

The Synod

The journey in faith continues...

Pastoral plan moves from formative stage to implementation

By Lee Strong, Catholic Courier

The seed was planted in 1985.

That was the year Bishop Matthew H. Clark first broached to the Diocesan Priests' Council the idea that the Diocese of Rochester should conduct a Synod, a diocesan-wide meeting to plan future directions for the local church.

It would be the diocese's first Synod since 1954, and only the seventh such gathering since the diocese was created in 1868.

Although members of the Priests' Council recommended not pursuing the idea at that time, the seed began to germinate.

Now that seed is ready to produce fruit in the form of a pastoral plan completed in December, 1994. The four goals contained in that plan — along with the action steps outlined in it — will provide a focus for diocesan activities and use of resources through the end of this century.

Those goals are: to form Catholics in beliefs, Catholic morality and spirituality throughout life; to advocate for the consistent life ethic; to recognize and value the dignity of women in church and society; and to promote the growth of small Christian communities.

The four goals put flesh on five priorities set for the diocese at the General Synod, held Oct. 1-3, 1993, at the Riverside Convention Center in Rochester. Those priorities, in turn, were fashioned as a result of parish and regional meetings that began in the fall of 1989 at sites across the diocese.

Between the initial conversations on whether the diocese should have a Synod and the publication of these four goals, thousands of people — representing parishes and church communities across the diocese — took part in hundreds of meetings to develop lists of priorities, winnow those lists to a manageable number, forge goals, rewrite and revise the goals, and develop specific action steps to carry them out.

Overall, these goals will help to direct future spending of diocesan resources, the hiring of new personnel and the restructuring of some diocesan positions and departments. They will also help to guide the activities of diocesan parishes and communities throughout the next five years.

Over that span, the Synod Implementation Commission — which was established immediately after the October, 1993, General Synod — will oversee the effort.

During September interview, Bishop Clark explained that he had decided to call for a Synod because he believed that the diocese was "at a stage in our life where we should gather the community and reflect on Catholic life 25 years after the Second Vatican Council."

IN CALLING FOR A SYNOD, however, Bishop Clark acknowledged that numerous initiatives and activities were already underway in the diocese. Indeed, the synodal goals build on many of those activities.

"It's not as though the Synod gave us a totally new agenda," Bishop Clark said. "It just gave us a clearer direction for the next five years."

In his June 17, 1990, letter announcing the Synod, Bishop Clark explained that "the word *Synod* comes from the Greek and means 'walking together on a journey.' This suggests what a Synod is meant to be: the people of the diocese gathering with their bishop to 'walk together.'"

That concept of walking together was reflected in the process of parish and regional discussions leading up to the October, 1993, General Synod.

In a September, 1994, interview, Father Joseph A.



Diocesan clergy wait backstage before Mass begins.



Banner bearers process down Main Street from the Rochester Riverside Convention Center to the Community War Memorial for the Synod's closing Mass on Oct. 3, 1993.

Hart, who guided the Synod from August, 1990, until Jan. 1, 1994, explained that by involving so many people in the the synodal process, the diocese was in effect "modeling" a vision of the church.

"If this is the way the church is to be, we knew we had to model somehow the involvement of everyone, the ability to listen respectfully, the prayerful means to consensus, the ability to move together with trust," Father Hart explained.

Deacon Thomas Cass, who has served as director of the Office of the Synod from Jan. 1 to Dec. 31, 1994, likewise observed that involving the people of the diocese in the synodal process will continue as the diocese begins in 1995 to implement the plan.

"The plan is intended to be a parish-based plan," Deacon Cass explained. Thus much of the work of implementing the plan will take place in parishes — with Pastoral Center support and resources.

Indeed, the next step in the process is for parishes to submit to the diocese by Feb. 1, 1995, a list of actions parish communities will be taking in the next fiscal year to begin implementing the synodal goals.

Those Feb. 1 reports will help to guide how the Pastoral Center allocates its resources in the 1995-96

diocesan budget. In preparation, the Pastoral Center is already making adjustments in such areas as communications, computers and personnel policies, Deacon Cass reported.

The Synod Implementation Commission, meanwhile, will continue to oversee implementation of the goals, making changes as needed in light of ongoing input from parishes, he noted.

THE FOUR GOALS were created through a process that began with people throughout the 12-county diocese setting priorities for the local church. Meeting first as parishes and local communities and then in regional gatherings, people selected 48 recommendations based on six broad themes.

Those 48 recommendations were voted on by approximately 1,300 delegates who gathered at the General Synod, with the top 18 recommendations selected from the 48 for the final vote.

Delegates also selected an additional recommendation. Synod planners had allowed time for delegates to raise issues they believed were not addressed in the 48 recommendations. Delegates then voted on which issue to form into a recommendation to be added to the 18 already selected for the final vote.