

## Features

## Puerto Rican cardinal cites need for Hispanic leadership

By Lee Strong

Citing pressures from a secular society and aggressive recruitment of Hispanics by fundamentalist churches as forces drawing Hispanics from the Catholic Church, Cardinal Luis Aponte Martinez, the archbishop of San Juan, Puerto Rico, challenged Rochester Hispanics to retain their faith and culture and to instill traditional values in their children.

The cardinal also praised U.S. bishops for initiating programs to train Hispanics for leadership positions in the Church and community, and for creating diocesan offices for Hispanic ministry. Such actions he said, are "a sign of the American bishops' interest in promoting the Spanish apostolate."

Cardinal Martinez returned to these themes repeatedly as he spoke to civic and Church leaders of the Hispanic community during his visit to Rochester November 19-21. The visit culminated in a Mass celebrating the feast of Our Lady of Providence — the Patroness of Puerto Rico — and the 20th year of the Hispanic Apostolate's service to the Diocese of Rochester.

Hispanics living in the United States, Cardinal Martinez said, are often afraid to become involved in the Church or their communities because they understand the language so poorly. They also feel isolated by cultural differences.

In the 1960s, the American bishops first recognized the plight of Hispanics in America, the cardinal noted, establishing offices for Hispanic ministry and sending diocesan personnel to Puerto Rico to learn the language and the customs. The Diocese of Rochester's own Spanish Apostolate office was established in June, 1967.

Cardinal Martinez applauded such efforts, but said that the current need is for leaders — lay people, priests, religious and deacons — to emerge from the Hispanic community itself.

"We are made to serve, not to be served," Cardinal Martinez observed. He urged Hispanics to become involved in American society in every way they could — especially in the area of politics. Again, the cardinal praised the American bishops for their efforts to further the development of Hispanic leadership, specifically citing the national and local *Encuentros* (Encounters) for fostering this development. At the *Encuentros*, Hispanics meet to discuss mutual problems and proposed means of addressing them. These proposals are submitted to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and frequently guide the bishops in forming policy.

In fact, recommendations made at the Third National Hispanic Encuentro, held in Washington in 1985, formed the basis for many of the recommendations in the National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry, which the U.S. bishops approved only a week ago during their general meeting in Washington. The plan calls for the formation of small ecclesial communities, emphasis on youth ministry, parish renewal, promotion of family life and leadership-formation programs adapted to Hispanic culture.

Although he had not seen the plan, Cardinal Martinez endorsed its thrust, praising in particular its call for small communities and its recommendation that parish leaders go door-to-door to meet and recruit parishioners.

One critical problem the Catholic Church faces both in Puerto Rico and the United States, the cardinal explained, is inroads made by fundamentalist Protestant churches. The Protestants, he said, work closely with the people, greeting them when they move into the neighborhood and following up with offers of

material help, jobs and even transportation to church services and functions. Another advantage fundamental churches have over the Catholic Church, he observed, is that their religion is not as demanding as Catholicism is — particularly because they allow divorce and birth control.

The proposals contained in the pastoral plan, Cardinal Martinez suggested, would counter the fundamentalists' efforts. He outlined a series of steps — making contact with people, making them feel wanted, and providing support for them through the formation of small communities — that would help to keep Hispanics in the Church and to preserve Hispanic culture.

Beyond these efforts, the cardinal said, institutes must be created to train Hispanic leaders and to teach Hispanic people how to read and interpret the Bible so that they can respond to the doctrinal challenges posed by fundamentalists.

The Diocese of Rochester will soon have such an institute, according to Father Laurence Tracy, the Spanish Apostolate's pastoral assistant for the Rochester area. The diocesan Division of Urban Services has already approved funding and a program outline for a pastoral institute to train Hispanics for ministry to local Hispanics. The diocese is now recruiting a director for the institute, which will focus especially on youth ministry and lay development.

Cardinal Martinez repeatedly called for greater efforts to keep young Hispanics in the Church and in touch with their own cultural traditions. The diversity of U.S. ethnic groups makes it difficult for Hispanics to do this here, whereas in Puerto Rico and Latin America, it is easy to stay in tune with what is essentially a continental culture. The Church, moreover, is present everywhere in Spanish-speaking nations.

Young Hispanics in the United States need to be stimulated and challenged, Cardinal Martinez said, and one way to do this is by example. Again, he emphasized the need for individuals to get involved in "everything that's good." When young people see their parents' pride in their heritage and involvement in the Church and community, he suggested, they will be less likely to stray.



Cardinal Martinez makes a point in his homily.



Two women pray before the statue of Our Lady of Providence after the special Mass celebrating the patroness' feast day and the Spanish Apostolate's 20th anniversary.



Cardinal Luis Aponte Martinez and Deacon Eliseo Melindez receive the offertory gifts.

## Spanish Apostolate looks back on 20 years of service to Hispanic people

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** In this 20th year of the Spanish Apostolate, we are happy to present this history, which was written by Father Larry Tracy, the apostolate's pastoral assistant for the Rochester area.

By Father Larry Tracy

Ministry to Hispanics in the Diocese of Rochester began in the early 1950s, but it was not until the mid-'60s that this ministry was formalized with the establishment of the Spanish Apostolate. Public pressure for the Church to improve its ministry to Hispanics had begun to develop. A September, 1966, article in the Rochester Times Union quoted Jorge Colon — an official of the Rochester labor office maintained by the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico — as complaining that "close enough ties" had not yet been

established between the Catholic Diocese of Rochester and the local Puerto Rican community.

Shortly thereafter, such ties were being forged through a series of events involving Father Roger Baglin, associate pastor at St. Bridget's Parish in Rochester. The first of these events was a January, 1966, vacation trip to Mexico during which Father Baglin contacted a group of Mexican nuns, the Hermanas Guadalupeñas (Missionary Sisters of Guadalupe), about the possibility of their undertaking a mission in Rochester.

In December, 1966, while Father Baglin and diocesan officials continued to discuss the need for ministry to the Hispanic population, Bishop Fulton Sheen was installed as the sixth bishop of Rochester. His

leadership brought many quick and dramatic changes in the Church of Rochester, including a new approach to Spanish-speaking people.

In early 1967, the bishop called in Father Baglin to ask him about the needs of Hispanics. The following June, Bishop Sheen asked Colon, Edwin Rivera and Domingo Martinez to submit a proposal for ministry to local Hispanics and told them to choose a church building in the city's Hispanic neighborhoods that would be an appropriate center for the ministry program.

June 29, 1967, marked the official beginning of the Spanish Apostolate of the Rochester diocese. Father Baglin was named field coordinator of this newly established office. One of the coordinator's first actions

was to establish a group of lay advisers — Colon, Rivera, Carmen Alvarado, John Melendez, Martinez, Pedro Pedraza and Dr. Marcelino Weiss. Judy Padilla was hired as the secretary for the apostolate.

In September, the diocese assigned to the apostolate the old Holy Redeemer parish center, Concordia Hall. The building was renamed *Centro Hispano*.

Bishop Sheen, in his initial meeting with the three members of the Hispanic community, also had talked about developing a human-services program. As the apostolate's lay advisers worked on this concept, they realized that such a program would not qualify for public funding unless it was incorporated as a non-religious entity.

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