

# Synod: Church as it is meant to be

By Father Joseph A. Hart  
Guest contributor

The consensus among priests discussing the General Synod at their regular Presbyteral Council meeting last week was: "We need to do this more often!"

"Oh, no!" I said to myself quietly, selfishly.

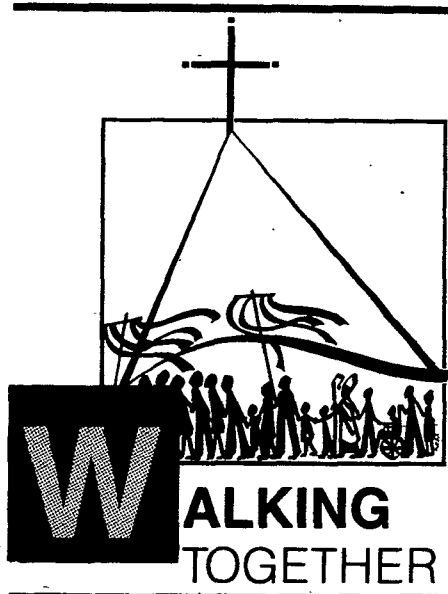
But they're right.

It was not so much all the Synod's elaborate details that these priests wanted to see reproduced. It was the atmosphere of open, respectful listening, the prayerful move toward consensus, the ability to plan together for the future with mutual trust.

A woman from the Southern Tier put it this way: "I realized yesterday that it didn't make very much difference which priorities were finally determined. The process facilitated an experience of our renewal as church in faith, hope and love; an experience of interdependent community, of mutual support and dialogue."

By now we all know that our Synod's primary purpose was to arrive at a unified pastoral plan for our whole local church. It accomplished this goal by submitting five priorities to Bishop Matthew H. Clark and the Synod Implementation Commission. During the coming months and years, the bishop and commission members will encourage and assist diocesan parishes and the Pastoral Center in finding the best ways to implement these priorities.

But this was not the Synod's only



purpose.

From the very beginning, our Synod attempted to model the way we are supposed to act as church. The atmosphere of trust, respect and openness was intentional, not accidental.

This atmosphere flowed directly from an understanding that every baptized Catholic has a responsibility for the church's mission and hence that each person must be fully heard.

The church's law wisely provides that, on an ordinary basis, we carry on dialogue about the church's mission through various types of councils. It suggests that each parish is to possess two councils to advise a pastor: a pastoral council and a finance council.

It is the proper role of the parish's pastoral council, presided over in love by the pastor, to carry on discussions

concerning its mission — similar to those provided for during the Synod process. In carrying out its role of fostering pastoral activity, the council might well need to consult broadly with fellow parishioners, discuss thoroughly the outstanding issues, discern carefully the Holy Spirit's promptings, and then prioritize the work to be accomplished in order to make the best use of limited resources.

The end result will be a parish community with a clear sense of mission and direction.

In like manner, the law calls for a presbyteral council to help the bishop in promoting the local church's pastoral welfare and recommends the formation of a Diocesan Pastoral Council "to investigate under the authority of the bishop all those things which pertain to pastoral works, to ponder them and to propose practical conclusions about them" (511).

The lessons learned during the Synod process can be applied here as well.

Our experience of the past two years tells us that what we have accomplished in the Synod can also be accomplished in parish and diocesan councils only if we take them seriously, only if their members are committed to study, to prayer, to active listening and to trust.

And there is another lesson to be learned from the Synod process. It is that the statuses of the bishop in our local church and the pastor in a parish

are not diminished because they use these consultative processes. On the contrary, because they visibly trust in the Holy Spirit's abiding presence in the community of the baptized they can more authoritatively call the entire community to use their energies to carry out the mission using limited resources in the ways that the community has directed.

This removes from their shoulders the burden of explaining to interest and pressure groups why this or that good and important action will not be taken.

The consultation, discernment and prioritization process keeps the community and its ministers clearly focused on our recommendations, our pastoral plan, our mission.

This is the final column in this year-long "Walking Together" series, signalling that this phase of the Synod process is coming to an end. But the Implementation Commission will be communicating with you in other ways.

I will be spending the next several months working with the Implementation Commission, finishing up some remaining work and preparing some papers for the diocesan archives. It's time now for our local church to return to "ordinary time" and for me to return to my position as associate professor of theology at St. Bernard's Institute.

But you and I know that we will never be the same. God's spirit has touched us and helped us experience how the church is meant to be.

# Hypocritical Pharisees couldn't trap Jesus

By Father Albert Shamon  
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 22:15-21; (R1) Isaiah 45:1, 4-6; (R2) 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5.

The words "plotted" and "entrap" reveal the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the Herodians in Sunday's Gospel. They ask the right question, but in the wrong way and for the wrong reason. It is a trap, one of the games people play to be able to say, "Now I've got you!" For whatever Jesus says, it is wrong.

Their question was, "Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?" If Jesus had said "yes," he would have offended the Jews and He would have risked losing popular support. If He had said "no," the Romans would have been offended and He would have risked standing trial for subversion.

They baited the hook with flattery. "Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

truth. And you are not concerned with anyone's opinion, for you do not regard a person's status." After such a buildup who could resist the clincher? "Here's a question that has been troubling us, what do you think?"

Jesus knew the Pharisees were trying to trap Him because He was wiser.

"Show me the coin that pays the census tax," He said.

One of the Pharisees produced a Roman coin. Little did he realize that by even possessing one, he already was well on the way to losing the argument.

The Jewish people found the inscription on the Roman coins offensive: *Tiberius Caesar, Divi Augusti Filius Augustus*, which meant "Tiberius Caesar, august son of divine Augustus."

It was sacrilegious for the pious Jew to call Augustus "divine." Thus Roman coins were not used in the temple. Instead they were changed into the Jews' own currency.

The existence of the coin itself was the basis for Jesus' first point: "give back to Caesar that which is Caesar's." The Jews were in fact subject to Rome. Because they enjoyed the benefits of a good administration, they had to pay their share of the expenses. Jesus recognized that, things being what they were, the only practical solution was to pay the tribute.

Then Jesus went on to say, "Give to God what belongs to God." What belongs to God? We do. We are made to God's image. If money is to be rendered to Caesar, because the image of Caesar is stamped on coins, then we must render to God our very selves, because His image is stamped on us.

What is true of us is also true of the state. The state too must render to God the things that are God's. Yes, we must render to Caesar what is Caesar's, but Caesar must render to God what is God's.

The great historian Godefroid Kurth wrote: "The Church takes from the State the direction of the moral life of its citizens, but leaves to the State a part beautiful enough: the earth. The Church does not declare war of the State; she extends to it the hand of friendship. If the State helps the Church, she blesses it; if the State respects her liberties, she asks nothing more; if the State attacks these liberties, she sheds her blood rather than allow it. For she cannot renounce her mission to teach all nations."

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