

## Bishops

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"This saying is trustworthy: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task," states chapter three of the letter.

But the extent of duties of a bishop as cited in the New Testament were more akin to the extent of duties of modern parish pastors than to today's diocesan bishops, according to Father Joseph A. Hart, associate professor of systematic theology at St. Bernard's Institute, 1100 S. Goodman St., Rochester.

Taking charge of a community's preaching and teaching, bishops oversaw Christian communities that consisted in the first century of rather small groups by comparison to the huge dioceses and parishes that constitute today's church, he noted.

Father Hart added that in many cities, including Rome, multiple bishops — rather than bishops acting alone — governed the local churches even into the second half of the first century.

By the end of the first century and the beginning of the second, according to Father Hart and other expert sources, the bishop's role had become more clearly defined and carried with it some of the meaning it has today. Increasingly, one full-time bishop oversaw a number of churches in a specific region, and bishops usually delegated various tasks to such part-time ministers as presbyters — forerunners of today's priests — and deacons.

Through the end of the Roman Empire and throughout the medieval era, bishops gradually took on a more secular and political role, Father Hart noted, pointing out that they became advisers to rulers and, in many regions, became nobles themselves. Given the absence of organized secular authority

in much of Europe, the church was often the only institution that held the respect of warring nobles who dominated Europe's feudal landscape, he added.

But the close of the Middle Ages also saw the beginning of the end of the church's temporal power, which receded and diminished until only a few prince-bishops remained in Europe prior to World War I, Father Hart said.

Pope Paul VI symbolically finished the era of the "princes of the church" once and for all at the fourth session of Vatican II when he gave each of the bishops in attendance a simple ring with no jewels and no ornamentation save for an engraved miter. The pope's simple act was meant to usher in an era of servant-bishops who would not live in palaces far removed from their people, but in homes like and near to the ones of those whom they were called to serve.

The Second Vatican Council defined the bishops' role as priests selected to teach, sanctify and lead the faithful of



a diocese. The council elaborated on those roles in the following words taken from the Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church (*Christus Dominus*), issued in 1965:

• **To teach** — "Bishops should proclaim the gospel of Christ to everyone. This is one of the principal duties of bishops. Fortified by the Spirit, they should call on people to believe or should strengthen

them when they already have a living faith."

• **To sanctify** — "As spiritual guides of their flocks, bishops should be zealous in promoting the sanctity of their clergy, their religious and their laity according to the vocation of each individual, remembering that they are under an obligation to give an example of sanctity in charity, humility and simplicity of life."

• **To lead** — "In exercising his office of father and pastor, the bishop should be with his people as one who serves, as a good shepherd who knows his sheep and whose sheep know him, as a true father who excels in his love and solicitude for all, to whose divinely conferred authority all readily submit."

Bishop Matthew H. Clark sees the way the diocese conducted its 1993 Synod as the way a bishop should conduct his episcopate. Using the three-fold model set forth by the Second Vatican Council, Bishop Clark elaborated on his contention that the Synod is a model of apostolic leadership.

He led the diocese by convening the Synod and calling the faithful to participate. Through the Synod and through his celebration of liturgies throughout the diocese, the bishop saw himself as a vehicle of God's sanctification in the lives of diocesan Catholics. Finally, the synod delegates' selection of lifelong religious education as the diocese's number one priority shows the importance the faithful place on the church's — and hence, the bishop's — teaching role.

The extensive consultation the Synod sought from thousands of diocesan

Catholics and from various groups throughout the diocese illustrates how the church in the 1990s is radically different from the church when he was growing up, Bishop Clark said.

"Much less is done by fiat than 50 years ago," he observed. "Fiats are a lot neater and consultations are much messier ... but I do deeply endorse the concept that the bishop is not somebody who gets it all done himself."

Bishop Clark noted that the church in 1995 faces numerous challenges, many brought on by the fast pace of the contemporary world, and he explained that Catholic bishops must help their flocks deal with these challenges in a creative manner.

"I believe we're in an age when even if all of us just stood still and held our breaths the world would still change around us," Bishop Clark said. "We have to change the culture, not just suffer the culture."

Through such vehicles as his pastoral letters on the role of women in the church and the church's response to people with AIDS, Bishop Clark has used his position of authority to highlight contemporary issues that challenge Catholics searching for moral guidance. He explained that as bishop, he sees himself as working with his fellow Catholics to encourage their participation in today's church.

"I'm moving with the community," he said. "I'm not way out ahead of it, but hopefully I'm not behind it."

Musing on his upcoming role as leader of the Diocese of Syracuse, Bishop-designate James M. Moynihan noted that he had no specific teaching or preaching agenda as of yet for his episcopate, slated to start May 29.

He pointed out, however, that the chief duty of all Catholics, including bishops, is to follow Jesus' command to love God and to love their neighbor.

"I think if we can concentrate on these two big commandments, we'll have more than enough items to fill our plate," Bishop-designate Moynihan said.

When pressed to be more specific, the former pastor of St. Joseph's in Penfield acknowledged he may use his office to advance the cause of Christian and non-Christian refugees fleeing various upheavals throughout the world — a phenomenon with which he became familiar over the last four years as associate general secretary of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association.

Both men pointed out that the most important task a bishop must undertake is to encourage Christians to strengthen their love for one another, most especially, Bishop Clark added, through such sacraments as confirmation and the anointing of the sick.

"These rites and rituals are ultimately meant to help us love one another more deeply," he said. "They open up for us what the Lord wants to do."

When asked if combining such a calling with more mundane administrative duties can make his position overwhelming, Bishop Clark smiled and replied: "I get tired from it, not of it."

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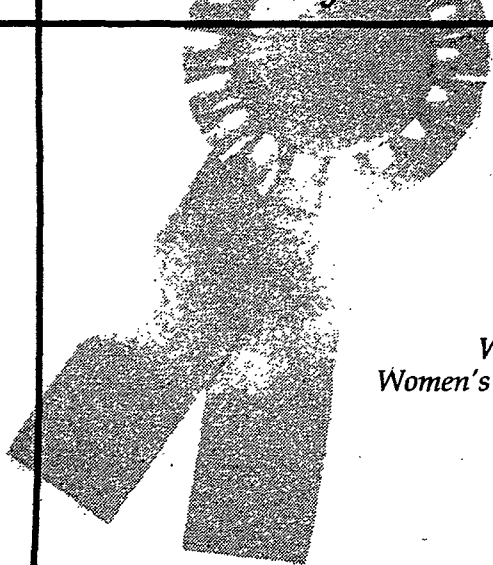
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