



Joyful jubilarians
Sister Florian Reichert, SSJ, will be among 30 religious honored for years of service to the diocesan community at a jubilee celebration this weekend. Pages 8 and 9.

CATHOLIC COURIER

Diocese of Rochester Thursday, October 11, 1990 50¢ 24 pages

Military chaplains eagerly respond to call

By Lee Strong
Staff Writer

Father James Jaeger has been personally touched by the Persian Gulf crisis.

An Air Force reserve chaplain working at Griffiss Air Force Base in Rome, New York, Father Jaeger was one of the last persons seen by some troops who recently departed for the Persian Gulf.

Amid distributing Bibles, rosaries, prayers cards and scapulars to some of the men and women he'd come to know in his two years at the base, the parochial vicar at St. Ann's in Hornell was called upon to hear confessions and provide last-minute counseling.

"Some of them asked, 'Father, are you going with us?'" Father Jaeger said. "I said if I could, I would." When asked such questions, he added, "You get a lump in your throat."

Like so many chaplains — both active duty and reserve — Father Jaeger may experience more such emotional moments in the coming weeks and months if Operation Desert Shield continues, or perhaps escalates into combat. Those chaplains may have to provide the last pastoral support these departing troops will experience before shipping out.

Or, as is the case of 30 chaplains — including the Diocese of Rochester's Father Richard Mattie, a Navy commander — they may find themselves in the Gulf providing for the pastoral needs of the service men and women stationed there.

In all, more than 1,200 priests serve as active duty or reserve chaplains for approximately two million Catholics — men and women in the military, their families, and retirees. Chaplains work on bases, in Veteran's Administration hospitals, and in the field.

The Diocese of Rochester has three priests on a active duty, four in the Reserves our National Guard, and seven retired chaplains.

All chaplains are organized under the aegis of the Archdiocese for the Military Service, USA, with the chaplains on "loan" from their respective home dioceses or orders. The archdiocese, one of 32 such military archdioceses in the world, was created in 1985 with the appointment of its first primate and current ordinary, Archbishop Joseph T. Ryan.

Despite the military label, the archdiocese functions the same as any other diocese or archdiocese. The "parishes" (military bases or posts, and V.A. hospitals) offer daily Masses, regular confessions, baptisms (13,035 in 1989), marriages (2,568 in '89), religious education programs for children and Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults.

The facilities on bases are all maintained by the individual branches of the service, and the chaplains are all employed by the military, but the archdiocese itself is an ecclesiastical entity, not a govern-

ment or military agency. Its funding comes not through the government, but through collections and donations.

Priests in the archdiocese provide the same sort of pastoral care that they would in a civilian setting, noted Father Michael McCormack, communications director for the archdiocese.

"Essentially, there is no difference other than the uniform," Father McCormack said. "The priestly ministry is carried out exactly the same."

Father William Leone, pastor of the Northern Cayuga Cluster and an Army National Guard chaplain, echoed that observation.

"I really find its kind of an extension of my parish work," observed Father Leone, who has served with the 209th Field Artillery since 1980. "The people who are involved in the unit are basically a random sampling of the general population."

And the task of the priest in the military is much the same as it is for a priest in a regular parish, noted Father James Burke, pastor of St. Agnes Parish, Avon, and a colonel with 20 years experience in the reserves.

"You've got to get to know the people there," Father Burke said. "Any needs will be the same as in a parish."

Nevertheless, the fact that men and women in the military face the possibility of death helps to bring some things into focus, Father Jaeger acknowledged.

"You start to consider what the important things are in your life," Father Jaeger said. "It's not money. It's love, family. You ask, 'Is my relationship with God strong?' All of a sudden, the faith they thought they'd lost is there."

Indeed, separate from the religious revival men and women experience because of the potential for death, many people in the service experience a religious reawakening due to other factors, Father McCormack noted.

"The military puts a lot of emphasis on high morals, values and good conduct," Father McCormack said. And with a median age of 24 in the military, this emphasis comes at an age when the service men and women are often open to reasserting religious beliefs, he pointed out.

Father McCormack observed, for example, that only 10 percent of Catholic recruits attended Mass regularly before enlisting, but that approximately 95 percent attended during basic training.

"The primary need is spiritual," Father McCormack said. "I think (being in the military) presents a situation by which they rediscover their faith. Like in the world, there's always some situations you find yourself in which provides an occasion for rediscovering your faith."

Or discovering Catholicism, as was the

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