



Bishop Matthew H. Clark Oct. 3, 1993, presided over the Synod's concluding Mass, which was celebrated by Bishops Joseph L. Hogan and Dennis W. Hickey, as well as other New York bishops and Rochester diocesan priests.



(Left) A member of the Hosanna Sacred Dance Group carries incense to the altar located in the center of the Community War Memorial. (Above) Bishop Matthew H. Clark greets Justin Danzy of Rochester's St. Bridget Church at the conclusion of the Oct. 3, 1993, Synod Mass.

Photos by
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Ironically, that additional recommendation — the consistent life ethic — received the second-highest vote total at the General Synod and consequently became one of the pastoral plan's four goals.

Even as delegates at the General Synod were completing their duties, the Synod's work continued. The Synod Implementation Commission began developing the pastoral plan based on the priorities selected by delegates and approved by Bishop Clark.

That commission established five analysis teams — one for each priority — which attempted to develop specific actions steps to carry out the priorities. The analysis teams also recommended the consolidation of priorities one and three — which both dealt with aspects of education — into a single goal.

The analysis teams finished their work in the early 1994, and the pastoral planning team took over. The team completed a draft pastoral plan over the summer, and this was then sent to delegates who would take part in 11 regional gatherings on Oct. 1, 1994. At these gatherings, delegates made recommendations that were incorporated into the final plan.

The Pastoral Plan outlines what the diocese plans to do, and leaves spaces for parishes to state what they will be doing.

GOAL ONE, for example, calls for such diocesan actions as developing adult-discussion packets for parish use on faith, spiritual and moral topics; hiring a diocesan coordinator for adult and family faith formation; and consolidating deacon formation, continuing education, the Hispanic formation program and the Certification for Designated Ministry program at St. Bernard's Institute.

Sister Patricia Schoelles, SSJ, president of St.

Bernard's and one of the planning team members, noted that the General Synod delegates overwhelmingly selected lifelong religious formation as the top priority for the diocese. Indeed, in the weighted voting used at the General Synod, this priority received 2,710 votes — far exceeding the 1,743 votes received by the second-place priority, the consistent life ethic.

Meanwhile, based on input from parishes, the planning team also merged lifelong religious education and Catholic moral teaching — the third priority selected at the General Synod.

Even as these priorities were being combined, the analysis teams, Implementation Commission and pastoral planning team realized that educational activities intended for people involved in church ministry should likewise be consolidated, Sister Schoelles reported.

"We needed to look at how we could (train the trainers) most efficiently," Sister Schoelles said. "The best way was to have one center for doing that in the diocese."

Thus the diocese's Department of Professional Development will be moved from the Pastoral Center to St. Bernard's Institute.

THE SECOND-LEADING VOTE-GETTER at the General Synod — the consistent life ethic — was not on the list of 18 recommendations that had emerged from earlier discussions in the synodal process. But that does not mean that it came from out of the blue, observed Jack Balinsky, diocesan director of Catholic Charities and a member of the pastoral planning team.

Balinsky pointed out that many of the issues included under the consistent life ethic — war, the death penalty, abortion, euthanasia — were discussed

at earlier sessions of the Synod. But as the process continued, the delegates selected broader goals. Specific issues, while each receiving support, moved to the side, he said.

However, at the General Synod session to discuss what priorities may have been overlooked in the process, the separate life issues were united under the more general heading — the consistent ethic of life — and consequently received wide support.

Action steps for this goal focus, in part, on helping people to see the links among life issues, Balinsky noted. Thus the steps include organizing a speakers bureau; providing regional information sessions about the ethic for pastors and parish leaders; hiring a diocesan consistent life ethic coordinator; and promoting service and advocacy projects.

"We recognize that one of the important goals of the consistent life ethic is to show the interconnectiveness of the issues — to show that it doesn't make sense to oppose abortion but to promote the death penalty," Balinsky remarked.

Many of the life issues are already being addressed, Balinsky addressed, but this goal will help such activities to be carried out in a more coordinated way.

THE THIRD GOAL — to recognize and value the dignity of women in church in society — is one that was forged amidst continuous, and sometimes painful, discussions, acknowledged Mary Kessler, director of diocesan Human Resources and a member of the pastoral planning team.

"I think it was the most difficult part of the plan to reach consensus on," Kessler observed.

Indeed, Kessler noted, the sweeping spectrum of issues affecting women — from abuse to ordination to roles in church and society — attracted divergent, sometimes opposing, views.

"I think the overriding response we were hearing was pain," Kessler continued. Women experience pain in both society and the church, she continued. Thus even before specific actions can be undertaken, a lot of time will have to be spent simply listening, Kessler stated.

Meanwhile, because this goal touches on so many issues, the action steps for goal three call for the creation of an interdisciplinary Pastoral Center team to coordinate implementation, rather than the hiring of a single individual to oversee the effort.

"We needed a collaborative model for addressing issues," Kessler said. "In regards to women's issues, one person cannot do it."

The action steps also call for developing diocesan guidelines for inclusive language; examining practices across the diocese for sensitivity to families and family issues; advocating for public policies addressing issues that affect women; and initiating programs that explore sexism within the church.

GOAL FOUR, meanwhile, in one sense models what the Synod is all about: a grass-roots movement.

Father Peter C. Clifford, director of diocesan Parish Support Ministries and a member of the pastoral planning team, pointed out that key to the group forging the goal and its actions steps "was to write a plan which would support the development of the grass-roots movement of developing small Christian communities throughout the diocese."

Hence the action steps call for training of leaders, creating a network to help support and coordinate the development of the communities, and gathering materials and resources to help support these efforts.

"Goal four doesn't talk about small Christian communities," Father Clifford explained. "It really talks about a process for encouraging their development."

At the same time, however, the writers of the goal statement recognized many people do not yet understand what is meant by the term "small Christian community." Thus the accompanying notes include a brief history of the movement; comments from Pope John Paul II concerning such communities; and a listing of the key elements of such communities — prayer, mutual support, Scripture, faith sharing and service.

Then, like the other three goals, this goal lists some specific actions the Pastoral Center will undertake, and leaves space for the parishes to say what they will do to ensure its implementation.

THESE SPACES FOR PARISH PLANS in all four of the goals help to emphasize that the Synod's work does not end with the plan's publication, Deacon Cass acknowledged.

He likened the synodal process to an hourglass. The process leading up to the General Synod involved narrowing input from the diocesan people down to four goals. Now, the diocese is at the point where the hourglass is widening, as the Synod's goals spread out into parishes.

And as parishes begin the process, the commission and diocese will continue to refine and revise the plan, building in part on the trust and the process that has been developed through the Synod.

"There's a lot more openness and cooperation to what we are doing, and a lot less sense of isolation," Deacon Cass said. "There's more sense of interdependence, that we are all church, that we are all working together."