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Strife rooted in old Yugoslav enmity

Members of Our Lady of Bistrica Parish in Lackawanna, N.Y., sat in the church rectory Tuesday afternoon, Oct. 8, their eyes glued to a Cable News Network report on the embattled Republic of Croatia.

CNN was carrying a Yugoslavian journalist's report that the Croatian parliament had moved that day to secede from Yugoslavia. The parliament's decision came on the expiration date of a three-month moratorium imposed in July on Croatia's June declaration of independence.

"I couldn't wait till these three months were over," commented Jozo Karoglan, who emigrated from Yugoslavia to West Germany in 1969, and later moved to the United States. "We are so proud and happy."

Franciscan Father Christopher Coric, pastor of the church in the west-Buffalo suburb, noted that the parliament's assertion of sovereignty puts the region "on the map so they know where Croatia is."

"They" are U.S. citizens who have been baffled by or indifferent to the bloody warfare that has raged in Yugoslavia for more than a year.

As of Monday, Oct. 14, wire-service reports indicated fighting was still going on in certain regions of Croatia, in spite of a truce agreed to by military representatives from both sides.

Eight previous cease-fires have failed to stop the shooting between the Serbian-led Yugoslav federal army and the Croatian military.

As in all things Yugoslavian,

defining the catalyst for such strife and the way it should be resolved depends on whom one asks.

Croats maintain that the current war is nothing less than a poorly disguised territorial grab by a land-locked Serbia greedy for resource-rich Croatia's access to the Adriatic Sea.

They assert that hundreds of villages, schools, businesses, hospitals and homes are being bombarded in a "dirty war" waged by Yugoslav forces backing Serbian guerrillas incited by Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic. In addition, Croats point out that Serbia blocked Stipe Mesic, a Croat, from becoming the Yugoslav federal president last May.

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Photo illustration by Babette G. Augustin

