Woeful week
Diocesan baseball teams suffered through a rough week, with Notre Dame the only team to post a winning record. Page 9.

CATHOLIC COURIER

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Mystery still defines Eastern Rite

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — As political walls fall in Eastern Europe, years of seclusion, isolation and mystery about the East are likewise falling away.

But when it comes to Eastern-Rite Catholic churches, the mystery remains — at least among Roman Catholics.

"We're sort of upset at (Roman Catholics') ignorance," acknowledged Father George Lukachyk, pastor of St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Church in Elmira Heights and Christ the King Ukrainian Catholic Church in Bath. "They parade us once a year during Church Unity Week."

Part of this ignorance stems from a lack of awareness that the Catholic Church is more than just *Roman* Catholic, and that a variety of valid rites and practices exist within the church, Father Lukachyk observed.

Father Matthew Berko, chancellor of the Ukrainian Catholic Diocese of Stamford, noted, however, that part of the problem is simply, "We're such a minority in this country." Indeed, even though Eastern-Rite Catholics numbered more than 500,000 in the United States in 1989, they were dwarfed in numbers by the more than 54 million Roman Catholics in this country.

In the Diocese of Rochester, the gap is just as pronounced.

The six Eastern-Rite parishes located within the 12-county confines of Rochester's Roman Catholic diocese had more than 3,000 adherents in 1989. During the same period the Catholic diocese had more than 389,000 members.

Yet Eastern-Rite Catholics are as much a part of the Catholic Church as are their Roman-Rite counterparts.

"The churches are one and uniform in faith and morals, and they come under the Holy Father in Rome," Father Berko explained. "The word 'rite' simply means a mode of expression."

Father Charles A. Mezzomo, pastor of Ss. Peter and Paul Ukrainian Catholic Church in Auburn, noted that "catholic" means universal.

"There are cultures other than Roman. It's not quantity (of followers) that matters, it's quality," he said.

The Catholic Church does, in fact, consist of 18 separate rites, including Western (known as Roman or Latin) and the Eastern Rites. Of the six Eastern-Rite parishes in the Diocese of Rochester, five are Ukrainian Catholic, and one is Melkite (Greek-Catholic). All six follow the Byzantine Rite developed in Constantinople.

The separate rites evolved in various regions of the early church. One of the first factors in this evolution was the split of the Roman Empire into East and West in A.D. 395. This political division contributed to the growth of church centers in Rome and Constantinople (in addition to such additional ancient centers as Antioch and Alexandria.)

Further development of the separate rites grew out of cultural differences — giving rise to such national churches as the Ukrainian and the Melkite in the Byzantine Rite.

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While the Eastern-Rite churches showed flexibility as they spread the Catholic faith, the Western church conformed more and more to the spirit of Rome, Father Berko observed.

"Rome has always been known for its strictness, its legality, its rules," Father Berko said. "Everything was done in a very rigid form."

Although the two rites differ in practice, the essentials of the faith remain the same, Father Berko said. The liturgy of both rites, for example, contains the central elements of the offertory, the consecration and Communion, he pointed out.

But were any Roman Catholic to attend a Byzantine-Rite liturgy, he or she certainly would be struck by the differences.

The Eastern-Rite congregation is extremely vocal by Roman standards, even in the post-Vatican-II era. In fact, much of the service consists of prayers and responses voiced by the priest, the congregation, the choir and the deacon. Music also is an important part of the

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service, which includes many chants and sung responses.

The involvement of the entire congregation in the liturgy "is the very essence of the rite," Father Lukachyk said. "Our entire service is a dialogue, a back and forth."

Eastern-Rite churches are decorated with numerous icons, portrayals of events in the life of Christ, and representations of the saints. The icons are not meant to be accurate representations, but stylized spiritual portraits, Father Lukachyk observed. "Icons are windows to heaven," he remarked.

Many of the icons are displayed on the iconostasis, a screen separating the sanctuary from the nave of the church. The screen frequently consists of several rows of icons and three doorways.

The extensive use of color and music in the liturgy is part of the Eastern Rite's sensory appeal, Father Lukachyk said.

"It's to use the five senses to worship God," Father Lukachyk explained. "Nothing comes into the mind except through the five senses. It helps to raise up our thoughts to meditate on God."

The Eastern priest, meanwhile, dresses in more elaborate, colorful vestments than has been common among Roman Catholic clergy in recent years. And he celebrates the liturgy with his back to the congregation — something not seen in most Roman Catholic churches since the 1960s.

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According to Father Mezzomo, the liturgical changes the Roman Catholic Church has made the Second Vatican Council — removing altar rails and having the priest turn to face the congregation, in particular — shift the focus of the service.

"The whole idea of the liturgy changes," Father Mezzomo asserted. "Instead of being God-centered, it's man-centered.
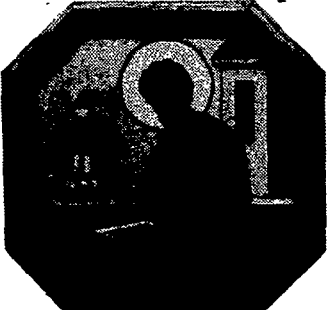
"The priest is an ordained minister," he continued. "He goes into the holy place. He is ordained to pray for the people."

The tradition of the priest serving as representative of the people and being the only worshiper allowed to approach the altar dates back to the Old Testament, Father Mezzomo explained. The Eastern-Rite churches simply maintain that tradition, thus
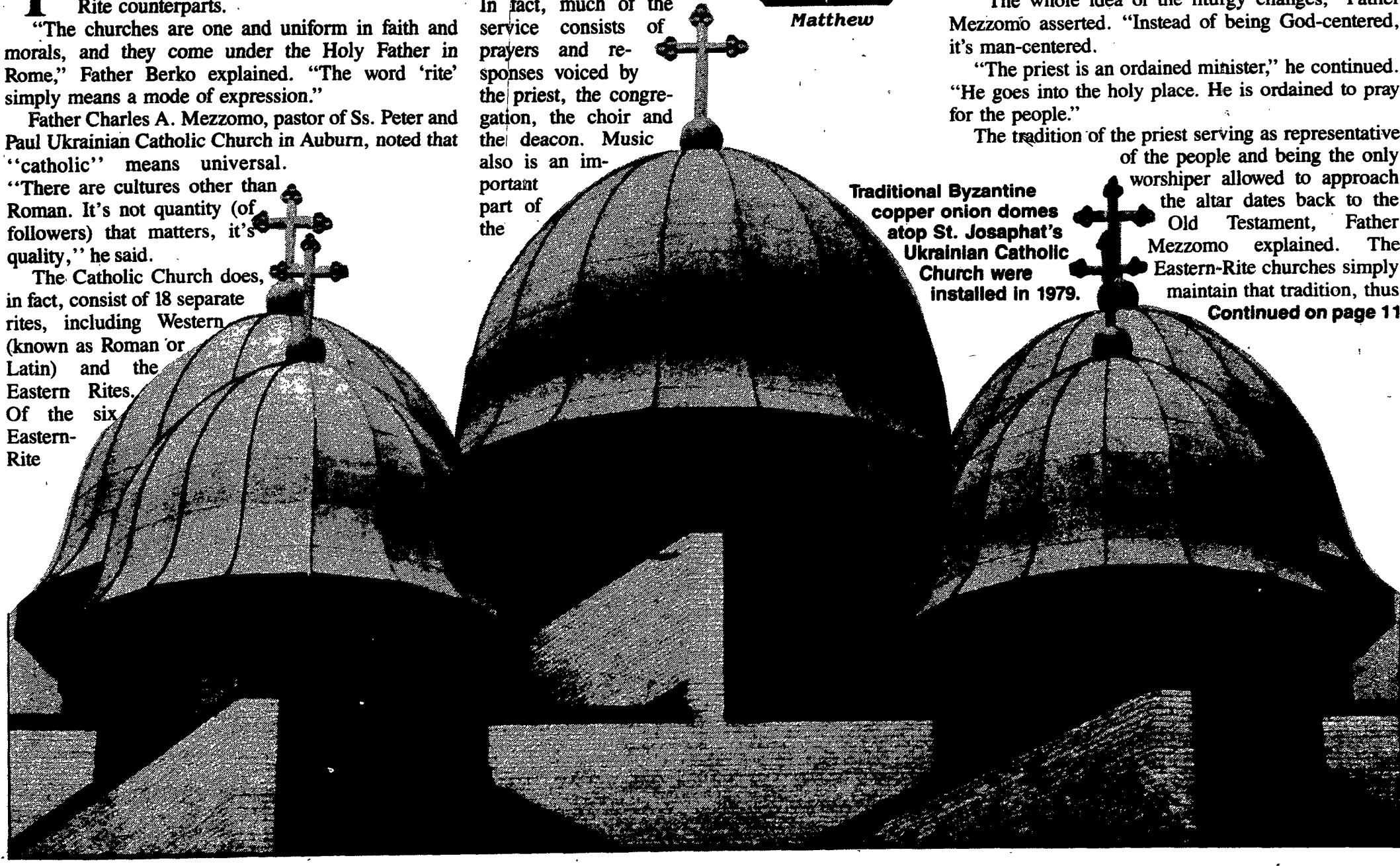
Traditional Byzantine copper onion domes atop St. Josaphat's Ukrainian Catholic Church were installed in 1979.

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