

Refugees

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 mately 500 refugees.

In August, 1988, Bishop Clark issued the letter requesting that each parish in the diocese sponsor two cases during the two-year effort.

While response has been better than Delaney expected, many parishes hesitate to get involved because of myths about sponsorship. Chief among those myths is one that sponsoring refugees involves heavy commitments of time and money. "There are too many parishes out there that think it's overwhelming," he said. "They've got to let me get in there to talk to them."

Sponsorship requires a time commitment of 90 to 180 days. The Catholic Family Center supplies sponsors with a checklist of practical tasks that need to be done before and during the first 90 days. These tasks include finding and furnishing an apartment, meeting the refugees at the airport, helping them apply for social security cards and social services, enrolling the children in school, arranging English lessons for all family members who do not speak English, and taking the refugees to appointments.

To help with the resettlement, the Catholic Family Center and USCC supply spon-

sors with \$250 per refugee to help pay for rent and food until the family finds employment or begins to receive public assistance. Delaney estimates sponsors will have to spend a maximum of \$600 in addition to this money. The actual amount could be far less, and depends on such factors as how many donations the sponsors can obtain to help furnish apartments.

Once these tasks are taken care of, the refugees are encouraged to find jobs and to become independent. "We're not asking anyone to adopt a family," Delaney said. "If legitimate needs are being served, I can't imagine involvement for more than 180 days."

Delaney acknowledged that some sponsors have had bad experiences, but suggested that they met with problems because they tried to do too much for the refugees. "Sponsoring the resettling of any refugees can only be based on common sense," he said. "If someone wants to maintain a close, service-oriented relationship with an Amerasian family, that's their choice." He added, however, that the emphasis in resettlement efforts is on independence, not dependence.

Meanwhile, to help expand the base of sponsors and counter some fears about the extent of sponsors' involvement, Delaney has been encouraging parishes, particularly those in small towns and rural areas,

to cluster together, or to work with other denominations and groups.

Parishioners at St. Joseph's Church in Wayland, Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Perkinsville and St. Pius V Church in Cochocton, for example, cooperated last year to sponsor the resettlement of two families. This year, groups at St. Joseph's sponsored a third family, which arrived in mid-February, and another that arrived Feb. 24.

Bea O'Brien a parishioner from St. Joseph's who became involved with last year's efforts through her daughter, said that one objection that she'd heard about resettling refugees is that some of them move on shortly after arriving because they find relatives or friends in other parts of the country. "The loneliness gets too much for them," she said.

Adult members of the two families the parishes sponsored last year did consider moving, but the children, who had already started school, opposed the move and the families stayed. The fact that two Amerasian families are established in the area will help with getting future refugees settled, O'Brien predicted.

In Elmira, on the other hand, the members of the Interchurch Council are watching the efforts of St. Patrick's Parish to resettle two Amerasian families who arrived Friday, Feb. 24. According to Sister

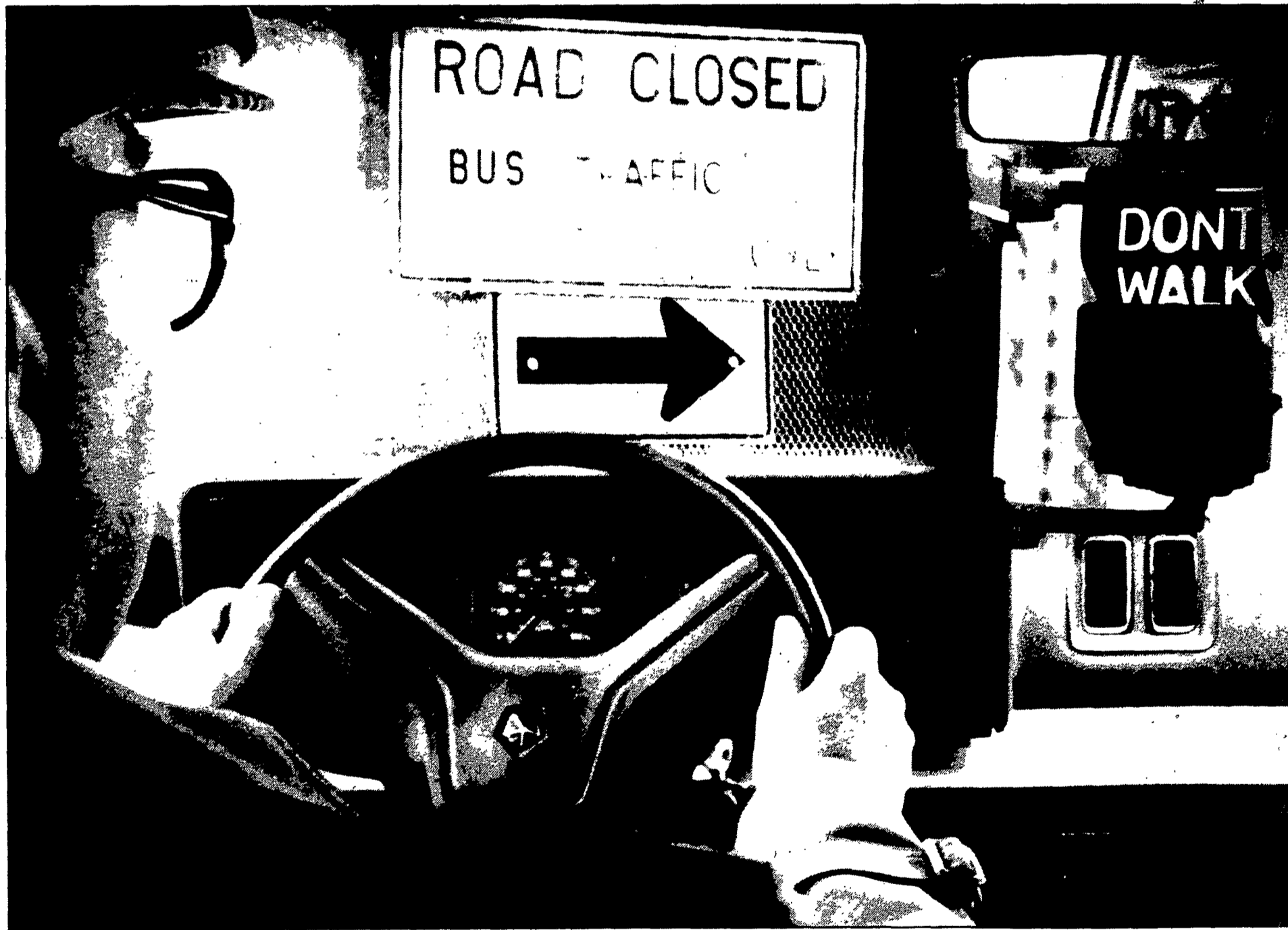
Mary Jean Smith, SSJ, the parish's social ministry coordinator, the other churches are "observing to be encouraged to be involved."

St. Patrick's was helped in its decision to sponsor the families by a visit from Delaney in the fall, Sister Smith said. Delaney was able to answer some of the detailed questions parishioners had about the process and to allay some of their fears. Parishioners are now enthused about the project, she said, noting that 30 to 50 people will be involved in resettling the families. However, the bulk of the work will be done by a core group of approximately 10 people, she added.

Although parishes and groups commonly work together as sponsors, individuals have done it successfully. Delaney cited two elderly women who between them have helped resettle 30 families.

Last September, when the current resettlement effort was just getting off the ground and parish sponsors had not yet been lined up, Keely Costello sponsored two families. "It's really not that much work once you get through the initial hurdles," he said.

Sister Smith pointed out that while refugees gain a new start on life in the United States, sponsors gain from the effort as well. "You learn so much. You always do when you reach out to people," she said.



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