



Visiting visionary

Ivan Dragicevic, one of the original seers of Medjugorje, Yugoslavia, brought his messages of peace and conversion to young people of the Rochester area. Page 9.

CATHOLIC COURIER

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Rural areas face catechetical challenge

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

Parishioners at Dryden's Church of the Holy Cross probably would not think of Barbara Ivers as a leader in a revolution.

Yet Ivers, the parish's religious-education coordinator, is indeed part of a catechetical "revolution" underway in the Diocese of Rochester's rural and small-town parishes.

"I think in the small parishes we're probably on the forefront of trying things because we have the small numbers of people," Ivers explained. "I think it's easier to make changes or to get people excited."

Jim Bloomfield, religious-education coordinator at St. Patrick's in Seneca Falls, is even broader in his assessment.

"I think the Diocese of Rochester is on the cutting edge of catechetics in the nation," Bloomfield said. "There are few places that say that catechetics is a right and a responsibility."

Ivers, Bloomfield and the dozens, if not hundreds, of people working in catechetics in the diocese's small-town and rural parishes are now devising ways to implement Bishop Matthew H. Clark's call for cradle-to-grave religious education for Catholics.

That call, first voiced by Bishop Clark in 1987 and developed by him in a series of regional meetings in 1988, requires diocesan parishes outside Monroe County to develop a "Well-Integrated Catechetical Plan" by 1992.

The WICP, as the plan is commonly called, incorporates all phases of catechetics, ranging from religious education for school children and youth ministry to the Right of Christian Initiation for Adults and adult education.

The plan developed for each parish, local area (a grouping of several parishes within a geographic region), and cluster (a larger geographic grouping incorporating several local areas) will outline how the 10 education elements included in the process will be provided for parishioners.

"I think one of the things that's facing (small-town and rural parishes) as a challenge is the concept of dealing with the idea that catechetics is more than just religious education for children," noted Maribeth Mancini, the diocese's director of religious education.

"WICP has exploded that idea," Mancini said. "I think one of the things the WICP is doing is calling the parishes to look at what they are about in terms of

catechetics — on whom are they spending their time, their money and their energy."

In taking this direction, the Diocese of Rochester is simply responding to a need voiced by Catholics nationwide. The Notre Dame Study of Catholic Life Since Vatican II revealed that religious education in parishes ranks second to bingo in sheer numbers of participants.

Ninety-three percent of the parishes surveyed in the study offered religious education for grade-school students; 84 percent did so for high-school students; and 63 percent had catechetical programs for adults.

The challenge for small-town and rural parishes, however, extends beyond simply accepting a broader definition of

catechetics, Mancini said. These parishes must contend with a variety of factors that interfere with their ability to offer all components of WICP.

"You're looking at places that have real limited resources," Mancini remarked. Such limitations can include money, personnel, facilities and equipment.

Parishes must also contend with distances from each other.

"In the city, you can cross the street and be in another parish," remarked Nancy Goodrich, religious-education coordinator at St. Joseph's, Wayland, and St. Januarius, Naples. "In an area like Wayland or Dansville, it's different. There

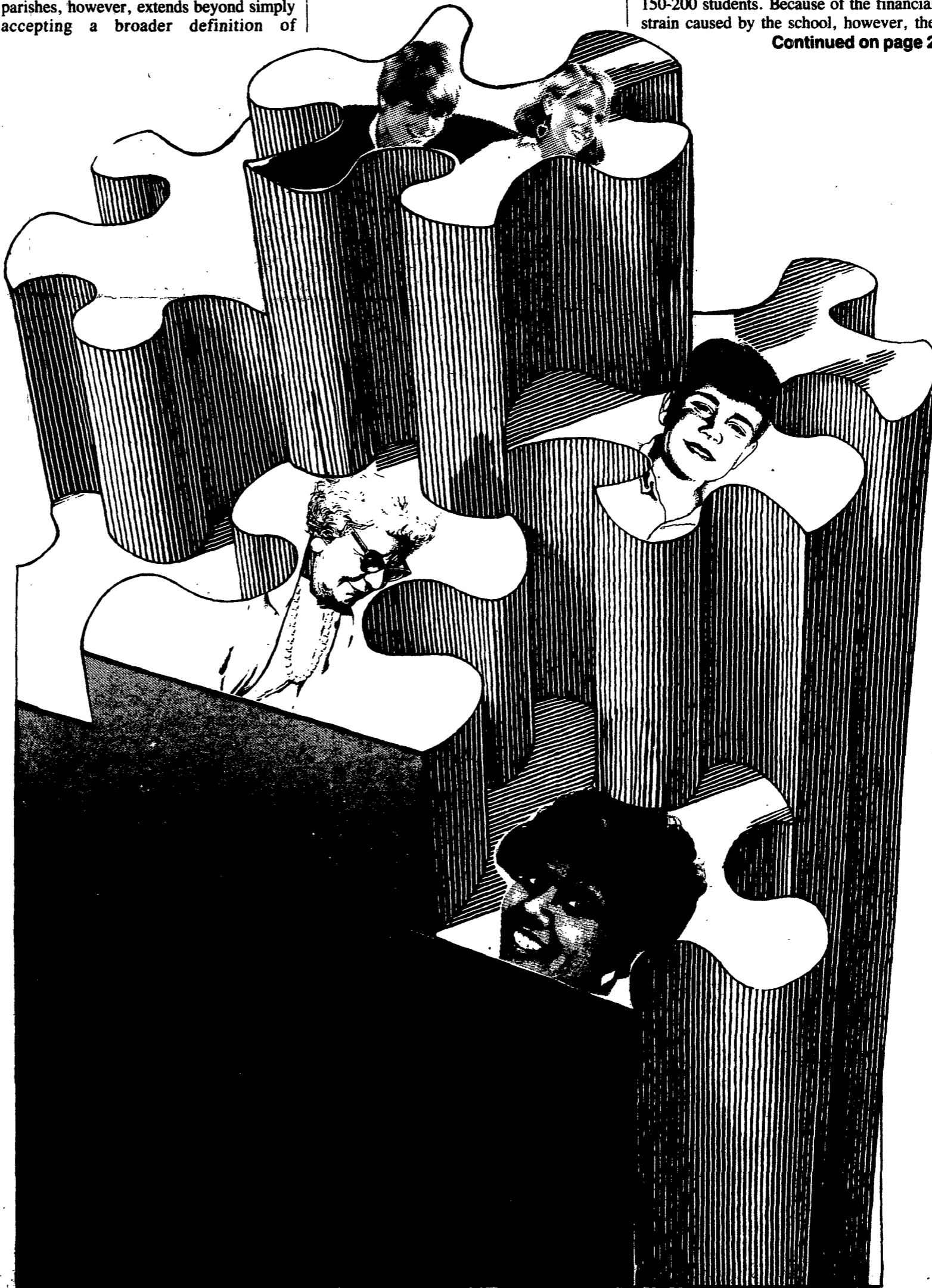
are towns in our cluster that are 30 miles away from each other."

Penn Yan's St. Michael Parish is among the parishes struggling with geographical isolation.

St. Michael's is located in Yates County. The only other parish in the county is its own mission church, St. Andrew's in Dundee. Meanwhile, St. Michael's operates the only Catholic school in the county. Keeping the school open has drained the parish's resources for years.

In 1989, the pastor, Father William Michatek, noted that the school served only 60 Catholic students while the religious-education program encompassed 150-200 students. Because of the financial strain caused by the school, however, the

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