

An ambitious, costly undertaking

Diocese establishes program for cross-cultural ministry

By Karen M. Franz

It has been said that 10 percent of Hispanics are unchurched, that is have no parish affiliation, notes Becky Gifford, assistant director of the diocesan Division of Urban Services.

In their efforts to involve Hispanics in the local Catholic community, diocesan personnel face several difficulties, only one of which is the language barrier. To aid personnel serving in ministry to the Hispanic community, the diocese has embarked upon a comprehensive program of Spanish language training and cultural education.

The program, which grew out of a recommendation made two years ago by the Hispanic Convening Committee, will formally begin in February of 1986 with intensive language instruction and opportunities for "cultural immersion" designed to make personnel familiar and comfortable with Hispanic culture.

The convening committee made the recommendation after perceiving a language deficiency among personnel involved in ministry to Hispanics, as well as a lack of preparation on the issues staff members would confront in their ministries, Gifford said.

Last spring, Gifford sent a letter to 1,400 diocesan staff members to survey their interest in some sort of language training. When she received more than 100 favorable responses, Gifford was forced to rethink the scope of the proposed program.

The Division of Urban Services consulted Sister Maria Jose Tresch, SSND, who is responsible for discernment and training of Maryknoll missionaries who will undertake cross-cultural work, and began to explore the resources the diocese could tap to provide an adequate program for staff members.

Sister Maria Jose urged the division to investigate the possibility of offering preparation beyond language instruction. Last May, during the division's Ministry Development Day, Sister gave a talk entitled "The Inner/Outer Journey: Addressing the Psychospiritual Issues of Working Cross-Culturally." Training to address the issues

she outlined in that presentation would also be needed, she said.

Shortly thereafter, a committee was formed to develop the program. The committee — Gifford, Sister Janet Korn, RSM, Father Ed Dillon, Father Larry Tracey, and Crimelda Rosario — then approached the Spanish department at SUNY Brockport, which had developed a similar program for the Rochester Police Department.

Diocesan personnel were again solicited this summer, and 35 interested persons were then evaluated for their proficiency in Spanish. Those 35 individuals represent a broad spectrum of diocesan personnel — from jail chaplains to Social Ministries staff, from school principals to the editorial staff of the Courier-Journal.

The program, which is scheduled to begin in February, is geared primarily to promoting conversational ability and will not emphasize grammar as heavily as would a high school or college course. "It's geared toward what class members need to know," Gifford explained. Participants will, in fact, be asked to submit a list of conversational situations they frequently encounter.

Participants will be required to devote four hours per week to classroom instruction and will be expected to devote an equal amount of time for homework. In addition, they will be offered the opportunity to participate in several cultural immersion experiences, seminars and pastoral reflection sessions.

A program of this proportion isn't cheap. Gifford noted that the fair market value for one teacher to instruct for 15 weeks at four hours per week is \$2,100, plus benefits. That doesn't include the consultant's fee due Brockport for setting up the program. In addition, the division will also be paying members of the local Hispanic community \$25 per hour to lead conversational sessions.

The committee is also envisioning a two-week intensive experience in the Rochester area. Participants in that program will be involved in Hispanic language and culture eight hours a day, five days a week. Some qualified persons also may be offered the opportunity for intensive experiences in

Puerto Rico. "Intensive experiences have in the past run \$1,200 per person," Gifford noted, terming them crucial to a real fluency in the language and familiarity with the culture.

She noted that some people asked if there isn't a cheaper way to accomplish the goals of the program — perhaps by hiring non-professional teachers to instruct personnel in Spanish. But, she said, if the diocese is going to undertake a program of cross-cultural education, it should be done right. "There is a science and an art to the way language training is done," she said. "I am just really confident that their kind of expertise (that of the language instructors at Brockport) is going to make a real difference in the competency of ministers in the diocese."

Funding for the first semester of work will come from the \$5,000 allotted for language training in the Division of Urban Services' budget. In the past, that money has been used to send individuals to intensive language training schools, but Gifford said the division hopes the new program will be more beneficial and cost-effective than a six-week crash course would be.

In the past, she noted, it was believed that a priest assigned to an Hispanic parish could be sent off for three months of intensive language training and return to his parish able to converse with parishioners. "That's not the way it works," Gifford said.

The committee designing the program has projected it to span two years. Funding to take the program beyond June of 1986 will have to come from next year's budget. As part of the division's budget request for 1986-87, the committee has requested \$15,000 for the program. The actual allocation won't be determined until spring, Gifford said, but the allocation depends primarily upon the amount of money raised by the Thanks Giving Appeal currently in progress.

The committee is considering the possibility of charging program costs back to the departments of the participants, but she said, "Ultimately, it comes out of the same pot."

Gifford said that the committee also is looking into the possibility of finding

alternative funding from various foundation grants. Brockport personnel involved in writing grant proposals have told the committee that the program contains several aspects that would be attractive to foundations.

But grants will not carry the program through 1986-87. For that period, the committee will have to depend on the diocese, she said. Gifford also noted that it is difficult to determine how the program will grow. It is possible that even if grant money is available, the diocesan contribution to the program would remain the same, but become a decreasing percentage of the program's total cost.

Gifford noted that in talking to administrators in other dioceses, she has learned that the Diocese of Rochester is "on the cutting edge" in offering such a comprehensive program to its personnel, and that those in other dioceses commend Rochester for its initiative.

"I feel it's liberating that people who are responsible for many Hispanic ministries within the Diocese of Rochester are becoming conscious of the importance of Hispanic language and culture," Gifford concluded.

Installation Service

The board of directors of Respite Cares, an affiliate of Genesee Ecumenical Ministries, has set a service of celebration and installation of staff and volunteers for Sunday, Nov. 3, 4 p.m. at the Twelve Corners Presbyterian Church, 1200 S. Winton Road. For information, call (716)473-6345.


Villa Fund Raiser

The Irondequoit Council #4691 of the Knights of Columbus is sponsoring a fund-raising benefit for St. Joseph's Villa. The event is scheduled for Saturday, Nov. 2, 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. at the Church of Christ the King, 445 Kings Highway S., Irondequoit.

The public is invited to partake of refreshments, food, and games of skill.

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