

# LILAC Visitors Honored

More than 90 persons attended a recognition program honoring volunteers in the diocesan LILAC project and staffers from the Rochester Psychiatric Center and Monroe Developmental Center.

LILAC is an acronym for Life in Institutions, Loving and Caring, an 18-month-old program of diocesan Catholic Charities.

The mistress of ceremonies for the evening, Kathleen Machi, noted that LILAC has as its objectives bringing warmth and hope to patients of the two centers. It is thought that more than 200 parish volunteers have

participated in the program during the past year.

Father Charles Mulligan, diocesan director of Social Ministry, presented the keynote address in which he said there is a conversion of heart taking place in both those who visit patients as well as in the patients themselves.

Father Mulligan likened the LILAC program's attempt to break through the isolation of patients within the centers to breaking down the walls of Jericho. He also drew attention to the development of community between staff and parish LILAC volunteers.

Dr. Martin Von Holden, executive director of the

Rochester Psychiatric Center, said LILAC is the "single most important community program at Rochester Psychiatric Center."

Rev. William Gaventa, chaplain at Monroe Developmental Center, noted that many LILAC volunteers "probably have gained more from their visits" than they have given. He displayed a hand-knitted lilac-colored Easter basket given by a Guardian Angels parishioner to a patient at the Monroe Developmental Center.

Deacon Anthony J. Mercadel of Guardian Angels Parish described the commitment of his fellow parish-

ioners who visit patients monthly and bring several to Sunday Mass. He also noted the growing openness of the parish to the patients.

Among the parishes visiting the centers are St. Joseph's in Penfield, St. Thomas More, St. Pius Tenth, St. Salomé, St. Anne, St. John the Evangelist on Humboldt Street and Guardian Angels.

Recognition awards were presented to 27 LILAC volunteers and 20 developmental and psychiatric center staffers.

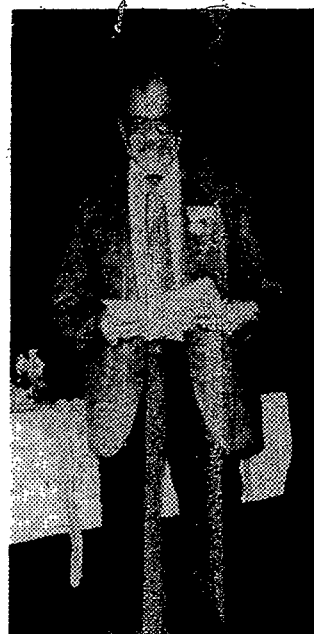
Ellen Stokton, of the Rochester Psychiatric Center coordinated the recognition program.



Frank Modafari of St. Thomas More Parish and Gretchen Schaffer also of that parish are presented their recognitions by Father Mulligan.



Attending the program are, left to right, Father Jeremiah Moynihan, pastor of St. Joseph's in Penfield; William Privett, associate director of diocesan Catholic Charities; Robert Tannenbaum, deputy director for community services at RPC; Rev. Gaventa; Ms. Stokton, Dr. Von Holden, Mrs. Machi and Father Mulligan.



Dr. Lee Fleckenstein of St. Joseph's in Penfield receives special recognition at the presentation.

## Regional Assembly To Probe Pastoral

The Northeast Regional Assembly, 7:30 p.m., Thursday, March 24 at Holy Spirit Church on Hatch Road in Penfield, will devote a major portion of its time to a discussion of the U.S. bishop's pastoral letter, "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response."

The congregations of the 14 member churches of the region will hear Father Charles Mulligan, diocesan director of Social Ministry, who will give an overview of the letter in a talk entitled, "Challenge of Peace — One Year Later."

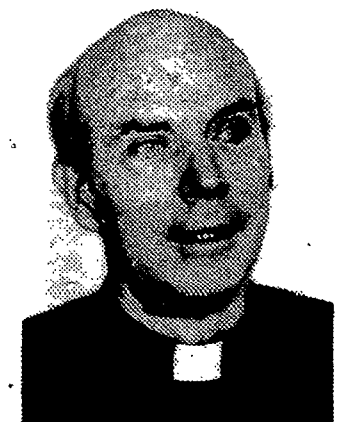
In addition, a panel discussion will allow persons from the region to present

their experiences when confronting issues raised in the letter.

Election of officers of the executive committee will also be held.

The program is open to any person interested in the topic. Refreshments will be served.

**A. W. BEILBY & SON**  
Funeral Home  
James Rotsell  
Darrell O'Brian  
139 Walnut St.  
Dial 936-9121  
Corning, N.Y.



Father Bruce Ritter

## OUR SAD, YOUNG MADONNAS

As I stepped off the elevator, my left knee suddenly buckled beneath me. A two-foot tiny terror had locked my leg in a vise-like grip that would have made any wrestling coach

proud. He smiled mischievously and tugged on my trousers. I smiled back. My cry for rescue to Chris, one of our counselors, could scarcely be heard above the laughing and crying babies, banging xylophones, and one very loud toy drum. Little Jesse, my lilliputian captor, was led away, giggling with delight.

Babies? What are babies doing at Covenant House?

Well, you see, many of the children here have children of their own. They come to us with their babies because they have absolutely no place else to go. Young mothers, thrown out of their homes, abandoned by their husbands, have been coming to us for a long time now. In 1981 we decided that they needed a special place of their own, so we set aside a floor for them. That's how our Mother/Child Program was born. The mother/child floor has been bulging with kids—from 16-, 17-, 18-year-old mothers on down to their three-day-old babies—ever since.

The mother/child floor is a lot like Bedlam.

I poked my head into the nursery. Babies were everywhere. The only thing I noticed more than the noise was the, oh shall we say, aroma of dirty diapers and baby powder.

Hi, Bruce, said a voice from behind me.

I turned and saw Allison with two-year-old Tommy in tow.

Hi, I said. How's it going?

Allison is 16. She's pregnant with her second.

Her mother was a prostitute who spent lots of time getting high, lots of time seeking out the company of some very depraved men—and very little time being a mother to Allison. Through her mother, Allison met 30- and 40-year-old "boyfriends". One of them got her pregnant. She was 14. She kept the baby.

Together they were placed in a foster home. But Allison, still yearning for her mother's love and approval, kept running away from her foster home. Once again, her mother introduced her to another "boyfriend".

And once again pregnant, she arrived as most do—scared, hurting, worried about where to live, and whether or not she would be allowed to keep her kids. Things no 16-year-old should have to worry about.

Bruce, Ramona left last night, Allison said. She moved in with some friends.

Ramona is a sweet, meek kid, mother of six-month-old, Hector, a really beautiful baby. Before she wandered in, Ramona had been abandoned by her mother and left to ex-

Father Bruce Ritter, OFM Conv., is the founder and President of Covenant House, which operates crisis centers for homeless and runaway boys and girls all over the country.

ist with her infant in a squalid apartment with a broken toilet. After three weeks, they fled the bugs and the smell for the relative cleanliness of the streets. In desperate need, scared, almost in shock, Ramona came to us, 18 and illiterate.

I have a feeling she'll be back, I said. She really does want the best for Hector.

There's a lot at stake for these kids. We look at the mothers and the incredible sadness and pain in their lives. And we look at their innocent babies—and recall all those tired old saws about parents and children... the sins of the fathers... history repeats itself... the apple doesn't fall far from the tree...

These babies don't have to become—they must not become—the next victims in an already too long chain. We know their mothers don't want that for them. They are good mothers! They really love their kids just like you love yours, and they have great dreams for them. We've seen them put their unspeakably ugly childhoods behind and with a little, or a lot, of help, blossom into responsible, loving parents.

But first they need to know that they themselves are loved. And they need that practical help, too: Classes in mothering skills and nutrition. Help in finding adequate housing. Medical care. Guidance in budgeting and housekeeping. Legal help with landlords and battering husbands. Tips on how to find a job, or the skills to get one with vocational training. Family counseling and follow-up when they leave us.

Our young mothers get all these things, as well as the support and comfort of a tremendous staff. They know that these girls are just kids themselves, gingerly walking a tightrope between coping and falling apart.

It's hard for a child to love her child when her own deposit of love is so shrunken and precarious. So we love them a lot. In doing that they learn to love their own children. In many cases, the results are almost miraculous.

"The mother/child floor is a lot like Bedlam."

Allison is finally beginning to come to terms with her mother's rejection. We hope that her children will never know that same pain. Soon, they will be placed together in foster care.

As I left the nursery, I watched a couple of our kids walking toward me down the corridor, pushing strollers that held two of the most peaceful-looking babies I think I've ever seen. I walked over to one young mother.

I didn't have to ask her age. She was no more than 17. I didn't have to ask her story. Her eyes told the whole of it.

What's your baby's name? I asked.

Aurora, she said.  
(Lots of our girls give their babies exotic, wistful, wishful, dreamy names... somehow that seems to give children a stake in beauty and faraway things that are no part of their mothers' lives.)

Aurora. Beautiful name, I said. Why did you choose it? I used to work at a day care center, she said. One of the other girls, who I really liked a lot, had a baby named Aurora. She named her after some town somewhere—in Nebraska, I think.

Do you like it here? I asked. Do you like the staff? Her face changed and her forehead relaxed and her eyes got very big and warm all of a sudden.

Oh... yes, she said. The girl standing next to her chimed in her agreement.

They're real nice, Aurora's mother said. They remind me of people I met once from California and Colorado. You know, people who are really different and nice, who don't come from around here. She didn't have to explain what she meant.

I could spend a lot of time on the mother/child floor. It's hard not to get caught up in the stories of the young madonnas. Hard not to say a thankful prayer for the hope that the Auroras represent.

I think of all the names we give to the mother of Jesus. Immaculate Mary. Most Blessed Virgin, Queen of Heaven, Hope of Sinners. But when we ask her intercession for these girls, only one title seems fitting: Mother of Sorrows.

We have a whole floor full of Allison and Ramona. Our own sad, young madonnas. Please pray for all of them and their babies. Thank you for helping us baby them a little.

Hundreds of teenage mothers and their infants come to us each year from the cruel streets. More and more keep coming.

We desperately need more space. More staff. Maternity clothes and strollers; an endless supply of diapers. We really need your help to keep on being here for them. We can't do it without you. Please help if you can.

I want to help our young mothers grow into responsible, loving parents. Here's my gift of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please print:

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_


ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_

ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_ AP (WII)

Please send this coupon with your donation to:

COVENANT HOUSE  
Father Bruce Ritter  
P.O. Box 2121  
Times Square Station  
New York, NY 10108



The street is NO PLACE FOR A CHILD