

et cetera

Diocesan

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dating back to 1986, according to Father Michael Bausch, executive director of GVOSM. At that time, the priest recalls, the AIDS crisis was growing and misinformation concerning the disease was circulating.

Of particular concern to GVOSM staff members was the fact that "people were talking about AIDS as a punishment from God," Father Bausch noted. At the same time, people began calling the office in search of housing for people dying with AIDS. "We were unprepared," he acknowledged.

The GVOSM board of directors appointed a committee to study the crisis. The committee delivered its report — "AIDS: A Compassionate Church Response" — to the board in September, 1986. The report called for increased educational efforts and advocacy for AIDS patients. Since the report, the Genesee Valley office has conducted several training sessions for counselors and staff of GVOSM and the Catholic Family Center. The February 3 in-service day and the companion workshop on February 6 also resulted from GVOSM initiatives.

One of the report's other recommendations was to coordinate Church efforts with other programs and agencies addressing the AIDS issue. Consequently, Father Bausch joined the Rochester Area Task Force on AIDS to study the AIDS problem in Rochester and the Finger Lakes Region. The task force's April, 1987, report — "AIDS Action Plan: Five-Year Agenda for Rochester and the Finger Lakes Region" — offered projections for the future, called for coordination of educational programs, cited services available and suggested services that should be developed.

The report concluded that "Prevention is our only current weapon against the continued spread of this disease syndrome. Education is our best weapon for reasonable, rational and humane treatment of persons with AIDS and AIDS-related disease."

Humane treatment of people with AIDS has become one of the key focuses for education efforts, according to Sister Dawn Nothwehr, OSF, education coordinator in the diocesan Division of Social Ministry. Sister Nothwehr, whose talk at the in-service workshop concerned the societal implications of AIDS, said AIDS patients "get a societal diagnosis along with a medical diagnosis."

This societal diagnosis, Sister Nothwehr said, is due to that fact that AIDS was initially diagnosed almost exclusively among people who were already labeled as outcasts in society: homosexuals and users of illegal drugs. Moreover, the fatal nature of the disease causes extreme fear in the general public, she noted.

Education is needed to address these fears and misunderstandings, Sister Nothwehr said. "It's very important that we base our social policies and attitudes on clear information

about the disease — on clear, moral, theological thinking and compassion," she explained. "Our decisions must not be made out of myth, folklore and fear.

"It's also important that we approach AIDS with compassion and with a sense that God is not one who punishes with disease," she added.

Sister Julien also remarked that the idea of AIDS as a punishment from God conflicts with Catholic teachings. "Everything in our understanding of the Gospel and the love of God tells us this isn't so," she said.

Instead, Church people must respond to AIDS with compassion and understanding, Sister Julien said. A key part of this response is learning to treat people with AIDS as individuals, she added. "You must know people as persons, not as categories or labels."

Judy Kollar, diocesan continuing education director, likewise observed that the Church must address social judgments against people with AIDS. "There's a presumption of (moral) guilt just because of the name of the disease," she said, but the example of Jesus calls the Church to respond differently to AIDS.

"In all of the areas where we have ethical questions and people who are suffering, we need to follow the example of Jesus in showing compassion for the people," she said. "He condemned the sin, but not the sinner."

On the other hand, Deacon Bergeron can attest to the painful effects of society's tendency to forget compassion in favor of condemnation. "What I've run into is the deep hurt, particularly in families," he said. "They have a sense of shame because the cause — homosexuality — is something not generally accepted in society."

The stigma, he observed, gives the AIDS patient "a double burden knowing he's going to die, and knowing society's opinions about AIDS and people with AIDS."

Deacon Bergeron attended the in-service day as part of his clinical/pastoral education, but also to help him "to be better able to counsel the patients, their families and friends."

Such counseling is needed principally because many people with AIDS are also rejected by their families and friends, who are affected by negative social attitudes about the disease. To offset such rejections and to provide additional support even for AIDS patients who have not experienced such rejections, the Genesee Valley office established the AIDS Volunteer Project.

The volunteers — many of them trained at the February 6 workshop at the Cenacle — will visit patients on a regular basis to sit, talk and just be available as a friend, according to Lucy DeChaine, GVOSM's coordinator of services to the disabled.

Another source of pain for AIDS patients and their families is the media's fascination with the disease. Carol Williams, R.N., of the Infectious Disease Clinic at Strong was sharply critical of the media during her February 3 talk at the diocesan in-service day. Although the media "try to be informational, they seem

to create news rather than report it," she said. AIDS seems to be "in the news every night, in magazines, in newspapers," Williams said. Whether this coverage is positive or negative, it's a constant reminder of the disease to the people who have AIDS. "They are being bombarded, and the message is not filled with hope," she commented.

Still, society needs information on AIDS, particularly about prevention of the disease, Williams added, citing teens as one of the main target groups for education efforts.

"Many of the parents (of today's teenagers) grew up during the sexual revolution, and they don't have the background to talk about abstinence, virginity, waiting to marry," Williams explained. A second problem is that "teenagers tend to think they're invulnerable. We need to break down that belief."

Williams said that events like the in-service day are important for providing accurate information Church ministers will need to counter the misinformation that puts people at risk.

She also looks to the Church to provide leadership and an example of how to respond to AIDS.

"From my own viewpoint as a Catholic, I look for a Christian policy of support and teaching," Williams noted.

Father Bausch believes the in-service day and other Church-sponsored workshops and programs dealing with AIDS are steps in the direction of providing this support and teaching. "I think we're starting to crack the nut," he remarked.

Yet the priest was quick to note that "We've reached the leaders in the diocese and the parishes, but we haven't gotten over the hump of communicating to the wider audience."

That wider audience hasn't begun to look at the AIDS issue seriously, the priest noted, but it will have to. "By 1990, all of us will have had some sort of personal contact with AIDS," Father Bausch predicted. "That, unfortunately, may be the only way we may be able to take it seriously."

Bishops study

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missiveness."

New York State's public-school guidelines do mention condoms, but do not endorse their use. In fact, they assert that "the view that condoms should or can be used as a way to reduce the risk of transmission of AIDS should not be supported." According to Kirst, the state guidelines appear to meet the U.S. bishops' criteria for acceptable public-education programs because they express moral values and fail to endorse condoms.

The state curriculum's two lessons mentioning condoms — one for grades 7-8 and one for

grades 9-12 — have been changed for use in the proposed Catholic curriculum. They still mention condoms, but do not endorse their use, Wegman noted. "This is one of the fine points that will be clarified between (the state) bishops and the school superintendents," she said. "The discussion is not finished nationally — nor in New York State — in terms of the (American) bishop's statement."

Kirst pointed out that despite its controversial nature, AIDS education is important for Catholic schools because the students need guidance in dealing with the issue and their fears. "We've already had first and second graders asking, 'If I hold hands, will I get AIDS and die?'" Kirst noted. "As educators, we have an obligation to answer (such) questions."

Mercy sisters invite women to attend 'Kate's Tea House'

The Sisters of Mercy invite women who are interested in learning more about religious life and the Sisters of Mercy to "Kate's Tea House" on Friday, Feb. 26, at 7 p.m. in the Mercy motherhouse, 1437 Blossom Road, Rochester.

The evening will feature four "storytellers" — all Sisters of Mercy — among them Sister Jean-Marie Kearse, superior general, who will weave Gospel values into stories about Catherine "Kate" McAuley — foundress of the Sis-

ters of Mercy. The evening is part of the Faithsharing Program, which is sponsored by the congregation's vocation team.

For reservations or information, interested women can call Sister Maureen Servas at (716)342-9594 in the Rochester area; Sister Lucille Lenhard at (607)734-6840 in the Elmira/Corning area; and Sister Virginia Taylor at (607)273-0143 in Ithaca.

Francis de Sales society offers support for spiritual growth

Adult Catholics searching for a way to deepen their spiritual lives may be interested in learning more about the Society of St. Francis de Sales. The Rochester chapter of the society, which was started by Father William Marceau, CSB, is now in its fifth year.

The society provides encouragement and support through monthly liturgy and gatherings for those who want to live more devout

lives. The group follows the message of the Gospels as well as the teachings of St. Francis de Sales.

A worldwide society with headquarters in France, the society has several groups throughout the United States.

An invitation for new members is now being made. Call (716)663-7309 or 482-3636 for information.



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