighted. For example, a delegate's vote in favor of making education the number one priority would equal five votes; a delegate vote to make education the number two priority would receive four votes; and so on down to a vote for

the number five priority which would receive the value of one vote in favor of the measure.

The most popular recommendation received 2,710 votes. It called for the diocesan Department of Evangelization and Catechesis to support and encourage parishes and clusters of parishes to:

"(I)mplement a complete religious education program which focuses on Catholics of all ages and makes creative use of inter-generational programs to involve the whole community in faith formation."

This priority and three of the other four arose

through parish/community and regional synod meetings conducted during the past year. But the second priority established by the synod came forth during the general session itself, which included time to discuss "What one recommendation is missing?"

The second priority — entitled "Consistent Life Ethic" — originated during small-group discussions on Sunday, Oct. 3. It emerged as the most popular of 24 "missing" recommendations put forth by delegates.

The Consistent Life Ethic priority, which received 1,743 votes, states that parishes, ministries and agencies of the diocese "promote and implement a clear and consistent application of the 'seamless garment' philosophy in respecting life in all its forms."

The "seamless garment," a concept originally promulgated by Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago, seeks to safeguard life from the moment of conception to natural death. It encompasses

issues ranging from abortion and euthanasia to justice and peace efforts.

The delegates also chose these three priorities, which are listed in order of vote totals.

3. Catholic Moral Education — 1,280 votes — Parishes and clusters of parishes, cooperating with diocesan Faith Development Ministry and Adult and Family Ministry, will be asked to "design and present ongoing programs on contemporary moral issues, especially life issues, and on the formation of conscience."

4. Role of Women In the Church — 1,078 votes — Parishes and other church institutions and communities should work to "eliminate restrictive gender roles in parish and diocesan ministries, to use language which is deliberately inclusive, and to involve both men and women in decision-making and leadership roles."

5. Small Christian Communities — 991 votes — Supported by the Department of Evangelization and Catechesis and Parish Support Services, parishes should "promote the formation and growth of small Christian communities within the parish made up of families and single persons of all ages who will meet together to pray, to study and share their faith, to eat and celebrate, to reflect on local and global issues, and to reach out to those in need."

Bishop Clark choked up when reading the priorities and was obviously moved by the conclusion of the Synod.

"It was thrilling and I am delighted!" he commented, following the Mass. "It shows that we can do something beautiful together."

The bishop may have been delighted, but no one seemed more relieved than Father Joseph A. Hart, director of the Synod.

Continued on page 14