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Bishop Clark

Continued from page 1

instructed to select at least one pastoral minister to receive special training in ministry to people with AIDS/HIV and those who love and support these individuals. These specially trained pastoral ministers will serve as resources for local parishes.

The diocese will also support and advocate the protection of human rights for those who have AIDS, the document says. Moreover, the Diocese of Rochester will set an example for the humane treatment of AIDS patients by refusing to deny to any person employment, promotion or benefits on the basis of that person's having AIDS or ARC, or having tested HIV positive.

The diocese will deny no person enrollment, admission or the service of any agency, program or institution under its jurisdiction," the document states. The diocese will provide spiritual and psycho/spiritual counseling for anyone affected by the illness of a person with AIDS/HIV. The paper further stipulates thata II diocesan employees take inservice education about the disease, and that the diocese will work collaboratively whenever possible with public or private agencies to provide care for people affected by AIDS.

Finally, the document says that the Division of Social Ministry will develop and provide AIDS education and training; monitor and influence - in conjunction with the Division of Education — any state-mandated education on AIDS; monitor legislation pertaining to AIDS issues; and provide care for people with AIDS and their loved ones.

The document concludes with "A Final Word of Hope," calling for the "local church to use this occasion ... to care for those weakest among us, as well as the weaknesses within each of us."

In assessing the document, Bishop Clark acknowledged that it "doesn't pretend to contain all that is known about AIDS;" Its purpose, he said, is to direct people in the diocese to those who have the training and education to provide information and guidance about AIDS.

He further noted that the document is intended to help individual people clarify confusion about AIDS and make informed decisions. The document is also intended to provide guidance, as the diocese influences the formation of public policy and in the shaping of educational programs.

The Division of Social Ministry is charged with developing and coordinating the programs resulting from the document. The division's director, Father John Firpo, said he welcomed the invitation "to provide leadership in education, advocacy and social services rfegarding this disease.'

Father Firpo said that division personnel are now focusing on one of the document's recommendations: providing respite care. On February 6, for example, the Genesee Valley Office of Social Ministry trained 22 people to become companions for hospitalized AIDS patients. The idea of creating hospices for people with AIDS will also be explored, Father Firpo said.

One of the bishop's priorities, Father Firpo noted, is providing care for children with AIDS or HIV infection. "We will be seeking to establish community-based care for these children," the priest said.

In addition, the division will undertake the training of pastoral ministers to serve as regional consultants for AIDS treatment at the parish level. This training has not begun, Father Firpo said, but division personnel will, in the near future, put together "a process to decide how (this) will be implemented."

Although specific programs for implementing the document have not been formed, the paper has drawn positive reaction from at least two Rochesterians noted for their expertise in dealing with AIDS.

Jackie Nudd, the director of AIDS Rochester, said she was excited about the document. "It's the first major statement from a local church (about the AIDS issue),"

she noted.

Also pleased by the document is Dr. William Valenti, associate professor of medicine at Strong Hospital and a staff member at the hospital's Infectious Disease Clinic.

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"The document is right on target," said Dr. Valenti, who treats many AIDS patients at Strong. "By saying what he did, (Bishop Clark) gives the diocese a message - this is how we are going to do it.

"He is also giving a powerful message to the people with AIDS and their families and loved ones that the Church cares about them and will support them," Dr. Valenti noted.

The physician concluded that "having the Church state its position is a great starting point. The next thing to do is to translate the bishop's statement into a program."

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