

Faith

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the Interfaith Forum. Their meeting marks the first time locally that such a broad spectrum of faith communities have begun to seek ways to work together.

During the Week of Christian Unity, Jan. 18-25, Christian parishes throughout the 12-county Catholic diocese have arranged pulpit exchanges, joint prayer services and talks. The main celebration in Monroe County took place at Sacred Heart Cathedral Jan. 20, with Bishop Clark as homilist.

The list of local cooperative ventures goes on and on. It is paralleled, moreover, on national and international levels, where the leaders of various denominations — such as the Catholic and the Lutheran churches — are even talking about the possibility of eventual union.

Were a Catholic of the 1950s somehow transported into 1991, he or she doubtless would find the broad spectrum of ecumenical (involving Christians-only) and interfaith (involving both Christians and non-Christians) to be confusing, possibly even disturbing.

The transported Catholic would in all likelihood wonder what happened to the

Roman Catholic Church — the church that counseled its followers to avoid other denominations and religions because they were wrong and potentially dangerous to a Catholic's faith.

What happened to that Catholic Church, at least in part, was Vatican II, explained Margery Nurnberg.

"One of the greatest things in the Vatican II documents is ... the Roman Catholic Church recognized the validity of the baptism of other churches," noted Nurnberg, director of the diocesan Department of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs.

That acceptance was contained in the "Decree on Ecumenism," published Nov. 21, 1964, and in a series of post-conciliar documents touching on a variety of ecumenical issues. On Oct. 28, 1965, the council published its "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," and on Dec. 1, 1965, it released "Guidelines on Religious Relations with the Jews."

Those documents called for an end to anti-Semitism and for the promotion of unity and cooperation among all faiths. In fact, the ecumenism decree went so far as to declare "that Catholics had a duty to participate in ecumenical activities," noted diocesan archivist Father Robert F. McNamara, in his article "Ecumenism and

the Rochester Center for Theological Studies," published in the Fall, 1990, issue of *Rochester History*.

After the Vatican Council approved ecumenical efforts, the Catholic Church abandoned its earlier teachings concerning other denominations, and actively began to seek out dialogue with them.

"Maybe once we thought the other churches were kind of renegade relatives, and we were embarrassed by them and wished they would either just go away or see the error of their ways and join with us again," observed Father John Hotchkin, executive director of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. "Now, we see each other as brothers and sisters in the Lord, and we look at other churches as potential partners in advancing the church of God."

Thus such efforts at cooperation and unity are not intended to promote a watering down of beliefs in the Catholic Church or in other religions, the Rev. Miller observed.

"We never, never want to water down what is distinctive about a church," the Rev. Miller said. "(Ecumenism) is an attempt to articulate that distinctiveness. Whenever you water it down, you have lost a passion, a base, and that's what we need

to share."

Deacon Brian McNulty, a staff member at St. Augustine's Parish, echoed the minister's words.

"The last thing any ecumenist wants is a tofu Christian," Deacon McNulty said. "If you are a Methodist, I want you to be a Methodist. If a Roman Catholic, be a Roman Catholic. Don't pretend you are something else."

As the husband of the Episcopal diocese's Deacon Lynne McNulty, Deacon Brian McNulty is in a unique position to observe ecumenical efforts. The McNultys have had to resolve the difficulties not only of an interdenominational marriage, but also of one that involves two ordained people.

"You've got to be able to distinguish what's at the center of the faith, and what's at the periphery," he observed.

Some issues — such as the ordination of women and married people — do indeed separate the Christian denominations. Further divisions exist between the Christian and non-Christian communities. The key is to focus not on these divisions, Deacon McNulty noted, but on the idea that "churches should do together all that is possible, and separately only what is necessary."

Nurnberg said that the current focus for faith communities is to talk about the elements of faith they share. Among those elements are a belief in God, and, for Christians, in the teachings contained in the Gospels.

In addition to discovering theological similarities, faith communities are also discovering areas of agreement in addressing such social issues as homelessness, hunger, and injustices in the judicial system, the Rev. Miller observed.

"I think that people are seeing that the issues that we are dealing with in the world and the community need to be dealt with from a joint perspective," he said.

Yet the question arises as to how far ecumenical and interfaith efforts can go. With some Christian denominations talking about unity, could a merger take place?

Father Hotchkin said a reunification may indeed happen among some of the Christian churches, but he said many barriers exist before this could take place. He cited by way of example that fact that the Catholic Church does not recognize ordained ministry in other churches as equal to ordination in the Catholic Church.

Still, Father Hotchkin noted, predicting how far ecumenism will go is difficult. He pointed out that no one, himself included, expected ecumenism to advance as far and as fast as it has since Vatican II.

"I would hope that as far as Christians are concerned, I would like to see further and further stages of growing unity 20 years from now," Father Hotchkin said, "as far beyond where we are now as we are now as compared to before Vatican II."

Agency

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tions ... and that renting to Planned Parenthood would divide the association's membership, just as renting to any other controversial group would.

Linda Mack-Simmons, president of the association, complained that opposition to the leasing came either from people who did not belong to the association or from members who had never attended its meetings.

At various points throughout the meeting, Mack-Simmons pointed out that the vast majority of letters she had received on the matter supported the leasing; that the association's delegates had approved the leasing with a vote of confidence; and that the association's property-management committee had spent more than a year soliciting more than 100 prospective not-for-profit tenants for the building. She said Planned Parenthood was the only one of these organizations to express interest in leasing space from the

association.

Mack-Simmons said the decision to lease to Planned Parenthood "was not done with any malicious intent. We did not receive any opposition from delegates." She also said that the agency would not be performing abortions on the premises.

Father Sirriani acknowledged that the association followed proper procedures in setting up the rental agreement, but said "I think it's clear knowledge that Planned Parenthood participates in the pro-choice movement, which we as a Catholic Church don't support."

However, Cindy Galeota, a member of Catholics for a Free Choice, disagreed with other Catholics present who argued that Planned Parenthood's presence in the association building would alienate members of the church. "I don't consider that if I went to Planned Parenthood that I would be any less of a member of the Catholic Church," she said.

But Catholics weren't the only ones opposed to the lease agreement. Charlene Hauser, the wife of a Baptist minister, said: "I just don't think (Planned Paren-

thood) needs to come into the community. I don't think we need to support it."

Opponents and supporters of the lease argued back and forth in several exchanges over the "need" for Planned Parenthood's services.

Supporters contended that neighborhood teenagers lacked birth control and gynecological services, and other information that the agency provides. Opponents argued that Planned Parenthood's effort to promote contraceptive sex actually encourages irresponsible sexual activity and indirectly promotes an increase in sexually transmitted diseases.

Regardless of the contending arguments, Mack-Simmons commented that "my presence here is not indicative that the association is going to change their plans."

Indeed, as opponents concluded that the lease would go through, some said they would withdraw from the association and request a refund of their dues. Maher, however, later speculated that he would remain in the association and possibly work to elect a slate of delegates more sympathetic to the opponents' views.

Co-ops

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Burnett said.

"Neighborhood people come in and do the cleaning and freezing," she remarked, noting that co-op's members get "sweat equity" for the amount of work they do. The co-op currently has six members, she said.

In the last two months, four organizations — three in Monroe County and one in Livingston County — have received Campaign for Human Development grants from the Catholic Family Center in Rochester.

The three other recipients and the amount of money the organizations received were the Gateway Project of Livingston County Coalition of Churches, \$2,870, and two other Rochester groups: St. Joseph's Work Cooperative, (an affiliate of St. Joseph's House of Hospitality) \$6,000; and LaVIDA — Viviendo Independiente de Drogas y Alcohol, \$3,400. LaVIDA, which is translated as "Living Independent from Drugs and Alcohol," is an organization that plans to serve the Hispanic community and that was begun by professionals and recovering addicts.

The two counties' CHD campaigns are separately run from a CHD administered by the United States Catholic Conference.

But the philosophy of "empowering" the poor that drives the national campaign is reflected in the choice of the local CHD recipients here in the diocese.

• Gateway, based in Mount Morris, operates a clothing co-op, a referral service and a lay-advocacy program. Ken Maher, parish outreach program coordinator for the Catholic Family Center, said that Gateway plans to use its grant to set up a mentoring program for families in crisis.

Six families that have been aided in one way or another by Gateway will offer their support to families currently experiencing some sort of crisis, Maher said. He noted that such families will be referred to a mentor family that will help the family in crisis by sharing similar experiences and offering guidance.

• St. Joseph's Work Cooperative has helped former guests of the House of Hospitality to form their own businesses, and will provide job training and job search services for its guests and those of other local outreach centers and shelters.

Mary Rose McCarthy, director of St. Joseph's Work Cooperative, noted that the work cooperative has already helped former guests set up Upstairs Graphics on South Avenue in Rochester. The company designs bumper stickers, posters and greeting cards, she said.

• LaVIDA is an attempt by the Hispanic community to help Spanish-speaking substance abusers find counseling and

assistance in their own neighborhood and in their own language, Maher said. He pointed out that many Spanish-speaking addicts find it impossible to navigate through the sea of welfare offices and substance-abuse agencies operated by New York state because of the language and cultural barriers that they often encounter.

Battle

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Bishop Clark's home parish, Sacred Heart Cathedral, 296 Flower City Park. Sponsored by Genesee Ecumenical Ministries, the service originally was intended to celebrate a Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, but the focus changed following the outbreak of war.

The Rev. James Miller, president of GEM, explained the shift in focus in a statement released by GEM last week. "The same concern which leads the church community to pray for Christian unity also leads us to pray for the unity of all humankind," his statement read.

"At this time," the statement continued, "as our country is at war with an Islamic nation and the lives of Jews and Christians in neighboring countries are also placed in great jeopardy, we invite our Muslim and Jewish neighbors ... to express our soli-

darity with all peoples in the Middle East — both military personnel and civilian populations — who are enduring ... a violent war."

During a reception following the service, one of the participating choir members, 11-year-old C.J. Rolle of Rochester, expressed his concerns for the outcome of the war in the gulf. Noting that his uncle is serving with the Army in the gulf region, Rolle offered a message to the leaders on both sides of the conflict:

"They should make up and go home," he said.

Unfortunately, bringing about peace — and defining what's right and wrong about the war — appears not to be as simple as Rolle might wish. Citing the complexity of issues surrounding the war, Father Faraone pointed out that his parish's service focused on "support for our brothers and sisters," rather than on the morality of the conflict.

"Our perspective is simply to pray for peace," he said.

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