

Local News

Workshop on AIDS focuses on education and compassion

By Lee Strong

John Washburn's thin face is marked by the lesions of Kaposi's sarcoma, a rare form of skin cancer. He receives injections in his right eye every three days to fight the blinding effects of cytomegalovirus.

Washburn has AIDS. The former superintendent of the Brighton School District was diagnosed with Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome 15 months ago. Current statistics show the average AIDS patient lives approximately 24 months after being diagnosed with the disease.

"I, John Washburn, may not have tomorrow, but you, ladies and gentlemen, do," Washburn told 70 parish staff members gathered at the Pastoral Center on June 1 for a diocesan staff day on AIDS.

"I am here to talk about the need for personal and collective AIDS education," Washburn explained. "My higher calling has been to teach."

Since his diagnosis, Washburn has resigned his position with the Brighton schools and has been speaking publicly about AIDS to "put a face on this progressively debilitating disease" and to enlist the support of other educators and community leaders to help eliminate narrow attitudes and ignorance about AIDS.

Washburn said he was also speaking out to point out the personal cost to himself and his family — and to all people with AIDS and

their families.

"The hearts of my immediate family and my extended family are broken by this diagnosis," Washburn said. "My heart, my dreams and my future are shattered by this diagnosis. My plea, then, is for no more AIDS, no more broken hearts."

"We simply cannot live with AIDS," said Washburn, who noted that through proper education alone, nearly a fifth of future AIDS cases might be prevented. "We simply cannot deny our responsibility to teach."

Parish staff members came to the in-service day to prepare themselves for the day when they will be called upon to confront AIDS and its consequences, and to teach parishioners about the disease. This preparation came in the form of presentations from a pastor, a diocesan educator, a health-care worker, a theologian and a chaplain.

Father Scott Kubinski, parochial vicar of St. Patrick's in Owego, looked to the in-service day for the guidance he will soon need in his new role as AIDS resource person for the Tioga-Tomkins region of the diocese.

The presentation by the Rev. Kenneth Veazey, protestant chaplain at Rochester General Hospital, was most helpful to Father Kubinski. Through examples, the Rev. Veazey showed how the suffering caused by AIDS extends to the circle of family and friends around the person with AIDS.

These people have to deal with not only the grief, anger and guilt that people frequently experience when a loved one is dying, but also have to deal with the social stigmas attached to the disease and its causes, and their own feelings about these stigmas, the minister pointed out.

The Rev. Veazey related the story of one young man in his 20s who was admitted to the hospital with AIDS. The young man was an Eagle Scout, a Young Republican, a businessman — and gay.

His family had to deal not only with a sense of loss, but also with a change in their image of him, the Rev. Veazey pointed out. The father, whom the chaplain described as a "Marlboro type," had a hard time accepting that his son was gay, and wasn't ready to use support systems available at the hospital because his denial was so strong.

"It's not simply the individual who has the disease, it's the whole family," Father Kubinski observed after listening to the presentation. "As a Church community we need to respond to (families') needs."

Ann Lancto, religious education administrator at St. Louis Parish, Pittsford, observed that parish education efforts must also help counter society's tendency to deny the dangers of the disease.

"It's the greatest myth of all that AIDS affects someone else and not me," she said.

Through St. Louis' religious-education program, Lancto plans to provide AIDS education for the youth of the parish. This program will be structured to complement what the children will be learning in their schools as a result of New York state's AIDS curriculum, which will be incorporated into health courses this fall.

In preparation for teaching the children — and for answering the questions raised by what they will learn in school — religious-education teachers will begin to receive AIDS education as part of their training program, Lancto said.

She recommended that the diocese make available to parishes transcripts or videotapes of the in-service day presentations — especially Washburn's talk — for use as resource material in the parishes.

"(Washburn is) such an effective speaker," she said. "He brought to my knowledge and emotions a far greater understanding of AIDS than all the statistics could do."

Sister Janice Morgan, SSJ, director of religious education at Church of the Assumption, Fairport, is likewise looking for ways to teach parish youths about AIDS.

But first, she said, the moral questions related to AIDS must be addressed by the Church.

She noted that the staff at Assumption has been struggling with this problem, spending staff meetings studying Bishop Clark's AIDS

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Bingo

Continued from Page 1 the parish received an additional \$600 in donations, which he said was only the beginning of proceeds from these letters.

Although Sister Eileen Daly, principal of the school, agreed that the proposal needed more time, she suggested that parishioners had not responded because they had questions not only about the plan, but also about the way the parish was attempting to eliminate bingo.

"When (Father Callan) keeps talking about (the parish) being pure in the next century, it implies we've been impure," Sister Daly said. "I think the bingo workers felt they were being put down."

Father Callan has repeatedly criticized bingo as a scandal to the Church as a whole, and has called for its complete elimination from the parish.

The bingo workers don't particularly like bingo, Sister Daly said, but recognized the game as the only means of keeping the school solvent. She noted, moreover, that the sense of impurity being attached to bingo had affected the way the workers participated in the joint parish/school discussions about the game during the last year.

"The bingo workers see themselves as not being welcomed," the principal said. "As a result, they come to meetings with their backs up, and they come across as aggressive."

According to Malone, the controversy surrounding the proposal has added to a sense of frustration and resentment bingo customers and workers have felt because of the negative

attitude the parish has displayed toward them. "I'm angry, and I'll always be angry until this thing is solved," said the father of four Corpus Christi School alumni.

"The people are saying, 'Why do they want us out of here? Why does he say we're bad because we play bingo?'" Malone said.

Part of the problem, he suggested, is that Father Callan and parishioners view bingo as gambling, while bingo workers and players consider the game as recreation.

To the workers, bingo is not a cut-and-dry moral issue, Malone said. "The players are not there to gamble," he said. "They're there to get out of the house and to see friends."

On the other hand, Malone said, workers would love to see the end of the commitments bingo entails, but feel that the school needs the income and can't wait for donations to replace the game.

"Until he comes up with the money, what can I say?" Malone asked. And even if the plan succeeds, questions about future financial support for the school remain, he noted.

"Will we be guaranteed our money two years from now? Three years from now?" Malone asked. "How can we begin to make our financial plans for next year if we don't where the money will be coming from?"

As parishioners attempt to raise the needed funds, Malone, Sister Daly and Father Callan agree that the survival of the school remains the most important consideration.

"We're enthusiastic in our support of the school," Father Callan said. "Certainly getting rid of bingo is no reflection on the quality of education at the school!"

Sister Daly pointed out that had Father Callan not been concerned about the school continuing, he could simply have stopped allowing the school to use the church basement for bingo, or even asked it to leave the school building itself.

"The church doesn't have to consult with us on this; it's their building," Sister Daly said. "He didn't do that — that's good. He has looked at finding an alternative."

Still, as the school and parish seek ways to keep the school solvent, questions about the current proposal remain unanswered.

If the proposal fails, will the money already donated be refunded? If the \$100,000 goal is not met in the near future, will the proposal eventually be withdrawn? If so, when? In the meantime, will the bingo committee meet to discuss other options for financing the school?

"Those are not questions that are raised or answered," Father Callan asserted. "We're confident we're going to get it. The support is

there." Perhaps the most important question — given the number of parish-supported programs already strapped for funds — is whether the parish can afford another financial commitment.

"We do have a lot of projects that cost a lot of money," the priest allowed, "but people have always supported them. We're still counting on people's generosity."

Bishop Hickey to preside at annual field Mass

Bishop Dennis W. Hickey will be the celebrant for the 71st Annual Field Mass of the Knights of St. John and Ladies Auxiliary on Sunday, June 19, at 10 a.m.

The Mass will take place in front of the Holy Sepulchre Cemetery Chapel on the east side of Lake Avenue. Those attending should bring folding chairs. All are welcome.

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