

Thanks for making me look so good

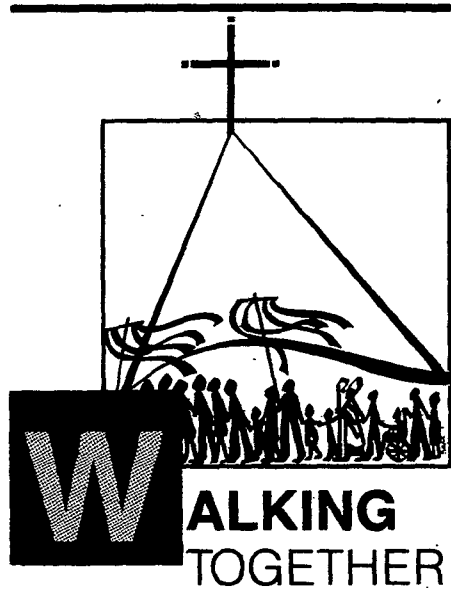
By Father Joseph A. Hart
Guest contributor

Throughout last weekend's General Synod at the Rochester Riverside Convention Center, people from every part of the Rochester diocese kept stopping me to say "Thank you ... this is wonderful!" I was delighted, of course, that everything was running so smoothly but at the same time a little embarrassed to be taking personal credit for what so many others had done.

The idea of having a Synod was not mine. It came from the Presbyteral Council, which recommended to Bishop Matthew H. Clark in May 1989 that a Synod was the best way "to address the issue of unified diocesan pastoral planning." I am grateful to them and to Bishop Clark for their wisdom and insight.

I cannot take credit for the process. The general model for our Synod was picked by the Pre-Synod Planning Committee, which studied what other dioceses had done and recommended the model developed by Father Donald Thimm for the Milwaukee archdiocese. I am grateful to them for their wisdom in giving us a very workable process.

Even the details are not mine. The details of this synod process were hammered into shape by the 24-member Synod Commission. This very diverse group was one of the finest consultative bodies with which I have ever worked. They knew what was best for our local church and articulated their insights well. I am most



grateful to them for what they sowed so carefully bore a rich harvest in the Parish, Regional and General Synods.

The Synod literature was not a product of my hands, either. Among the great unsung heroes of the Synod are the 60 members of the writing committees. These talented people — operating in six distinct groups — captured well the whole sense of the basic synod questions and provided six most readable and thought-provoking documents for the Parish Synod discussions.

These theme papers were so well done that they have been in much demand in other dioceses and have been used locally by other faith communities. These same generous people were also responsible for the wording of the collated recommendations that

went to the Regional Synods and the amended recommendations that were presented to the General Synod. I am grateful to them for providing the backbone to the synod process.

Of course, there would have been no Parish Synods without the Parish Synod Teams or Regional Synods without the Regional Synod Teams. Without the joy of being delegates, these people worked for two years with little recognition. They took care of publicity, hospitality, discussions and final reports. They set up chairs and found facilitators and baby sitters. I am grateful to them for all they did to make this grass-roots consultative process work.

The most frustrating task of all was provided by the facilitators. During the Parish, Regional and General Synods, they helped the discussion groups to accomplish their tasks without participating in the discussion. I can only imagine how hard it was to listen to a fascinating discussion without having the opportunity to speak. I am grateful to them for accomplishing this most difficult task with style.

And how can I take credit for all the work that our volunteers have done? From the opening of synod survey envelopes in 1991 to the staffing of the name-tag tables last weekend, volunteers have made the Synod Office work. They have collated and boxed materials and then lugged them all over the diocese; they have spent hours checking lists and addressing envelopes; they have come day after day to translate documents into Span-

ish. I am most grateful to them all.

And what wonderful liturgies we had last weekend! But I was not responsible for them either. Sister Estelle Martin, RSM, chaired a committee that worked on the art and environment; Father Bob Kennedy's committee planned and executed the outstanding celebrations themselves; and Ginny Miller did a great job working on the music and pulling together a choir from every corner of the diocese. I am grateful to them for making our General Synod so prayerful and joyful.

And where would I be without Marcy Holtz, the Synod's assistant director? She planned the budgets, kept the endless lists, and saw to the smallest details. She organized the many volunteers and kept the process on schedule. There are few people who I have ever known who have worked so hard on behalf of our local church. I will always be grateful to her.

Now you understand that I am just the front man. I am really a visible symbol for the synod process. When you thank me, you are really thanking yourselves. It is you, the local church, which has planned, organized and celebrated the Synod. The process has worked so well because you have made it work. You have prayed for the Holy Spirit's guidance and you have put your heart and soul into finding the best ways to carry on the Church's mission in this place and time. So as I recall last weekend's joyful events, I am grateful to you — one and all — for making me look so good.

Baptism is our invitation to heavenly celebration

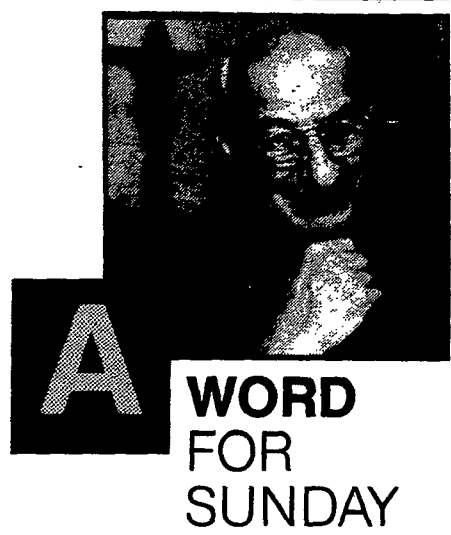
By Father Albert J.M. Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 22:1-14; (R1) Isaiah 25:6-10; (R2) Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20.

Everybody loves a party, especially a wedding party. Our Lord always spoke of heaven not as a glorified church service, but as a wedding party. People are essential to a party, so God invites everybody to His wedding party of heaven. But in the parable of Sunday's Gospel, some of those invited declined the invitation.

Once two young men shared the same room in college. Jeff was a very devout young man. His roommate was Tim, a worldly young man whose main interest in life was living life to the fullest, come what may. Often Tim and his friends would make fun of Jeff. Jeff's goodness, his adherence to the moral law, his prayer life, his doing what he was supposed to do at all times, got under Tim's skin. It's uncomfortable to live with a saint.

One afternoon Tim came back to



the dorm and found Jeff lying on the floor. He was rushed to the hospital, but it was too late. Jeff had suffered a massive coronary, unusual for one so young, but it does happen.

Tim and some of his buddies went to the funeral parlor. They noticed a very special floral arrangement. It was a telephone with the receiver dan-

gling and a red ribbon bearing the words, "Jesus Called. Jeff Answered."

Later than night, Tim couldn't sleep as he turned the words "Jesus Called. Jeff Answered" over and over in his mind. He noticed Jeff's Bible sitting on the edge of the desk where he had placed it, planning to return it to Jeff's parents. He opened the Bible to Hebrews 9:27. It read: "It is appointed that human beings die once..." Beside the verse Jeff had written, "We must keep our appointment with God."

That did it for Tim. He knelt by his bed and turned to God in prayer. After this, Tim lived his life so as to be always ready to keep his appointment whenever God called.

Jesus called. Jeff answered. But a lot of people don't answer. A lot of people have taken the phone off the hook. And that's sad. Everyone is invited to the banquet. Some, however, will choose not to attend. Some are so busy making a living that they forget to make a life. They turn down the invitation, and it is given to another.

Still, if we accept His invitation to be a Catholic, for instance, then we must

put on the wedding garment. God's chosen people thought salvation was theirs just because they were His chosen people — the sons of Abraham. Some Catholics think salvation is theirs just because they are Catholic.

Jesus' parable was meant to set the record straight regarding this error. It teaches that to accept the invitation requires a change not of garments, but of life. Once we have accepted the invitation, then we cannot keep on our old clothes — our old ways.

Baptism is our invitation to the banquet. At the same time, it is a call to reject Satan and all his works. Any sinner can come into the Church — he or she is invited — but the sinner must reject sin, strive to leave it behind and press forward toward sanctity. The sinner must put on the wedding garment of effort.

We are not alone in our striving — we are members of a faith community that celebrates God's word in the Liturgy of the Word and receives His life in the Liturgy of the Eucharist — so our striving is a joyful one, a party preparation for the eternal banquet of heaven.

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Live as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth.

Eph. 5, 8-9