

Introduction

At the threshold of the New Millennium, our diocesan church faces both assets and challenges.

Among our strengths are:

- Our Synod, completed in 1993, has focused us on four important priorities:
 - to form Catholics in beliefs, Catholic morality and spirituality throughout our lifelong journey of faith
 - to advocate for a Consistent Life Ethic, through education, service and advocacy
 - to recognize and value the dignity of women in Church and society, affirming and working for the God-given equality of women and men
 - to promote the formation and growth of small Christian communities for faith-sharing, mutual support, and responsive action
- In *From East to West: A Perfect Offering*, issued in October 1996, Bishop Matthew H. Clark called us to rededicate ourselves to the centrality of the Eucharist in our faith communities and to work together to understand fully the implications of that centrality.
- The leadership style of our Bishop is one that listens to and empowers those whom he serves.
- The Diocese of Rochester has a tradition of creative response to the issues and challenges of the Church and the world.

Some Special Challenges

We bring these and other strengths to the challenges and issues of the New Millennium, including:

- The number of active priests has been declining and will continue to do so. In 1966, 371 priests served 315,000 Catholics in the diocese. By 2010, the number of priests is projected to be 117. This decline has had a clear impact on parish life and on the organization of parishes. The growth of lay ministry and of parish clustering have helped, but a more comprehensive approach is needed.
- As people have moved out of urban and rural areas, faith communities in those areas have become smaller and often poorer. They may not be able to generate the human and financial resources to support a full and vital pastoral program. Should financial ability be the determining factor in the presence of a full range of ministries?
- In other areas, we face population growth, resulting in demand for expanded pastoral care.
- Even in stable parishes and faith communities, the demands for pastoral care and the quality of that care continually increase. Perhaps no single parish - no matter how large or how affluent - can afford to do everything at the level of quality required by our mission. A set of autonomous parishes may achieve less than they would through collaborative actions.
- Reductions in government funding for social and economic justice programs have increased demands on parishes and other Church institutions.

Church in the New Millennium

As we begin the third millennium, we must understand anew what it means to be Church. We are both local communities and integral parts of the larger Church at both the diocesan and world levels. The challenges we face are opportunities for us to deepen our commitment to and improve our practice of collaboration as we bring our considerable strengths to bear on the challenges of the New Millennium.

Two-part Process

Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium is a two-part planning process in which all of our parishes and faith communities will engage over the next three years. Part one involves a parish self-assessment of its progress and future hopes and concerns related to carrying out the Church's mission, particularly our Synod Goals.

In part two, parishes will develop joint recommendations for their common future by meeting in Planning Groups. A third of the parishes and faith communities will participate in this two-part process in 1997, 1998, and 1999.

As we prepare to enter the next millennium, His Holiness John Paul II has invited the whole Church to enter a period of reflection. The Pastoral Planning process provides us a well supported, structured way for the Church of Rochester to do that together.

Mission

Diocese of Rochester Mission Statement

We, the Catholic Church of the Diocese of Rochester, joyfully embrace our baptismal call to worship God, to preach the good news of Christ, to build up the community of faith and hope in the Holy Spirit, and to serve those in need.

As pilgrims nourished by the Eucharist for our journey of faith, we work with other churches and with all who seek harmony within the human family to advance the reign of God.

Continuing our diocese's century-old tradition of courage and creativity, and responding to the Second Vatican Council's call for the ongoing conversion of the Church, we strive to meet the needs of our community in this time and this place.

Values

In pursuit of this mission, our work will be guided by these values, which have emerged from our Synod process:

- To be a collaborative Church
- To call forth lay leadership
- To utilize fully the richness of our diversity
- To be open, trusting and respectful in our dialogue with one another
- To engage in ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and cooperation

Vision

"The Church... seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ Himself ... to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served." (Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes: The Church in the Modern World*, Par. 3)

When a bishop articulates the vision of a diocese, he does so not as the lonely prophet but rather, trusting in God's Holy Spirit, as one who clothes with words what he sees and hears in the hopes and dreams of the people he serves.

What kind of church do we want to be as we enter into the new millennium? We long to be a faith-filled community ever richer in wisdom, talent and love. We long to be a community known for its warm hospitality, for its love of learning and study, for its vibrant catechesis, for its joyful worship, for its compassionate service. Keeping the bond of union with Pope John Paul II and all the bishops, we long to be a church that reaches out in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and cooperation.

In our vision, we want to be a welcoming community that actively includes all members, and shares the Gospel of grace with those who have fallen away or who do not belong to any church. It is to be a local church that prizes a diversity of cultures and gifts and uses those gifts to the fullest extent allowed in our tra-

dition. It rejoices that through baptism "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all are one in Christ Jesus." (*Galatians*, 3:38) It is a church of families and individuals, of priests and lay leaders. It is black and white, yellow and brown. It is both rich and poor, rural and urban, enjoying large assemblies but creating everywhere small intentional communities in which faith can grow and flourish in a very personal way.

As we approach the millennium, we dream of a church where old and young alike thirst for the Word of God. Faithful to the Catholic tradition, it will be a community that lives out its beliefs in a daily spirituality and applies moral norms to the demands of everyday life. It is a people that celebrates life and love, healing and forgiveness through the sacraments. It is a worshipping community that praises God through the conscious, full and active participation of the entire assembly. It is a people that understands the importance of the Sunday Eucharist to the life of faith, and embraces it as the foundation of all other activities.

We long to be a community that is ready to wrestle with the difficult issues of the day with a radical spirit of faith. We long to be a healing community that shares the "hopes and joys, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted." (Vat. II, *GS*, 1) We want to be a people that lives out the gospel of life, feeding the hungry and visiting the prisoner, sheltering the homeless and caring for the dying, offering hope to the addicted and support to those with burdensome pregnancies. It is a people that does not fear to raise a prophetic voice in pursuit of justice and peace for all.

Trusting that such a vision is no idle dream but the very promise of the Gospel, I challenge our local Church, in the spirit of the Synod, to work with me in making plans to move us toward this ideal.

† Matthew H. Clark



Bishop of Rochester
December 15, 1996