

Synod

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First time for laity

Five years ago this month, Father Joseph A. Hart, moderator of the diocesan pastoral center, was serving as director of the Diocesan Synod, which was funded by the Thanks Giving Appeal. Father Hart said the 1993 Synod was the first time the diocese had held one that involved lay people, a result of changes in canon law in the early 1980s. Previous diocesan synods had been clergy-only affairs, he explained.

"We tried to respect what the law of the church said, that all of the questions the people raised needed to undergo discus-

sion," Father Hart recalled.

Approximately 1,300 delegates to the Synod voted to approve five priorities for the diocese. Two of them, lifelong religious education and Catholic moral education, were eventually merged into goal 1 — lifelong faith formation.

In the interest of seeing where the synodal goals are going in the diocese, the *Courier* spoke with a number of diocesan and parish officials responsible for implementing the priorities.

Lifelong faith formation

According to a diocesan report, goal 1 has been implemented in several ways. For example, the report said, the number of parish youth ministers has grown from 12 in 1992 to more than 80. It also cited the success of St. Bernard Institute's "On The Road" series, which takes institute instructors to parishes for adult education forums.

Faith Formation Coordinator Ursula Arnold of St. Joseph's Church, Penfield, noted her parish has worked hard to fulfill the goal. Among the programs her parish offers are:

- Regular catechetical classes for children from preschool age to eighth grade.
- Weekly youth group meetings that combine catechetical and social outreach.
- Adult education programs focusing on such subjects as spirituality, the sacraments and the church's social teachings.
- An ongoing faith formation that involves entire families in the learning process.

"We're getting away from the old thinking that it's just for kids," she said of faith formation.

Consistent ethic of life

Goal 2 committed the diocese to promote the consistent life ethic, which opposes abortion, economic injustice, war, poverty, euthanasia and violence as threats to human life.

Since the Synod, a number of parishes have attempted to implement the goal, according to Suzanne Schnittman, diocesan consistent life ethic coordinator. For example, almost 40 parishes formally made a "Pledge For Life" this year to support a woman with a crisis pregnancy, she said.

Many parishes boast a variety of efforts on behalf of the consistent life ethic, Schnittman said, pointing to Holy Spirit Church in Penfield as one example.

Barbara Marcellus, the parish's synod coordinator, said Holy Spirit parishioners regularly lend material support to crisis preg-

nancy centers and have participated in pro-life prayer services and vigils. Meanwhile, the parish recently hosted a medical ethics seminar, and between 30 and 40 parishioners volunteer as mentors and tutors at diocesan schools in Rochester.

Along with other Webster parishes, Holy Spirit is co-sponsoring and hosting a non-violence mission presented by Catholic pacifist Father Charles Emmanuel McCarthy on Nov. 6 and 7, she said. (See related story, Page 2a.) Marcellus also noted that a recent survey of parishioners revealed a high level of desire for programs on the death penalty and the consistent life ethic.

"Either (parishioners) already have a passion for these issues, or they realize these issues should be of great concern to them, and they should learn more about them," Marcellus concluded.

Dignity of Women

Advancing women's dignity in church and society may be the most difficult of all the Synod's goals to achieve, according to Gloria Ulterino, diocesan coordinator for goal 3. In recent years, the Vatican has made it clear it does not support women's ordination, and has also reiterated restrictions on the role of lay liturgical volunteers, she noted. There are times, she commented, when she's concerned that the church may alienate those who consider it an institution that discriminates against women.

"I am concerned that there will be some very wonderful young people, men and women, not just girls, who will walk away," Ulterino said.

At the same time, however, she said she sees signs of hope in this diocese's commitment to women's dignity. For example, in a June synod report, Ulterino wrote that at least 94 parishes practice "inclusion," many of which do so by having women work either in liturgy or head their liturgy committees. Meanwhile, at least 32 women's spirituality groups now exist in the diocese, she wrote.

One parish that has been exemplary in its inclusion of women is Sacred Heart Church in Auburn, Ulterino said. Judith Nichols, the parish's pastoral associate, said her church has undertaken a number of initiatives to promote goal 3.

For example, she said, parish Bible study groups have explored the role of women in the Old Testament. The parish has also sponsored programs and events that highlighted domestic violence against women, she said.

She added that the parish has had altar

girls since the 1960s, long before many others, and uses gender-inclusive language in the liturgy.

"This parish has a long history of giving women the dignity they deserve," Nichols concluded.

SCCs

At least 5 to 10 percent of the active Catholics at any given parish may be interested in forming SCCs, according to Deacon Claude Lester, goal 4 diocesan coordinator. But many parishes still mistakenly consider such activities as small group Bible studies to be examples of SCCs, he said. SCCs are actually different, he explained. They emphasize how one's heart approaches Scripture rather than how one's head interprets it, he said.

"This is supposed to be a small faith-sharing community, not a Bible study," he said of an ideal SCC.

He added that SCCs should ultimately move their members to want to serve the wider community, an aspect that will be the topic of discussion at the upcoming SCC conference at Notre Dame.

One parish working toward the SCC ideal is St. Stephen's Church in Geneva. According to Mary Kay Bolan, the parish's goal 4 coordinator, the parish has two SCCs of about a dozen people each. The parish is looking to form a third SCC, she added.

Meanwhile, she said, St. Stephen's parishioners, along with parishioners from neighboring St. Francis DeSales Church, has also helped local senior citizens form two SCCs.

SCCs have also been formed out of the parish's young adults community and Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults candidates, Bolan commented. The parish has also formed temporary SCCs whose establishment coincides with the seasons of Advent and Lent, she noted.

The SCCs meet weekly to discuss the upcoming readings for the weekend liturgies, she said, adding that SCC members also pray together and share with one another how they have tried to live out their faith. SCCs have supported outreach activities, as well, she said, noting that SCC members have worked at community lunch programs for the needy, and collected clothes for an unwed mother and her children.

"All of these people are so glad to be in a Christian community," she added of SCC members. She noted that SCCs offer an spiritual intimacy not necessarily available in such large gatherings as weekly Mass.

"It's a more personal and prayerful kind of support," she said.

Diocese set to host forum

CANANDAIGUA—The Diocese of Rochester will host the North American Forum for Small Christian Communities at Notre Dame Retreat House from 7 p.m., Thursday, Oct. 15, to 11:30 a.m., Sunday, Oct. 18.

The conference is designed to introduce participants to community organizing principles that can empower small Christian communities to promote social change, according to organizers.

John L. Carr, secretary of the department of social development and world peace for the U.S. Catholic Conference, will give the event's keynote address at 7:30 p.m. Oct. 15. His topic will be "The Catholic Call to Justice: Mission and Message, Direction and Dangers."

Chief forum presenter Sister Pearl Caesar, a member of the Sisters of Divine Providence, has been a community interfaith organizer in Mercedes, Texas, for 22 years. She will give five workshops at the forum on various aspects of community organizing.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark will celebrate a Mass for the forum at 5 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 17.

For information, call Deacon Claude Lester at 800/388-7177, or 716/328-3210, ext. 339.

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