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# CATHOLIC COURIER

Diocese of Rochester

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## Fortuitous furniture

Thanks to the efforts of parishioners at St. Leo's in Hilton, people in need can receive donated furniture and household goods free of charge through the Furniture Alert program. Page 6.

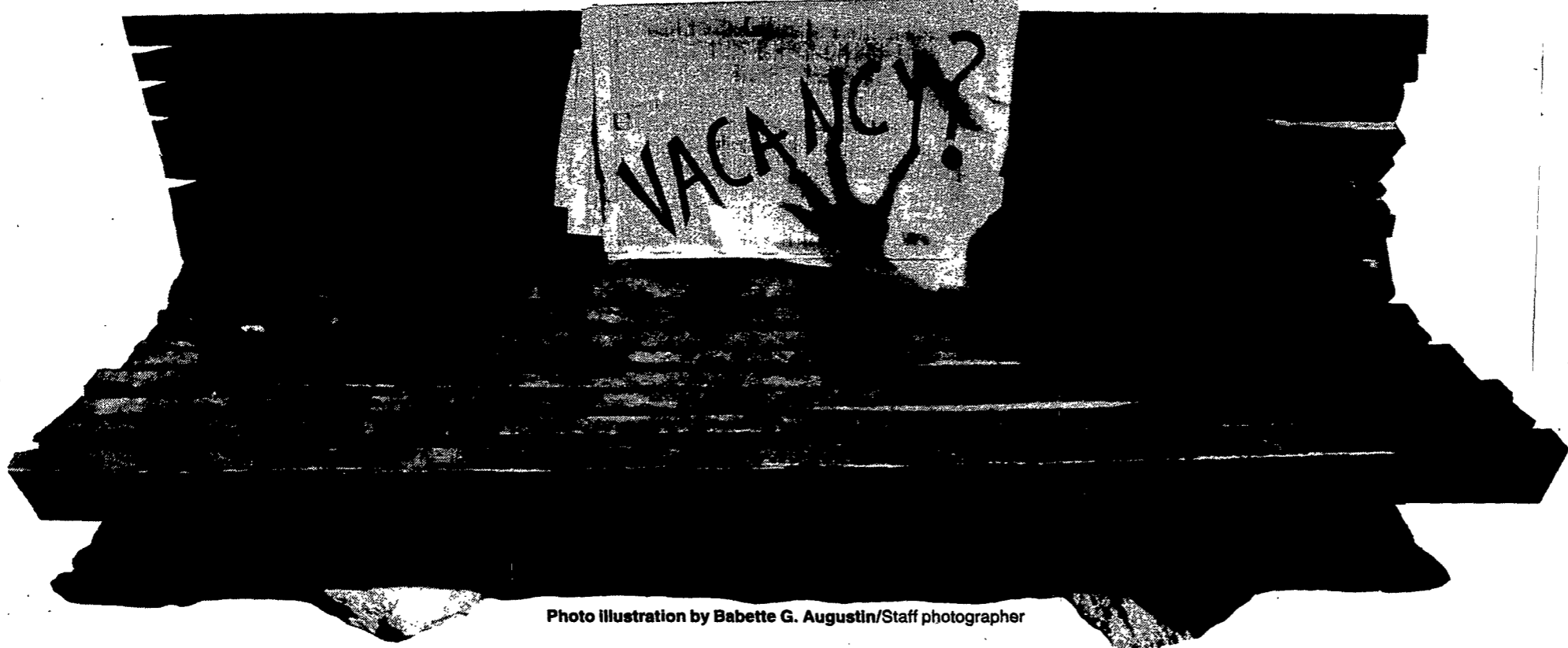


Photo illustration by Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

## Future cloudy as shelters close

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — In the winter of 1982-83, the growing numbers of homeless people in Rochester led three parishes — Corpus Christi, Blessed Sacrament and St. Bridget's — to open emergency shelters.

Originally, the plan had been for the shelters to remain open a year or two until the situation improved or a government agency assumed the responsibility.

Come April 13, 1991 — nine shelter seasons later — St. Bridget's and Blessed Sacrament shelters are slated to close their doors for good.

Maybe.

Next winter, the Catholic Family Center's Francis Hospitality Center — scheduled to open next month — will provide beds and support services for as many as 30 homeless men. Of those 30 slots, however, only seven are reserved for emergency shelter.

Will that handful of emergency beds — plus expanded shelter facilities at such sites as the Salvation Army and the Open Door Mission — be enough to compensate for the 27 beds for men being lost in the closings at Blessed Sacrament and St. Bridget's?

"My sense is that Francis Center will not meet the emergency needs of the people," noted Sister Marilyn Pray, SSJ, director of St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, which provides emergency shelter for up to seven men a night.

Even Blessed Sacrament's shelter director, Dick Sadowski, is unsure that he will be closing down permanently.

"I'm concerned," Sadowski said. "Concerned that by us closing, it's going to put more people on the streets."

Sadowski is so concerned, in fact, that he will be directing at the parish an expanded, federally funded supper program to keep in touch with the homeless population and to maintain the pool of volunteers his parish has developed — just in case the shelter has to reopen next fall.

Whether Blessed Sacrament's shelter still will be needed hinges on a number of factors — one of those being the Francis Center.

The center is the culmination of a project of the Catholic Family Center to open a year-round, 24-hour facility to meet the homeless people's needs beyond shelter for

the night.

The center will provide 23 individual rooms for long-term occupation by homeless men. Through the center, these men also will receive counseling and support to get education, jobs and independence, noted William Privett, development director for the CFC.

One advantage that Francis Center will have over the two parish shelters is that while the latter were staffed by volunteers,

expected. The report noted, for example, that between 1986 and 1987 approximately 4,500 people spent at least one night in a shelter facility.

The study called for the opening of additional shelters for women and children, as well as a permanent facility for men such as the Francis Center.

Since the study, approximately 100 beds have been added for the homeless community in Rochester, Privett observed.

## Demand strains food supplies

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

Tom Ferraro has been involved in emergency food distribution for 15 years.

Yet, he declared, he has never seen the emergency food situation as bad as it is this year.

"It's starting to become not an unusual occurrence that somewhere each week (an emergency provider) runs out of food," reported Ferraro, director of the Genesee Valley Food Bank, an organization that distributes food to 160 shelters, food pantries and soup kitchens in a 10-county region.

Nor is Ferraro alone in noting increased demands for emergency food.

Sister Marilyn Pray, SSJ, director of St. Joseph's House of Hospitality in Rochester, noted that at the end of last month, approximately 130 people a day were coming to the house for lunch. In previous years, she observed, the maximum number coming even during the worst of times had been approximately

120.

Between November, 1990, and March, 1991, the supper program at Blessed Sacrament Parish in Rochester had served 1,500 more meals than it had done during the same period in 1989-90, reported director Dick Sadowski.

Pat Bonsignore, operations manager for the Southern Tier Community Food Bank — which supplies food for emergency programs throughout six New York counties — said his agency supplied food to 3,500 more individuals and 4,500 more meals in February, 1991, than it did in February, 1990. "So far, (the demand) is increasing by leaps and bounds," he said.

And nationally, a congressional study released March 26, showed that approximately 20 million U.S. residents are unable to feed themselves regularly.

While a burgeoning homeless population in the United States has received a great deal of attention in recent years, indications are that hunger in this country

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the former will operate with professional staff members supplemented by volunteers.

The goal of the Francis Center approach, Privett said, "is to encourage these people to get on with services that will make a difference, to get on with their lives."

The need for such a facility was voiced in 1988 in *Beyond Bed and Breakfast*, a report by the Task Force on the Homeless convened by the Mental Health Association.

The study revealed that Rochester's homeless population was much larger than

Many of those beds were for women and children — thanks to the reopening of Sojourner House, and the opening of Women's Place and Liberty Manor.

But even with those additional beds, shelter providers report that all of their beds were filled some nights this past winter, and the overflow had to be placed in area hotels.

Privett noted that no comprehensive information has been gathered on Rochester's homeless population since the Health Association study was completed. An updated study is being proposed to help

determine current numbers and the nature of the population, he added.

Shelter providers can already offer some clues about the changing nature of that population.

"We see a lot more 17, 18, 19 year olds with problems coming in," noted Linda Rosier, director of St. Bridget's shelter. Among these problems, she explained, are mental illness and drug and alcohol addiction.

And in light of state and federal cutbacks in funding for mental health and drug and alcohol programs, the situation may grow worse, Rosier said.

"Offices are being closed," Rosier said. "That's going to flood everybody back into the community. That really has me worried."

Lillian Piersante, director of Dimitri House, Corpus Christi's program for the homeless, likewise has noticed an increase of younger guests with mental illness and/or drug and alcohol problems.

"One of the disturbing things this year was that a lot of our guys were very, very young," said Piersante, whose program provides emergency housing for up to seven men a night. "The guys are 20, 21, 22. There's more mental illness. There's more guys involved with drug use."

Part of the problem, Piersante said, is that government cutbacks have meant fewer spaces available in treatment programs for the mentally ill and for drug and alcohol abusers. People needing these programs are put on waiting lists, but during the lengthy wait sometimes become homeless. Once on the streets, they have a hard time getting back into programs.

Sister Pray said she had no hard evidence that cutbacks were affecting the homeless. Nevertheless, she added, "the situation that there are mentally ill people walking on the streets — that says something."

Privett observed that government cutbacks do, indeed, have an indirect effect on the homeless because the services that helped them deal with their emotional or mental problems are being cut. Thus while direct services to the homeless are not being cut, cuts in other services can push people into homelessness and affect the kinds of services shelters are called upon to provide.

When such programs are available, they  
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