

Priest's predicament

Franciscan Father Bruce Ritter, director of Covenant House, has taken a leave in the face of new charges of sexual misconduct, which he denies. Page 6.



Standing in

When Bishop Matthew H. Clark served the four parishes of the Cayuga Team Ministry as "pastor for the weekend" recently, *Courier* photographer Babette Augustin tagged along. Page 9.

Title time

Mercy's Monarchs claimed a third-consecutive Private-Parochial League crown in girls' basketball, while Notre Dame's Crusaders tied for first in the Sullivan Trail Conference. Page 12.



Changing focus

Because a wedding only begins a couple's life together, the *Courier* has shifted the emphasis of its annual wedding section to encompass issues related to marriage and family life, beginning on Page 16.

Index

Around the diocese.....	14
Calendar.....	22-23
Columns.....	28-29
Entertainment.....	15
Features.....	18 & 20-21
Insight.....	16-17
Local.....	3-4
Opinion.....	31
Sports.....	12-13
World & Nation.....	6-8



CATHOLIC COURIER

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Group to assess family programs

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

For Kathy Keogh, variety is the spice of family life — literally.

Keogh and her clan hope to taste that savory mixture sometime this spring by traveling from abode to abode in the Pittsford area, sampling salad at one dwelling, then moving on to a meatier dish at the next.

The progressive dinner is one of the many activities regularly planned by the four Catholic Family Movement groups at St. Louis Church in Pittsford. Each group consists of four or five couples who meet monthly to hear Scripture readings, participate in discussion sessions and work on such specific monthly projects as helping at a shelter for homeless people.

Catholic Family Movement, based in Chicago, encompasses dozens of chapters throughout the country, each of which is devoted to sustaining Catholic family life.

"We're with people who have the same ... Christian family values that we do," Kathy Keogh said of the movement. "It's a great support group."

The groups also plan parties and such family-oriented activities as the progressive dinner. Indeed, the dinner symbolizes the potpourri of programs offered throughout the diocese to families of all sorts, from the nuclear family to single-parent families and other groupings that don't fit traditional patterns of family organization.

The Catholic Family Movement would fall under the heading of "family enrichment," one of eight such services directed toward parish families, according to a memo from the diocesan Division of Social Ministry. The memo, which was distributed at a recent meeting of the Diocesan Pastoral Council, informed council members about a tentative draft report to be issued sometime this spring by a diocesan-appointed family-ministry task group.

The memo also listed marriage preparation, Retrouvaille (a program for couples whose marriages are in trouble), family camp, justice and peace education and advocacy, sacramental preparation, youth ministry and family religious education as the programs that touch upon family life in the diocese.

Other diocesan officials cite services for divorced/widowed persons, adoptive parents, and bereavement groups in parishes as qualifying for inclusion in the list of family-life ministry services. Indeed, any services "designed to meet a variety of needs of families" could be included under the heading of family ministry, according to Maurice Tierney, associate director of Catholic Charities for the diocesan Division of Social Ministry.

Although he declined to comment on specifics contained in the task group's report, Tierney said the document will evaluate the current state of family-life ministry programs available in the diocese.

He noted that each of the diocese's three major social-ministry agencies — Catholic Family Center, the Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry and the Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry — sponsors a wide variety of programming geared toward nurturing and supporting family life.

All three agencies offer services ranging from family counseling to housing assistance and marriage preparation. Each



Illustration by Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

of the agencies emphasizes the need to address clients' problems in the family context.

"In all of our programs ... we never deal with and treat a person in isolation from their physical and human environment," remarked Elizabeth Williams, director of Personal and Family Development Services for Catholic Family Center. "The human environment obviously includes the family," she added, noting that many families fall outside the traditional model of two married parents with children.

For example, Williams pointed out, such individuals as homeless people may find their only real "family" among agency personnel. "Family for a homeless woman and her child becomes the staff at Women's Place (a shelter for women)," she said.

Williams oversees nine family-life programs catering to 15,000-20,000 clients a year. Among those served are the hundreds of couples who prepare for marriage each year in parish marriage-preparation classes.

The parish marriage-preparation teams are served by the regional offices of diocesan Marriage Preparation and Family Ministry, which provide the teams with training and class materials. Each regional office operates out of one of the three major social ministry agencies.

Shari Fischer, the regional coordinator for the Catholic Family Center, would like to see family life ministry become a priority for parishes throughout the diocese. Her husband, Dennis, assists her on a volunteer basis, and summed up the question the couple would like to see parishes answer: "How do we empower (families) to buy into the church's value system?" The Fischers advocate the establishment of two lay family-life advocates in each parish and the creation of family-life committees on each parish council. The family advocates would be attuned to the needs of families in the parish and would serve in a critical capacity, making the parish council aware of how its activities should respect and in-

clude the viewpoints of parish families, the Fishers said.

Williams was skeptical of the Fischers' proposal to establish such advocacy roles. "I think in many, many parishes ... the pastor is the kind of person people can go to," she commented, asking rhetorically, "if you're having a family problem, do you go to the person sitting in the pew with you?"

In some instances, Williams acknowledged, parishioners might prefer to turn for guidance to someone other than their pastor, but she noted that in most cases, her parish-based clients are referred by caring priests.

Anthony Barbaro, director of the Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry, agreed with Williams' belief that family-life advocates for each parish are not needed. "There seem to be several structures already in place," he said. "The primary way we enter family life in the parishes is through the social ministry committees."

The social ministry committees in his region often concentrate on family needs within their parishes, Barbaro said, adding that parishes' religious- and adult-education programs also touch upon family life.

The director's comments allude to the fact that several parishes in the diocese offer programs dedicated to integrating the faith of the church with the life of the average Catholic family.

For example, the Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry's religious-education office works with parishes to integrate family life in such areas as sacramental preparation and "intergenerational" catechesis.

Sacramental preparation has come a long way from the days when students were instructed on the meaning of the sacraments in a few classes and then rehearsed for their First Holy Communion or Penance, noted Ginny Stanton, Southern Tier consultant for religious education.

Parents now often attend the classes and

Continued on page 11