

No price too high

A week in jail hasn't dampened the conviction that draws Father Anthony Mugavero to area abortion clinics. Page 4.

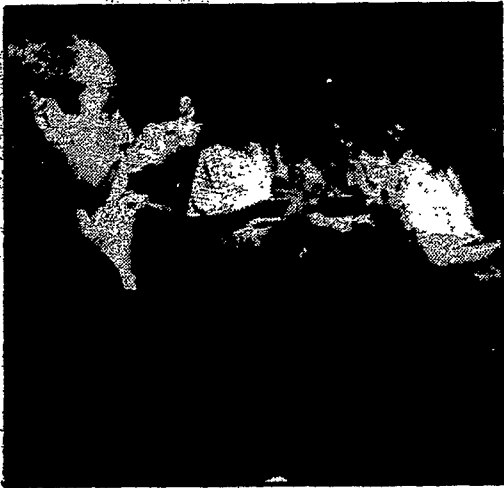


Numbers game

Organizers disputed estimates of crowd size at last weekend's Rally for Life in Washington, but not the event's success. Page 6.

Caring connection

St. Ann's new program, the Home Connection, provides elderly people with health and social services as well as a place to socialize. Page 10.



Teen talk

At the Bishop's Day with Youth, Bishop Matthew H. Clark queried teens about the effect the church has on their lives. Page 14.

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Unleashing the caged beast?

Experts debate effect of drug legalization

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Father John Marquis, ST, and Father Vincent P. Panepinto — one a former New Orleans jail chaplain and the other a pastor in Rochester's inner city — have both witnessed the devastating effects drug abuse has on people, families and neighborhoods.

Yet the two men propose radically different approaches to winning the war on drugs.

"The profit motive is what is making it impossible to deal with drug abuse," Father Marquis said in a phone interview with the *Catholic Courier*. He recalled that many of the delinquent youths with whom he worked were caught up in making hundreds of dollars from crack cocaine sales. The priest — currently a vocations minister for his order — also outlined his pro-drug-legalization stance in a recent article for *U.S. Catholic*.

"(Anti-drug) laws are false gods promising a salvation they cannot produce," Father Marquis wrote. "Every year they demand more adoration from their devotees: more time, more money, more people, more resources. And yet, no matter how punitive the sanctions ... the drug-providing business has only escalated, indeed, ballooned."

But the pastor of St. Michael's Parish on Rochester's north side views legalizing drugs as a way of easing access to substances that people should have a hard time getting. Father Panepinto calls legalization a "vital mistake."

"At least at this stage, people have to go searching for (drugs)," the priest said. "If we're selling this to people over a counter

in a drugstore, what are we saying?" he added rhetorically.

The inner-city neighborhoods surrounding St. Michael's are riddled with the effects of drug abuse, Father Panepinto said, yet addiction is rampant in society as a whole.

"The judge who bangs the gavel and then goes out and has three martinis could well have the same problem (as the illegal drug user)," the priest observed, pointing to his own cigarette habit as an addiction.

"We as a society ... have this desire to run away from that which hurts us," he said. "I just feel that our energy should be put into educating all members of society on the addictive process."

Father Marquis, however, believes that current attempts at education have failed to stem drug addiction. He didn't mince words when he criticized the "Just Say No" campaign inaugurated by first lady Nancy Reagan in the 1980s. The priest termed the effort "the most asthmatic piece of barf to ever hit the streets."

Reagan's campaign failed to address the complex issues surrounding drug use and addiction, he asserted. "When (children) get to be 15 or 16, they're not going to 'just say no,'" commented Father Marquis, who worked with numerous drug addicts during his years as a chaplain in Louisiana.

Instead, Father Marquis' experience with addicted people has led him to advocate a stance on drugs that is sometimes considered academic by anti-drug groups — complete legalization of illegal substances.

Father Marquis' sentiments are shared, in varying degrees, by a small, but increasingly vocal minority that supports drug legalization for a variety of reasons. Frustration with what they view as the failure of the U.S. war on drugs compels some to advocate legalization. Others are

concerned that civil liberties are under fire from the tactics police, courts and corporations are employing to control drug abuse — especially drug testing and search-and-seizure maneuvers.

Both opponents and supporters of legalization tend to agree that the drug war's emphasis on enforcement has siphoned resources away from education and rehabilitation — efforts that most agree should be the bulk of any national campaign against drugs. But the question of whether legalization should accompany redirected anti-drug efforts raises controversy.

Ministers and pastors often deal first-hand with such drug-related problems as street crime, overdose-related deaths and family break-ups. While most agree on support for education and rehabilitative efforts, religious leaders express a variety of opposing views on the question of legalization.

Father Laurence Tracy, who lives on Rochester's north side and serves as pastoral assistant for the Spanish Apostolate, regards the legalization debate as a superficial approach to a complex problem.

"I would suggest that we not waste our time on that debate," he said. "Making (drugs) illegal or legal is not going to change the problem."

Father Tracy observed that the nation spends billions of dollars trying to stop drug trafficking, but devotes little money to halting drug use through education. He proposed that drug laws be selectively enforced — but not repealed — as communities focus their efforts on treatment and rehabilitation for drug users.

Yet, anti-drug laws encourage drug trafficking in the first place, argues Father Marquis, who noted that many inner-city

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