

Local News

# Diocese wants Landmark Society's offer in writing

By Richard A. Kiley

Lawyers for the Rochester diocese and Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier Parish sent a letter this week to the Landmark Society of Western New York, asking the society to put in writing a verbal offer it had made with regard to assuming ownership of the Holy Redeemer property.

Frank Crego, president of the Landmark Society's board of trustees, made the verbal proposal to Father John M. Mulligan, director of the diocesan Division of Urban Services, during a breakfast meeting on April 15. That meeting came just three days before a marathon public hearing on the matter in City Council chambers.

Crego said the society would take from the parish all financial responsibility for the Holy Redeemer buildings and property. Even if the church were eventually razed, Crego said, the organization's offer would spare the parish approximately \$70,000 in demolition costs.

During his testimony at the April 18 public hearing, Father Mulligan downplayed the proposal, saying that the Landmark Society had not offered to compensate the parish for forfeiting ownership of the property. Early Tuesday morning, the city Preservation Board voted 8-0 in favor of a landmark designation for the 110-year-old church.

The city Planning Commission approved the recommendation with a 7-1 vote on May 9.

Father Mulligan said he hopes the letter to the Landmark Society will clear up whatever differences are keeping the matter from being resolved.

"What we've done by writing to the Landmark Society is ask them, 'If you did make an offer, make it in writing,'" he said.

Although Henry McCartney, executive director of the Landmark Society, had not received the diocesan request as of Monday evening, May 26, he called the letter "a step in the right direction."

"That's very positive; we've been trying to get a better idea of what they've wanted," said McCartney, who added that an appraisal of the Holy Redeemer parcel is still being conducted and may be completed this week.

McCartney estimated the land's value at between \$26,000 and \$40,000, based on city assessments of parcels located near Holy Redeemer Church.

McCartney said he would like diocesan officials to confirm whether any restrictions would be imposed on the society if it decided to donate the land to the City School District, and whether such a decision would change the cost of the parcel.

Officials of the Rochester City School District have expressed interest in using the former Holy Redeemer School building as an early-childhood center. Unless the land on which the church now stands is available for recreation and other purposes, however, church and Landmark Society officials fear the state might not approve the district's use

of the school.

The request on behalf of the diocese and the parish for a written offer was drafted by diocesan attorney Stephen Kruk and Joe Fischette — an attorney who grew up in Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier Parish.

"Even before the planning commission meeting, we said, 'If you do want to purchase (the parcel), submit a written offer,'" said Kruk, who added that he was surprised the society hadn't already put its offer in writing. "We're making that request one last time. We're looking for what they consider to be a valid and genuine purchase offer."

The parish, which has not used the church building since it was vacated in 1985, would have had nothing to gain from Crego's verbal offer, according to Kruk.

"There wasn't any talk of (monetary) compensation; the only argument they gave was that (the parish) wouldn't have to spend money to get rid of the parcel," he said.

"There are numbers that I know would be received very well, but the number zero — which is what we've been offered — has not been well received," he added.

The letter also asks the Landmark Society to stipulate the period of time it will need to find a developer for the property, and what will happen if the society does not reach agreement with a developer within that time frame, Kruk said.

Father William B. Leone, pastor of Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier Parish, greeted news of the letter with cautious optimism.

"We met with our parishioners, and they're all in favor of what is being done at this time," Father Leone said. "We'd like to see this tried."

Although the diocese did not set a deadline for receiving a response from the Landmark Society, Kruk said he recommended that the society be given two weeks to respond.

"What we want to do is give them enough time so they don't feel pressured," he said. "If we were to come to an agreement with the Landmark Society through this letter, it would bring the matter to an end."

# Tour puts spotlight on rural poverty, military spending

By Lee Strong

In the five years since the release of the U.S. Catholic bishops' pastoral letter on war and peace, the federal government has increasingly neglected human services in favor of military spending, according to Bishop Matthew H. Clark.

"(The letter) challenged the allocation of our resources," Bishop Clark said. "In the last five years . . . the situation has not improved. It has deteriorated."

The bishop spoke Friday, May 20, as part of the Pockets of Poverty Tour organized by the Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry and the Tioga County Social Ministry Committee.

The tour was intended to mark the fifth anniversary of the pastoral letter's release and to focus attention on the rural housing crisis, which organizers say is, in part, a product of disproportionate spending on military needs as opposed to social concerns.

"The pastoral teaches that the arms race is one of the greatest curses on the human race and that the harm it inflicts upon the poor is more than can be endured," said Kathleen Dubel, director of justice and peace for Southern Tier office. "Our nation's housing needs, as well as other human needs, cannot be solved without a significant reduction in the military budget."

In remarks made in Owego and Elmira, Bishop Clark said the tour organizers' point would have been equally valid had they chosen to focus the tour on any of a number of social issues other than housing.

According to Bishop Clark, one of the bishops' arguments in *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response* is that military spending decreases the amount of money available for spending on social concerns. The purpose of this tour was to keep these

in the public eye, he said.

The bishop urged public officials to be as sensitive as possible to housing and human-service needs, asked those employed in military-related industries to raise questions about the work they are doing, and encouraged those trying to improve housing and human services to keep working.

As originally planned, the tour was to include stops at several sites that typify housing problems in Chemung and Tioga counties. At the stops, speakers familiar with housing issues were to discuss these problems and relate them to state and federal spending priorities.

Due to a breakdown of the bus, however, the tour was limited to stops in Elmira and near Waverly.

In Elmira, the tour bus halted in front of Hathorn Court, a subsidized housing project. Iona Coleman, a Hathorn resident, told the 30 passengers — including several media representatives — about the problems she had encountered in finding affordable housing before being accepted to live in the project, and said the government should spend more on the construction of low-income housing.

When the bus stopped outside a trailer park near Waverly, Sister Rosemary Machie, SSJ, who works out of the Bishop Sheen Ecumenical Housing Foundation's rural office in Rushville, discussed the plight of people living in trailers. Many of the units built before 1970 are hazardous because of faulty wiring and lack of repairs, she said.

Although people living in the trailers own them, they usually have to rent the land on which the trailers sit and are thus subject to decisions made by the land owners, she said. If, for example, an owner decides to sell his land, everyone living on it has to find new land to rent as well as a means of moving the trailer.

Sister Machie also addressed the problems of the rural poor in general. She said that many of the rental units available need repairs, are poorly insulated and heated, lack electricity and adequate plumbing, and in some cases don't even have septic tanks.

Sister Machie observed that the rural poor have been hurt by the decline of agriculture, limited services available for the rural population — and lack of knowledge of what services are available — and "a real decline in federal spending since 1980."

An additional problem for the rural poor is isolation from neighbors, and from housing, health and counseling services. For these people, transportation is a major concern, Sister Machie noted. "You are dead in your tracks in the rural areas if you don't have a car," she said.

Ironically, the tour bus broke down shortly after Sister Machie's comments, forcing cancellation of the rest of the tour — which was

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## Retreat weekends scheduled for Cenacle Center in May

The Cenacle Renewal Center in Rochester has scheduled two retreat weekends for May 27-29. A "Creation Centered Spirituality" retreat weekend will be led by Timothy McGowan and Sister Helen Harber, r.c. The offering for the weekend is \$60.

The Cenacle will also offer an "Approaches to Prayer" retreat weekend from May 27-29.

Father Alexander Bradshaw will offer a presentation on the apparitions of Mary at Medjugorje. The suggested offering for the weekend is \$60.

Reservations for both weekends can be made by contacting the Cenacle Ministry Office, 693 East Ave., Rochester, or by calling (716)271-8755.

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