



### Sweet inspiration

The Cathedral Choir School's director infuses tradition with new life as she blends the sacred choral repertoire with fresh children's voices. See page 3.



### School Days '87

Our annual back-to-school section examines issues Catholic educators face in adapting traditional values to changing conditions. The supplement begins after page 6.

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## Parish homeless-shelter network reports winter statistics

By Teresa A. Parsons

"Harold" arrived at Blessed Sacrament's emergency overnight shelter on November 16, opening night for the winter of 1986/87. He returned virtually every night for a meal and a bed until the shelter closed on April 15.

"Grace" found her way to Blessed Sacrament midway through the winter. She had been asked to leave another emergency shelter for women because she had stayed more than the maximum number of days allotted to guests. "Grace" also stayed at Blessed Sacrament every night until the shelter closed in April. Both Grace and Harold typify a trend among guests toward "settling in" for the winter at Blessed Sacrament. Data compiled by the Genesee Valley Office of Social Ministry from the shelter's most recent winter season shows that guests spent an average of 30 days at Blessed Sacrament, as compared to an average of 16 days during the winter of 1985/86.

"It looks to me like this community is developing a longer-term dependent population," said William Privett, the Genesee Valley office's associate director for Catholic Charities. "We have people (who) are basically becoming long-term residents at Blessed Sacrament."

The same trend was reflected far less dramatically at St. Bridget's and Corpus Christi parish shelters, where the average length of stay increased by approximately three days.

To Privett, the statistics illustrate the need to re-examine what services the parish shelters, and particularly Blessed Sacrament, provide. "It may suggest that we need to be more aggressive, in terms of connecting services to the people in the shelters," he said.

Statistics compiled from last winter revealed that all three parish shelters were more consistently full than in the previous year, but that shelter beds were occupied for longer periods by the same people. Specifically, occupancy of shelter beds increased by 13 percent, while the total number of guests who stayed at all three parish shelters dropped to 223 from 292 in 1985/86.

Shelter coordinators do not believe those figures indicate a drop in the city's overall homeless population. A sharp increase in the number of guests referred by parish shelters to other agencies tends to support that theory. During the winter of 1986/87, Blessed Sacrament's shelter alone referred 237 men to other shelters, as compared to an estimated 143 the previous year.

Blessed Sacrament's coordinators observed an even larger increase in the number of people who came to the shelter just for an evening meal. The shelter's volunteers served 1,006 meals to men and women other than overnight guests — almost twice as many as in the previous year. Some of the people who came for meals were later referred to other shelters, but the majority lived in the surrounding neighborhood. Shelter workers observed that in general, those who came for meals were not living with their families, and they were younger than most of the shelter's overnight guests. "That suggests to me that there are larger numbers of people in the neighborhood who are not able to provide for their own food," Privett said. "They may be indicating another need that ought to be addressed within the neighborhood."

Overall, last winter's figures suggest that the parish shelters are continuing to serve at least part of the purpose for which they were established in 1981 — to care for individuals who are not able to stay at shelters with stricter requirements. At the same time, guests' lengthier stays raise the question of whether the shelters are still functioning as emergency facilities.

"It suggests that we need to sort out our pri-



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*John Byrne  
shelter coordinator*

mary purpose again," Privett said. "We've got to still provide a service that gains the trust of homeless people, many of whom have lost that (trust) with the more traditional system of care ... (but) we also have to encourage them to take steps toward self-sufficiency, without diminishing the hospitality we offer."

Blessed Sacrament coordinator John Byrne pointed out that, typically, most of the 17 guests who stayed in the Monroe Avenue church basement were not new to homeless-

ness. "We saw older guests, and chances are that they have gone through all the agencies," he said. "There are a percentage of young people coming through, needing direction to agencies ... The majority of people who are there are very well aware of what else is available, but for some reason or other won't accept it."

People unaccustomed to street life might consider staying in a shelter the worst possible alternative. But as Byrne pointed out, those people probably haven't seen some of the other

kinds of housing that would be available to shelter guests: At the very least, shelters dependably offer heat, electricity, running water, a sense of safety and a hot meal.

Byrne also believes that some of the guests at Blessed Sacrament come seeking companionship. "They are people who have tried being on their own and, for some reason, they can't do it, or they can only do it for short periods of time," he said.

The loss of 16 longer-term shelter beds at St. Joseph's House of Hospitality may also account in part for guests staying longer at Blessed Sacrament. St. Joseph's was forced by a shortage of volunteers to discontinue its homeless shelter last winter, although staff members and volunteers have continued to serve daily meals.

Unless the number of volunteers at St. Joseph's House increases between now and November, staff members do not expect to reopen their shelter this winter either.

Organizers at all three parish emergency shelters are planning to reopen for a sixth season. Corpus Christi emergency shelter coordinator Betty Schmitt said no specific changes have yet been planned for the shelter's operation during the coming winter. Since April, staff members at Dimitri House have continued to offer a drop-in center twice a week, in addition to counseling and health care advocacy. Emergency food distribution has been added five days a week between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. As soon as the kitchen can be renovated, the parish supper program will move to 102 N. Union Street. Meanwhile, volunteers are still renovating apartments for the homeless in the main Dimitri House building.

At Blessed Sacrament, organizers hope to install a shower or two before November. They also plan to continue providing transportation between shelters for guests.

A part-time coordinator has been hired for St. Bridget's shelter. Linda Rosier, who also serves the parish as community outreach worker, has already arranged for Baden Street Settlement to provide counseling at St. Bridget's two or more evenings a week, as needed.

The prospects for housing women should improve this year, with the addition of two new shelters and a total of 25 to 30 more beds for women. Restart's Liberty Manor, a residential treatment program for substance-abusing women, celebrated its opening this summer in the former convent at Our Lady of Perpetual Help parish.

The Women's Place, located in St. Augustine's former convent building, may also open by the end of the year. Renovations, however, have been held up by delays in state funding.

By the time the parish shelters open this year, the Center for Governmental Research's in-depth study of homelessness in Rochester should be completed. The study is being prepared for the Task Force on the Homeless, a group convened by the Mental Health Association. Represented on the task force are Catholic Charities of the Genesee Valley Office of Social Ministry, Volunteers of America, the Salvation Army, the City of Rochester, Monroe County, the Rochester Psychiatric Center and the Rochester Housing Council, among others.

During the first phase of the study in March, parish shelter volunteers interviewed more than 40 of the 135 homeless people who participated. Center for Governmental Research staff are currently preparing a survey of agencies, groups and individuals that provide services to homeless people. The second phase of the study is expected to be finished in September.