

# Hispanics celebrate living Christ

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The neighborhood around St. Francis of Assisi Church, 77 Whitney St., echoed with the sounds of Spanish voices and music last week.

The sounds emanated from speakers in the parking lot of the city parish, where hundreds of Hispanic Catholics gathered for the diocese's ninth Hispanic Mission from Aug. 5-9.

The mission — which concluded with a Mass in the church on Friday, Aug. 9 — was sponsored by the diocesan Office of the Spanish Apostolate. The five-day event drew Hispanic Catholics from such areas as Rochester, Geneva and Brockport.

The gathering was cosponsored by six Rochester parishes with large Hispanic populations: St. Francis of Assisi; Holy

Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier; St. Michael; Corpus Christi; St. Peter and Paul; and Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

Monsignor Rafael Fontanez, pastor of San Jose Parish in Villa Caparra in Puerto Rico, led the mission. The celebrant of three weekly television Masses, Monsignor Fontanez has led many missions throughout Puerto Rico and the United States.

"My goal is that the people at least be happy, and they know that Christ exists and he is there," Monsignor Fontanez said. "Not the Jesus Christ of history. I try as far as I can to show that (Jesus) is alive and he is living here right now."

That message hit home with Sister Genevieve Morales, OSF, pastoral assistant at Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier Parish, 34 Teresa St.

"I think (Monsignor Fontanez) brought

the idea of each person being committed to Christ," Sister Morales said. "I think the mission kind of stirred the spirit in each person."

Deacon Carlos Vargas, who serves the parish community at St. Francis of Assisi, noted that — as word got around about Monsignor Fontanez's preaching — more and more people attended the mission as the week progressed.

The goal of the mission, Deacon Vargas explained, was to reach out into the Hispanic community and to re-establish contact with Catholics who have stopped attending church. Organizers were also hoping to reach those who have turned to evangelical churches.

"We're not trying to bring them back," Deacon Vargas added. "We never lost them."

Monsignor Fontanez noted that his ministry is, in part, a response to Pope John Paul II's call for evangelization.

"The Holy Father told the bishops that they have to start a new program to stop people from going to other churches and to rescue the ones who have gone," Monsignor Fontanez explained. "We have to try to show them that (the other churches) do not have the whole truth."

As part of his effort to meet the community, Monsignor Fontanez visited people's homes during his weeklong stay in Rochester. He also visited local hospitals in an effort to establish personal contacts with area residents.

"They are going to talk to other people about that," the priest observed. "They are going to say, 'Look, the church was here. Look, the preacher was here.'"

Monsignor Fontanez pointed out that missions are a tradition among Hispanics throughout Latin America. People are drawn to the music and the preaching, Monsignor Fontanez explained.

For local Hispanics, the mission also



Monsignor Rafael Fontanez, pastor of San Jose Parish in Villa Caparra, Puerto Rico, conducts the mission.

enabled them to gather together and hear preaching in their own language, Deacon Vargas said.

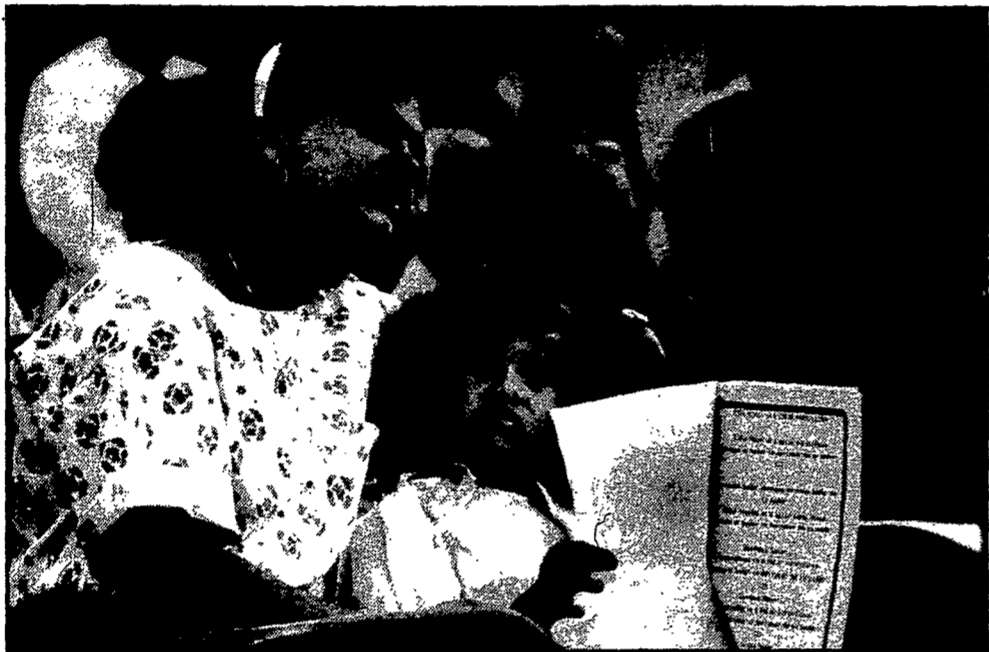
That's one of the reasons why Epifanio Candelario and his wife, Felicitata, parishioners of St. Francis de Sales Parish in Geneva, attended the mission on Aug. 8.

"I like (to hear preaching) in Spanish," Epifanio Candelario said. "I like to hear people talk about religion, (to) learn more that way."

Sister Morales noted that the mission was not an isolated event. It marked the beginning of efforts to reach out to Hispanics throughout Rochester.

Among other events, Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier will host a retreat for Hispanic teenagers and create a leadership school for lay people.

The people attending the mission, Sister Morales added, "are the people who are going to continue helping others. They are the ones who will bring Christ to other people."



Mireya Hernandez (left) and Denise Marie Roman listen to Monsignor Fontanez at the ninth Hispanic Mission, Aug. 5-9, at St. Francis of Assisi Church.

## Both sides frustrated in talks over civil disobedience

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Talks between the Diocese of Rochester and pro-choice activists over the use of "rescue missions" at area doctors' offices have apparently come to an impasse, according to sources on both sides.

Participants in the dialogue, however, disagreed over why the stalemate occurred and which side was responsible for the impasse.

Pro-choice representatives claimed that the diocese has refused to take a clear stand on the legitimacy of civil disobedience tactics used in "rescue missions," when pro-life activists block or occupy the offices of doctors who perform abortions.

Church officials argued that pro-choice activists came to the dialogue with the wrong perception about the diocese's role in the debate.

The dialogue began in January, 1990, following several rescues at Rochester-area doctors' offices. Father Anthony P. Mugavero, parochial vicar of St. Theodore's Church in Gates, participated in several of the demonstrations. Pro-choice activists, led by Dr. Eric Schaff, picketed St. Theodore's Church on two successive Sundays, prompting the diocese to call for talks on the abortion issue.

Schaff initially met with Father John Firpo, diocesan director of Social Ministry, and Lourdes Perez-Albuerne, associate director of justice and peace. Subsequent meetings involved various pro-life and pro-choice activists. Father Mugavero said he couldn't attend any of the meetings due to time constraints and the fact that he took a sabbatical last year.

After more than a year of occasional meetings — which were mediated by the

Center for Dispute Settlement — Schaff claimed that the diocese has failed to clarify whether it endorses the tactics used during rescue missions.

No talks have taken place since last March, according to sources on both sides.

"I think the diocese is very cowardly in not giving out more guidelines," Schaff said. "Our goal was not to change anybody's behavior. Our goal was to get the diocese to (make) clear to its constituents what is non-violent disobedience. I think the diocese has let us all down."

In a recent press release, pro-choice activists noted that a diocesan statement on civil disobedience issued by Bishop Matthew H. Clark in 1988 specifically referred to "Operation Rescue as an example of non-violent civil disobedience."

The press release also asked whether rescue missions fulfilled the conditions for non-violent civil disobedience set forth in a January, 1991, diocesan statement released in the wake of protests against the Persian Gulf War.

The pro-choice activists also listed a number of instances in which they claimed the kind of tactics used by pro-life demonstrators during rescues could cause health problems for women unable to get into doctors' offices.

When asked to respond to the contentions made by pro-choice activists, Perez-Albuerne refused on the basis that both sides had agreed to keep the nature of the discussions confidential. She did explain that the diocese neither endorses nor condemns rescues, but set forth guidelines on civil disobedience in order to help Catholics decide for themselves whether or not to participate in the demonstrations.

"A lot of people try to enter into civil disobedience for a whole range of issues," Perez-Albuerne said. "We don't see it as

an act that a group entertains. Each individual's decision ... should be done with an informed conscience."

Perez-Albuerne asserted that the diocese entered into the dialogue, hoping to move the abortion debate beyond the confrontational tactics used by activists on both sides.

The two sides had great difficulty attempting to find common ground from the very beginning, even when they tried to define abortion.

Elaine Ashworth, a member of Greater Rochester Catholics for Choice and one of the dialogue's participants, said that the pro-life activists insisted on abortion being

called "baby-killing" when each side discussed educating people on the issue.

Carol Crossed acknowledged that she and her fellow pro-life activists sought to talk about abortion in terms of killing, but she added that such word usage is no different than the rhetoric employed by pro-choice activists.

"We didn't think it was fair to say that abortion was interfering with a woman's right," said Crossed, a parishioner of Corpus Christi Church. "That would only be giving one side ... If abortion is a woman's right, you can call it that, then at the same time it's the taking of a life."

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