

Joyous Mass closes out high-spirited weekend

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — "We are exhilarated, and too excited to be exhausted," Bishop Matthew H. Clark remarked to the gathering at the Rochester Community War Memorial.

And thus began the final event of this seventh diocesan General Synod: the closing Mass, held this past Sunday, Oct. 3. The two-hour service also commemorated the Diocese of Rochester's 125th anniversary.

The Mass was attended by approximately 4,500 people — mostly synod delegates who marched in a procession from the Rochester Riverside Convention Center, where they had participated in several hours of intense discussion over the weekend.

A festive mood pervaded the War Memorial. Enhancing the atmosphere were colorful Synod banners, as well as large choir and instrumental groups comprising musicians from throughout the diocese.

The multicultural service included a reading in Spanish, as well as signing for the hearing impaired.

In addition, a bell choir from St. Louis Church in Pittsford greeted the delegates as they made their way into the War Memorial.

"I've been playing for a while, so I'm used to the nervousness," commented 11-year-old William Payne, after performing in front of the large crowd of delegates assembling outside. The choir combined with a bell choir from St. Mary in Rochester to play inside the War Memorial.

A large contingent of Aquinas Institute students served as ushers at the Oct. 4 Mass. They belonged to the 60-member Aquinas Peer Ministry Team, which performs social ministry activities throughout the year. At the Mass, they collected food for area food pantries and soup kitchens.

"I like representing my school, and I think it's a nice way to help the diocese," stated Christa Muratore, an AQ junior.

The most climactic moment of the Mass — and the entire Synod, for that matter — came after Eucharist. That's when Father Joseph A. Hart, Synod director, presented Bishop Clark with the final five recommendations.

The bishop, choking with emotion, then shared these results with the con-



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer
Bishop Matthew H. Clark hugs Justin Danzy of Rochester's St. Bridget Church at the conclusion of the Oct. 3 Synod Mass.



Members of the Hosanna Sacred Dance Group spread incense.

gregation. The No. 1 recommendation — lifelong religious education — receiving a standing ovation. Likewise, another standing ovation accompanied the bishop's closing procession.

"The people are very, very thankful for the process — to be included in

shaping the direction of the church of Rochester for the future," explained Father Hart.

Upbeat moments like these were in abundance all weekend, despite the serious nature of the issues being discussed. In fact, at the opening prayer service on Friday evening, Oct. 1, Bishop Clark implored the delegates to "laugh a lot, and make new friends."

Those assembled seemed to take Bishop Clark's instruction to heart. As they began their small-group sessions, a series of hand-shaking and questions of "Where are you from?" filled the Convention Center.

As Bishop Clark floated from group to group on Friday, he remarked, "This is just a great energizing thrill — not just in terms of optimism, but also because of the great spirit in here."

Father Hart was optimistic in another way. As he saw his staggering workload as Synod director finally nearing its conclusion, he commented jokingly, "I'm going to make it."

Delegates also employed humor as

they endured a 30-minute delay in the chilly outdoor air while they waited for floor seating at the concluding Mass. Many wondered if the Mass, scheduled to begin at 4 p.m., would be done in time for them to watch the Buffalo Bills-New York Giants football game on television at 8 p.m.

Football was on the mind of Daniel Rauli as well. Although busy tallying votes on Saturday for various recommendations, Rauli was also thinking about another kind of scoring.

"The Syracuse game already began?" the Syracuse native said in dismay. "What's the score?"

Rauli's company, Scantron, had been hired to process the 1,200 computer ballots for each of the themes. These ballots were filled out by the delegates following small-group discussions, with each delegate selecting first, second and third choices.

On Sunday morning, Rauli acknowledged that during a break in the proceedings on Saturday afternoon he had snuck out to his car to listen to the game in which Syracuse lost to Boston College, 33-29.

Meanwhile, Rauli said he had to finish the computing as fast as he could Sunday: he was going to the Bills game in Buffalo that night.

Heading in another direction were Sister Mary Stephen Heffer, OP, who attended the Synod along with Sister David Marie Beikirch, OP.

The two women religious belong to the Dominican Monastery of Mary the Queen in Elmira. For Sister Heffer, it was her first trip outside the monastery — other than for doctor visits — in about 10 years.

"This is very draining; I'm not used to all this," she said during Sunday dinner at the Convention Center.

Yet Sister Heffer added that she found the weekend fruitful. "I can go back and say that these are some of the needs that we need to pray for," she remarked.

At the same dinner table, Karen Snyder's thoughts also drifted back to the discussions and their ramifications.

"In our group, there was a point at which we were going, 'This is awesome.' This is an awesome responsibility," remarked Snyder, a parishioner at Henrietta's Good Shepherd Church.

EDITORS' NOTE: Contains additional reporting by Rob Cullivan and Lee Strong.

Synod delegates: Open priesthood to women, married

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It will be interesting to see how other dioceses react to the words:

"We recommend that Bishop Matthew Clark petition the Holy See to allow the ordination of women to the diaconate and to prayerfully reconsider the 1976 instruction from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith prohibiting the ordination of women to the ministerial priesthood," stated the other prophetic recommendation.

The recommendation went on to stress that "both the Papal Biblical Commission and Theological Commission have offered the opinion that there is nothing in Scripture nor in the Tradition to prohibit it."

The recommendation further noted that the priesthood shortage could be alleviated by women's ordination and "including women in ministerial office" would end "the alienation, marginalization and under-utilization of women in the Church."

Lauren Borchard, a delegate who belongs to the Coming-Painted Post

Roman Catholic Community, believes that ordaining women "would help part of the problem with the number of clergy." She added that "women tend to feel the priesthood is something very special that they're not a part of."

On the other hand, Ted Capogrossi, a member of Immaculate Conception Church in Ithaca, wondered whether the Holy Spirit genuinely prompted diocesan Catholics to consider ordaining women — or for that matter, married men — or whether the recommendations grew out of a solely human agenda by some diocesan Catholics.

"The way I feel, I really haven't heard a strong enough argument that these are coming from the Lord," he said of the recommendations.

But Jan Naujokus, a delegate from St. George Lithuanian Catholic Church in Rochester, said that some women do feel they are being asked by the Lord to be priests.

"If there's a calling, they should be able to take their place," she said.

Matthew Olszewski, a delegate from

Sacred Heart/St. Ann in Auburn/Owasco, noted his surprise at the reluctance of some women in his small group to endorse women's ordination.

"A lot of the women were a little leery," he remarked, adding that he came down on the side of tradition in that particular debate.

Nonetheless, although he said he would "tend to support" a male-only priesthood, he believed that it should be open to married men.

"I think it would make better priests," he said. "They would understand more family problems because they would be dealing with the same problems a lot of us parents are dealing with."

Indeed, the recommendation that called for married priests stated:

"A married priest would no longer live in isolation from the joys and problems of marriage relationships and family life and consequently would be a more relevant preacher, more learned counselor, a more informed teacher and more life-giving presence to the

people."

The recommendation also noted that celibacy unjustly deprives the married of a priestly vocation; deprives the church of the gifts that married priests might bring; and creates "overwork" for the few celibate priests.

According to the official Synod program, more than 60 parishes throughout the diocese called for a change in ordination practices and/or priestly celibacy. These parishes subsequently submitted these recommendations as some of their top synodal priorities.

"What our parishes have proposed are intricate matters which require scriptural, theological, historical, pastoral and canonical study," the synod book stated.

"For this reason our delegates will not be asked for a learned opinion on these matters," the book continued. "Rather, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, they will be asked to discern their sense of the questions. What is expected of them is not an intellectual judgment but a spiritual intuition."