

Southern Tier Agencies Lead In Protecting Their Children

Second of Two Articles
By MARTIN TOOMBS
Southern Tier Editor

Three of the busiest child protective services in the state are those in the Southern Tier counties of Chemung, Tompkins and Steuben. For 1976, Chemung County led the state in reports of child abuse; Tompkins County was second, and Steuben, sixth.

Frank Barry of the Family Life Development Center at Cornell University warns against too much emphasis on the statistics, noting that they are also an indication of the quality of the public information efforts in each county. He also pointed out that the figures represent reports of child abuse, not actual cases of child abuse.

Raymond Case, until

recently a protective services supervisor in the Chemung Social Services Department, said that of the reasons for a high reporting rate, the "biggest one is community knowledge." He noted that the staff often speak to community organizations and have made an effort to explain the reporting responsibility to "mandated reporters," professionals who deal with children, including teachers, nurses, doctors and social workers. Case also noted that young, unwed mothers often have problems dealing with their children, and Chemung County also leads the state in that category as well. Another factor is that "we still see the community as depressed," he said, a condition that has existed since the 1972 Agnes Flood.

"There is no doubt in our

minds that we've got a severe problem," Sarah Curtis, Steuben Commissioner of Social Services stated. She and protective services worker Maryann Rutan also said that one reason for the high reporting rate is the department's information efforts.

Marge Vance of the Tompkins Social Services Department called Tompkins a "sophisticated county," that is aware of the toll-free number and people are more apt to make a report.

The three protective services respond to a report in basically the same manner. The state's child abuse registry takes the information from the person making the report, and calls the protective service in the appropriate county. Case noted that the time lag on such calls is usually about five minutes. Law requires that an investigation be started within 24 hours. How this is done depends on the report's nature; in case of imminent danger to the child, a worker will go to the home immediately. If the child is in danger, the worker has the power to temporarily remove the child without a court order.

The investigation must be completed within 90 days, and the parents receive notification of the findings. If the parents disagree with the result, they can appeal through the Social Service's fair hearing process. If a report is determined to be unfounded, the parents are notified and all records of the case are destroyed.

Indicated child abuse cases are dealt with according to the specific situation. In Chemung and Tompkins counties, the treatment of child abuse and neglect is aided by a child abuse task force, which makes available the full range of social services to the child protective worker.

The Chemung protective unit has 12 staff members. Case noted, five of whom spend their time investigating an average of 45 reports each month. The others are involved in court work and in dealing with abusing or neglecting families.

Foster care for abused children is often seen by the public as the only treatment for child abuse. Case called removal of children to foster care "a last resort," primarily for protection. "Foster care has a great psychological impact on kids," Case emphasized, and the removal from the parents, especially for young children, can be "extremely traumatic." The worker has to "really take a long, hard look" at the situation before the children are removed, he noted, first weighing the potential harm of leaving the child with the parent against the harm of removal.

Case also pointed to the county's high rate of young, unwed mothers as a source of abuse and neglect cases. The new mothers sometimes have what Case called a "doll philosophy" concerning their child, and might simply leave the child alone, or forget to give the baby sufficient care. Often without the support of their own mother, they can become isolated, and find

themselves unable to deal with their problems.

Case also noted that while most abuse cases can be resolved in less than a year, in neglecting families often the "apathy is so severe, they're difficult to deal with." After a year, the worker "must start thinking about permanent neglect" action in Family Court, Case said, which, if contested, can result in the children being lost in the system.

Marge Vance of Tompkins County's protective unit emphasized two projects of the Tompkins Child Abuse Task Force, parenting education in the high school and the formation of a Parents Anonymous chapter.

She pointed out that "young men and women never have formalized training in child development," and that while the effort to get the courses taught in the school has been difficult, it is "not a dead issue." Parents Anonymous groups enable abusing or neglecting parents to work on their problems, she explained. The group members also often provide a crisis babysitting for each other, and support during a crisis.

Maryann Rutan of the Steuben protective unit also pointed out the value of Parents Anonymous groups, noting that a group is operating in Corning, and they are working on groups for Bath and Hornell in order to properly serve the large county, which, Sarah Curtis, the Social Services Commissioner, pointed out is larger than the state of Rhode Island.

Ms. Curtis also noted the extra pressure placed on many young mothers who care for babies without the support of their own mother, or someone with child-rearing experience, due to the lack of an extended family. Ms. Rutan noted that often young mothers the unit deals with expect their children to walk too quickly, or not to cry, and react negatively toward the child when they are disappointed.

Ms. Curtis also noted the uniqueness of child abuse, in that it "cuts across social, economic, class" and "educational lines." She noted that the worst case of abuse she had ever seen involved a father who was a pediatrician and a mother who was a school psychologist.

Other types of family violence, such as wife-beating and husband-beating, are starting to be a concern of the Social Services units, Ms. Curtis noted. The tendency towards violence causes many problems, Ms. Curtis noted; currently, the violence in our society is such that "we're literally killing each other." For the situation to improve, the "social consciousness" must turn around, she stated, and become one based on persons caring about each other.

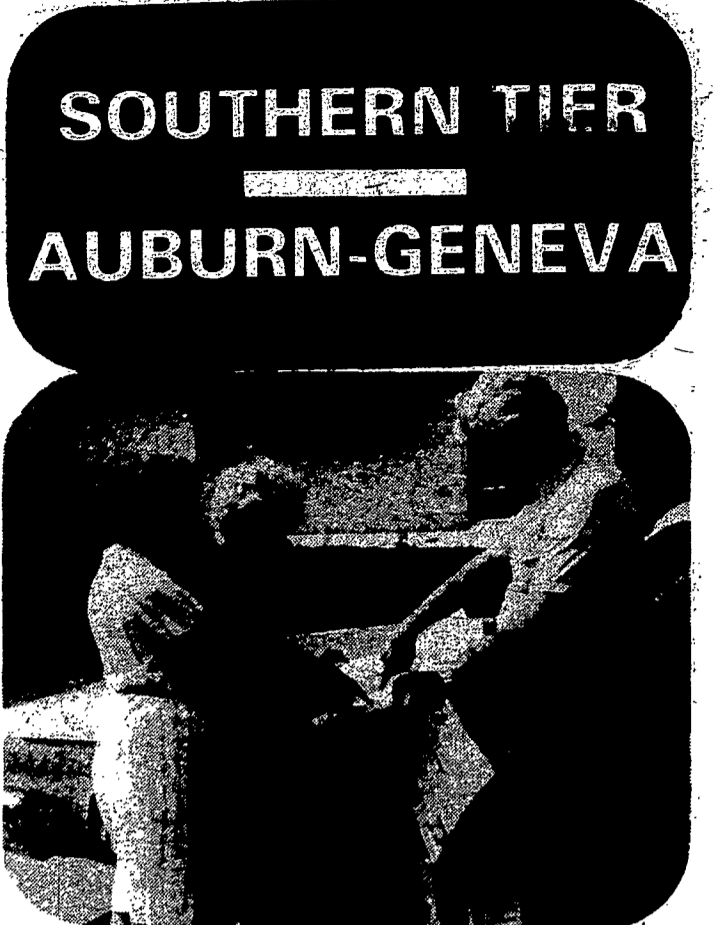


Photo by Mary Ann Ginnerty
Mrs. Herbert Loomis, president of Church Women United of Cayuga County, Mrs. Joseph Hassett, coordinator of the Walk for Hunger, and Mr. Hassett check final measurements for the event.

Hunger Walk Slated Oct. 2

By MARY ANN GINNERTY

An informational meeting will be held at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, Sept. 8 at First Methodist Church.

Auburn — "Recruiters are needed from every church and organization in Cayuga County to enlist walkers for the Walk for Hunger, Oct. 2, as the community is called to rally around the hunger appeal of Church World Service," said Mrs. Beatrice Hassett, coordinator for Church Women United.

Spearheading recruiting efforts is Glenn F. Mosher, treasurer of Auburn Interfaith Ministries (AIM), co-sponsors of the effort.

The walk will cover approximately 10 miles within the city of Auburn.

Festival Features 'Celebrity Trivia'

Mt. Morris — Visitors to Letchworth Park this Saturday, Sept. 10, are invited to stop off here and join the people of St. Patrick's in an old-fashioned festival and field day. The action begins at noon and runs until 11 p.m. on the church parking lot at 46 Stanley St.

personalities, sports figures and others have contributed more than 40 items for this; for example, a lollipop autographed by Kojack. Traditional fairgrounds food and drink will be augmented by Kentucky Fried Chicken, from 5 until 7 p.m. The program includes races, silent auctions and other entertainment. Josette Anzalone is general chairman. Rain date is Sept. 17.

Bolivian JPC Revived

LaPaz (RNS) — The suppressed Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) of the Bolivian Catholic bishops — dissolved in 1975 after it came under fire from the military regime of President Hugo Banzer — has been brought to life as an agency "dependent on the Holy See."

"prophetic voice" of the Bolivian Church and one of the most effective social justice agencies in the world, the original JPC had directly challenged President Banzer's expulsion of foreign missionaries and his restriction of civil liberties for Bolivian organizations and individuals.

Arturo Vilela, an attorney and former director of the Bolivian Christian Family Movement who is president of the six-member reorganized commission, said the new JPC is "based on new doctrinal patterns" and will operate on the "upper levels" in seeking to create a collective consciousness for human rights.

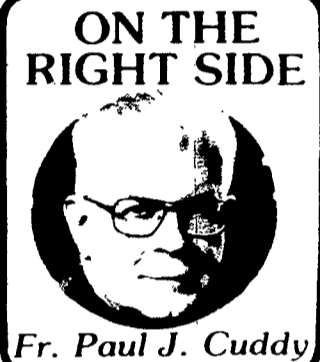
President Banzer labeled the JPC activities "seditious" and urged the Bolivian bishops to disband the agency on the grounds that it was misled by foreigners who did not understand the realities of Bolivia.

Once hailed as the

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Fr. Paul J. Cuddy

Recently I was returning from Mass at Ontario, about 10:30 a.m., and picked up two hitch hikers at the outskirts of the village. They were headed for Webster, only nine miles away. Both men were in their late twenties. Both mentioned they had problems, and when they got off their medications they had emotional troubles. The self-assurance and the candor of these men, mixed with a bit of their own fantasy, made an interesting conversation.

Dramatis Personae: Fr. C., driver; Nick and Ron, passengers.

Fr. C (stopping car): Hop in, men. One in front, one in back. Where to?

Nick: Webster, to get a haircut. Where you going?

Ron (who had been spouting Bible passages from the back seat): Are you a priest?

Fr. C.: Sure am. The genuine article.

Ron: I studied with the Witnesses. You don't think much of them, do you. (It was a declaration, not a question.)

Fr. C.: Why, yes. I regard them well. But I don't like the bad things they say and teach. And they say bad things about Catholics and the Church.

Ron: They don't think much of you.

Nick: We do carpenter work, but haven't had much work. Do you know any place?

Fr. C.: No. Construction work seems slack in the area.

Ron: How long have you been a priest, sir?

Fr. C.: Forty-two years. Forty-two happy years.

Ron (whistling): Forty-two years! That's a long time!

Nick: It's a good job. Say, have you got any work for us at your church? It's a big plant, and we are good carpenters.

Fr. C.: Oh, I don't have any authority over that. You'd have to talk to Father Hart, the pastor.

Nick (shocked, and staring at Fr. C's white hair and obvious age): You're not the pastor?

Fr. C.: No, I'm an assistant at the church. Father Hart is the pastor.

Nick (still stunned): Forty-two years a priest; and you're only an assistant! Forty-two years! Say, man, you better get in there if you want to move up. Forty-two years.

It is great fun to observe the reactions of people when they discover that "he is only an assistant." Being a faithful priest seems secondary to being a pastor, or even more impressive, a monsignor.

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C-J Tour: Several people have asked, "Is there going to be a Courier-Journal tour this Fall?" The answer is "Yes. The program is now jelled. It looks like a fascinating tour— Central America. And it looks like it is low-key and relaxing. From Rochester to New York. From New York on Pan American to Panama and the Canal Zone, which is of special interest to us with the debate about relinquishing our claims on the canal. On to Costa Rica, said to be the most democratic of the southern countries; then to San Salvador, the smallest of the C.A. countries— the size of Massachusetts; and several days in Guatemala, where Catholicism and Indian paganism are said to be picturesquely fused at Chichicastenango.

The whole trip looks like a thrilling experience and an insight into an aspect of Catholicism and anti-Catholicism which has evolved from the intertwining of Spanish and Indian cultures, history and Catholicism, which is a puzzle to many of us.

The Courier-Journal tour leaves Rochester Thursday, Nov. 3, and returns Thursday, Nov. 24, via Pan American.