

Dreamers

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D'Agnolo had earlier graduated from Nazareth College and was looking for a way to integrate social work and ministry.

"I call what we do here 'heart ministry,'" D'Agnolo said. "People come to the door broken and hurting. We give them the sense that they're cared for and try to help them look for alternatives.

"A lot of the people we get have been inappropriately referred, and they're really down-and-out," she added. "We don't see a lot of people getting better, but one note of thanks makes the other 100 cases worthwhile."

D'Agnolo believes that it was the grace of God which led her to St. Augustine's. "Coming here every day is not like a job; it's like going to my grandmother's house," she said.

That sense of homeyness is the result of a conscious effort by the staff at St. Augustine's over the years, according to Sister Rita Sullivan, pastoral assistant.

When she arrived 12 years ago, the co-pastors, Father Paul McCabe and Father Neil Miller, were establishing that aura of hospitality. In the spirit of Vatican II, they opened the rectory to the entire community. They also nurtured the Cursillo and charismatic movements in the parish and were rewarded by a renewal of parish life and the creation of a strong core of lay leadership.

"It takes time to be caring," Sister Rita explained. "You've got to be willing to sit down and listen."

It helps to have parish secretaries who have heard it all. Together, Anne O'Connell and Rosemary Link have served the parish for more than 35 years, so if one doesn't know you, the other is bound to. Both have a smile, a comfortable chair and a cup of coffee to offer strangers and old friends alike.

Shortly after Father Trott arrived in 1979, he took the principle of hospitality one step further by opening an overnight shelter or "sleep center" in the rectory basement. Although the shelter closed after two years, the rectory never did. A stream of homeless guests who are not really street people, but are at a transitional point in their lives, has

come and gone ever since. Father Trott views this as a somewhat passive act of evangelization. "Many of the people who stayed here became Catholics," he said simply.

He believes, however, that a more active evangelization is needed in the black community. And because the school was the most successful way the church reached out to blacks in the neighborhood, its closing is doubly painful to him.

"I've always had a particular attraction to black people," Father Trott explained. "We've done so many things against them. I just feel we've got to reach out and show them love, that we are brothers and sisters and share the faith with them any way we can, but not in any patronizing way."

No one on staff is quite sure what direction that outreach will take next. But they are all convinced of the importance of bringing black clergy and religious to the parish. Earlier this month, all school families, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, were invited to a Mass celebrating Catholic Schools Week. Father Tom Usher, a black priest from Chicago, was the guest celebrant.

"Some of the non-Catholic people were amazed. They didn't know the Church had

any black priests," Father Trott said.

The staff also hopes to expand on its distinguished history of youth ministry. Eleven years ago, during Father Dave Simon's tenure at St. Augustine's, he and Sister Sheila Walsh of St. Monica's parish co-founded the Upstairs Youth Agency, a musical production company. Upstairs has survived and evolved into an after-school arts program for neighborhood youngsters and an outreach to disabled children in public schools.

Meanwhile, the two parishes also sponsor SAMY (St. Augustine's and Monica's Youth), a loosely structured group of high-school-aged students who plan and participate in social, spiritual and service activities.

SAMY has been directed by Mary Merner for the past year, but it's run by the teens.

"It's not a structured group," Merner explained. "It's for everyone, for all kids. You don't have to join or anything — you just come."

Because close to half of St. Augustine's parishioners are over 65, more effective ministry to the elderly is another parish goal.

Working with the Southwest Ecumenical Ministries (SWEM) Commission on Aging, Sister Rita has already compiled a directory of area services for seniors. The commission is also trying to recruit and train neighborhood volunteers to visit the elderly in their homes and provide low-cost transportation.

Looming large over all their hopes is the question of how the school building will be used after this year. The possibilities are as varied as their individual interests, ranging from a transitional shelter for homeless people to a day-care center. But no plans will be made until parish council determines what directions the parish's future ministry should take.

Meanwhile, Sister St. Luke has been so caught up in juggling student and teacher placements, soothing fears and hurt feelings, and arranging the disposition of school records and equipment, that she has had little time or energy left to consider her own future.

"Right now, I'm just getting through one day at a time," she said.

Where to go when something's wrong, but you don't know what...

An uninformed neighbor given to looking out the window might dream up all sorts of reasons for the unusual number of people who come and go from St. Augustine's school annex at all hours of the day and evening. But it's nothing illegal that draws them.

It's the Matt Talbott Center, and it started with a 19th-century Irish drunk.

The real Matt Talbott was born into a family of alcoholics in Dublin during the late 1800s and started drinking at the age of 13. Through his struggle to quit, he developed a program similar to Alcoholics Anonymous and, before he died in 1925, went to great extremes to make amends for his years of debauchery.

The Matt Talbott Center at St. Augustine's Parish doesn't restrict its clients to alcoholics, but attempts to deal with all types of compulsive behavior — from overeaters to workaholics — by helping clients recover a sense of power and manageability over their own lives.

J. Greg Doyle, 51, the director, is himself a recovered alcoholic as well as a private investigator and the third generation of his family to run the company his great-grandfather founded, now the Doyle Group.

Echoing Talbott, he co-founded the Huther-Doyle Memorial Institute for treatment of chemical dependency in 1979, as part of his own recovery process. Several years later, he left Huther-Doyle to enter the diocesan permanent diaconate program and was ordained in 1983. His first assignment for field training, meanwhile, was in 1981 to St. Augustine's Parish.

In August, 1981, Doyle began a weekly self-awareness group at the parish with four people. Since then more than 600 people from all over upstate New York have passed through the Matt Talbott Center, which now includes some six offshoots from the original group and is growing all the time. The center offers support groups for the

families of compulsive people or "co-dependents," for adolescent drug and alcohol abusers, for disabled persons, and for those who wish to increase their spiritual self-awareness, to name a few. The operation is funded by donations rather than by charging specific fees.

The Matt Talbott Center retains its ties with the parish through Doyle himself, who is the permanent deacon on staff, and by its location on parish grounds. Beyond that, the center offers what all concerned view as ministry, rather than just a social service.

"Matt Talbott is an all-embracing place to go when all you know is that there is a problem," Doyle explained. "We see it as a ministry with a spiritual dimension that other (treatment) programs don't have."

"In theory, we are making people aware that they can make their own choices," he added.

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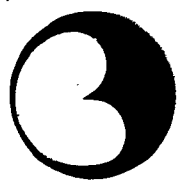
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RCIA participants share their journey of faith



Bishop Matthew H. Clark congratulates participants in last Friday's Rite of Election held at Sacred Heart Cathedral.

By Teresa A. Parsons
Last week the spiritual journeys of 447 candidates and catechumens from 86 parishes converged at four sites in the diocese to celebrate the Rite of Election.

People of many different ages, faiths, lifestyles and backgrounds, they gathered to mark a milestone in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) by expressing their intention to Bishop Matthew H. Clark to receive the sacraments at Easter.

Those designated as "catechumens," persons who have never been baptized, were individually presented by name to the presiding bishop, who "elected" them to receive the sacraments at the Easter Vigil.

Candidates whose baptisms in another Christian denomination are recognized as valid are also acknowledged by name to the bishop, who recognizes their intent to receive the other sacraments at the Easter Vigil.

Also present at the Rites of Election, held

in Seneca Falls, Horseheads and Rochester, were hundreds of others — sponsors, companions, friends and RCIA team members — who have supported and encouraged the candidates and catechumens throughout months of study and preparation.

"It's not the 'convert' talking to Father anymore — a private thing," observed Maribeth Mancini, diocesan consultant for adult religious education. "It (RCIA) says 'This person who's joining us is important.'"

In the process, she added, the RCIA serves to renew and teach the whole faith community. "Cradle Catholics" may find it difficult to understand why people seek membership in a Church so ideologically disparate.

"We forget there are people out there who hunger for Eucharist," Mancini said. "The RCIA helps us understand the power of our own baptism."

The Second Vatican Council, in the

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