

COLUMNISTS

How far have we come since the Synod?

Quite a while ago I prepared a statement of basic goals for students studying ethics. I think this work is actually a collection of goals gleaned from the works of other authors. But I came across it the other day and spent a few minutes thinking about how it also relates to our own diocesan Synod. The Synod identified five major goals for our diocese; access to moral education was among them. At the time, some of our wiser members observed that this goal would likely guarantee that the way ahead would not be entirely "smooth." As we look back at nearly five years since claiming this goal, the whole diocese can probably testify to the wisdom of those who made this prediction!

It is not altogether surprising that we have been made aware of areas of disagreement among us as we have tried to place greater emphasis on moral education, however, if we consider some goals claimed by those who undertake the teaching of ethics. Five goals cited very often are:

1) Stimulating moral imagination. Developing moral ideals is part of all moral development, so as we learn more about morals, we become aware that a real consequence of moral positions we hold can be actual suffering or happiness. We learn that the moral conflicts we confront in our lives are very often inevitable and difficult — perhaps more difficult as we become more aware. If our moral education isn't inspiring us to become more sensitive to



the moral life

By PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

others, more empathetic, more creative, then the education we are undertaking is probably not as effective as it needs to be. I wonder whether "straight Catholics" can honestly say that their sensitivity regarding "gay Catholics" is greater than it was five years ago.

2) Recognizing moral issues. Education in morals should strengthen our ability to perceive when and how issues of morality are present — as in questions of human rights, or when conflicting obligations are present in our lives. Sometimes students of ethics do not notice moral issues, so they don't realize that many of the technical, social, psychological or political problems we deal with actually raise fundamental questions of right and wrong. I wonder whether our diocese is greeting the events this week in Seneca Falls any differently because we have spent some of the past five years undertaking moral education.

3) Developing analytical skills. The op-

portunity to analyze issues is part of education, too. Moral reasoning involves concepts that require careful definition and scrutiny. So do the rules, principles and teachings that we use. There is great need today to explore the methods of argument used in advancing various moral positions. We should, by now, understand better the differences between cogent and slipshod arguments. I wonder how many of us are more informed about actual arguments advanced by the church against capital punishment than we were five years ago.

4) Eliciting a sense of moral obligation and personal responsibility. Answering the question, "Why ought I to be moral?" is a profound activity for all humans. Fear of hell, love of God, commitment to the church, personal actualization of deeply held beliefs can all function as "moral motivators." Moral education should, above all, help to inspire us toward enhanced freedom and personal responsibility. Growth in our interior freedom to make moral choices and assume responsibility for our choices must be part of what we want to achieve in moral education. Learning ethics is merely an abstract exercise if we aren't personally involved in what we learn. I wonder about myself whether over the past five years I've really become more free and more responsible about the choices I face today, or whether I'm just a better "debater" of moral issues.

5) Tolerating — and resisting — dis-

agreement and ambiguity. Morality is a difficult and controversial subject. People disagree, and the issues are often resistant to any clear-cut solutions. This is true whether we're talking about church members or human beings in general. Good moral education should help its students to find civil and rational ways of handling moral disagreements. At the same time, we ought to become more careful about identifying the sources of the positions we hold, so that we can reduce unnecessary and potentially destructive ambiguity in expressing our own positions and in appreciating the positions of others. I wonder whether we have become more or less comfortable discussing the questions we may have about the church's position on particular moral questions over the past five years.

These goals are significant ones. They don't necessarily make for a calm and peaceful career, but I can honestly say that I love teaching moral theology. I don't want to speak for those who study morals, but I think that is a satisfying activity as well. Part of the building up of the kingdom — and part of our personal commitment to know, love and serve God — involves coming to greater moral knowledge. At this "five year mark" following the Synod, we might use these five goals to test our own growth over these years.

Sister Schoelles is president of St. Bernard's Institute.

Church should prepare for priest shortage

"I restrict myself to one wedding a Saturday. At the moment I am booked up on every Saturday until the end of the year."

These comments of a priest administering a large parish without an associate are being echoed more frequently these days by priests throughout America. If per chance they don't limit their services, it is not unusual for them to have four or five Masses on the same day.

It is also becoming common for pastors to have responsibility for more than one parish. The reason is that 13 percent of all parishes in the United States don't have a resident pastor — a percentage that will probably rise dramatically in the near future.

These changes alone indicate we have entered a new age of the parish. We need to realize that the days are gone when we could count on having a priest present to witness all marriages, preside at funerals and baptize children. Rather, we are now likely to experience paraliturgical services in which a sister, deacon or layperson conducts as a Bible service in



the human side

By FATHER EUGENE HEMRICK

place of Mass.

If we are in a hospital or nursing home, we will more likely be visited by a lay minister or deacon than by a priest.

Other changes include the introduction of professional parish managers who are not priests. And there are lay boards that run Catholic schools utilizing the cost-saving methods of big business. We also will witness the continued closings of parishes and schools.

As the priest shortage becomes more acute, getting an appointment with a priest will require more advance notice.

The use of faxes and e-mail will be routine, and most pastors will operate from cellular phones and pagers.

These changes will happen not so much in order to lighten priests' workloads, but because of the diminished number of priests.

As disrupting as these changes will be, the greatest disruption will come from people who fail to understand our changing times. Parishioners wanting to have it the way it was, or the way they want it to be, will be a great thorn in a parish's side.

And how might this be avoided? By the church declaring a state of preparedness similar to that which we experienced after World War II.

After that war, nations realizing the atom bomb's destructive force developed intensive educational programs. As frightening as those programs sometimes were, they heightened our awareness of being in the nuclear age. The mysteries of nuclear power, which had been restricted to the domain of scientists, became public knowledge.

The church needs to initiate similar programs that instruct parishes about the circumstances that are influencing and changing them, about what is causing these changes and what must be done to prepare for new models of parish.

The statistics are accessible; the church has the educational means to accomplish this; and, most important, Catholics are willing to learn. If programs like this are created, they will short-circuit the confusion and frustrations that arise when people don't know why Father can't celebrate Mass at their marriage or for a beloved who has died.

"Ignorance is the curse of God, knowledge the wing whereby we ascend to heaven," it has been said. If the church declares a state of preparation now, it might just curtail the cursing that is bound to occur when Father is nowhere to be found.

Father Hemrick is director of diocesan relations at The Catholic University of America.

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Kids Answer from page 12 Treasures in heaven.

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