

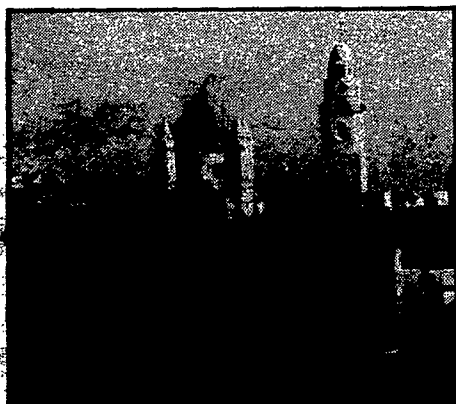


Breaking barriers

The historic meeting between Pope John Paul II and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev opened the door for greater religious freedom in the Soviet Union and a possible papal visit. Page 5.

Parenting program

A former resident of Melita House, a home for pregnant women, finds comfort and support in the house's After Care Program, which consists of learning and social sessions. Page 8.



Holy wars

Middle East conflicts have shattered the once-idyllic vision of Christmas in a land both sanctified and victimized by the faith of Moslems, Christians and Jews. Pages 14 and 15.

High hoops

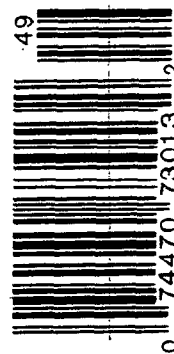
A bumper crop of big and tall players give all five diocesan high school boys' basketball teams realistic shots at winning sectional titles this season. Page 18.

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CATHOLIC COURIER

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Disabled long to serve the church

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Members of the folk group at St. Joseph's in Penfield assembled in the rectory's music room before last Saturday's 5 p.m. Mass.

One latecomer was careful to step over a dark, huddled figure asleep on the music room's floor.

As the group finished its rehearsal, Joseph Kristan tugged at the figure's leash, and said "Let's go, Lorie."

Lorie doesn't officially belong to the folk group, but she is always present at rehearsal because she is the guide dog for Kristan, who has lost more than 90 percent of his vision due to a genetic condition that began destroying his sight in the late 1970s.

Kristan did not nobly accept blindness at first. On the contrary, he candidly admits that he took out his anger about his handicap on his family, and that he withdrew from the world in depression.

"I just found it tough to want to become involved in anything," he said.

Then one night about 10 years ago, he and his wife Barb were invited to a parish sing-along at a pot-luck supper. It was there he and Barb met Judy Hendrickson, the folk group's director, who led several tables of revelers in song after song.

"It was, oh, 12:30 or 1 in the morning and there was still one table singing, and it was (the Kristans,)" Hendrickson recalled. She invited the couple to join St. Joseph's folk group, and the couple took the offer.

Despite some initial problems adjusting to walking up and down the altar steps, Joe Kristan and his wife, who suffers from rheumatoid arthritis, have stuck with the group and become active members of their parish.

"Once the people at St. Joe's accepted



Judy Sanchez

Joe Kristan rehearses with members of the folk group at St. Joseph's in Penfield before Mass last Saturday.

me for who I was instead of what I have, it was very easy to give them my love," Kristan remarked.

The church is not only called to accept the handicapped, but to integrate them fully into the life of the church, noted the U.S. Catholic Bishops in their 1988 document celebrating the 10th anniversary of "Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on Handicapped People."

Issued at last year's November meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, the document charted the course of the Catholic Church's response to disabled people over the last decade, and resolved that "(i)f any disabled person is prevented from active participation, the church community is incomplete."

The bishops continued: "We call upon church leadership throughout the country to encourage conversion of mind and heart, so that all persons with disabilities may be invited to worship and to every level of service as full members of the Body of Christ."

Parishes throughout the Diocese of Rochester have responded in many ways to the bishops' call, though stories of successes have been mixed with occasional tales of failure. Scores of parishes have renovated their buildings to provide access to the handicapped, while others have gone further to actively recruit disabled parishioners for service on parish councils and committees.

The church has a long history of serving the disabled, but the disabled have not had as many opportunities to serve the church, according to Lucy Dechaine, manager of the Catholic Family Center's Department of Disabled Services.

"The general public still needs some education," commented Dechaine, who is blind. "People with disabilities are people first," she said, estimating that about 15 percent of all Catholics in the diocese have some sort of disability, whether it is aging-related hearing or sight loss or a more severe handicap, such as complete blindness or mental retardation.

A lack of awareness among the Catholic population created a sense of alienation for one member of the diocese who served on

Continued on page 20



Together with his wife with Barb, Kristan operates First Choice Payroll Service out of an office located in their Penfield home. Joe Kristan credits his wife with helping him overcome his blindness?

inda Dow/Hayes/Catholic Courier