

Hunger expert urges listeners to take action

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Poverty and hunger in the United States are enshrouded in myths, asserted Nancy Amidei, Belle-Spaford professor at the University of Utah School of Social Work.

The greatest of those myths is the mistaken notion that individuals can't do anything to stem the tide of a deteriorating economy and a declining social-welfare system, she said.

"We've got to stop nibbling around the edges," Amidei advised a crowd of about 100 people at Our Lady of Mercy High School Wednesday night, Oct. 16. "We've got to go for broke. ... One of things I expect is that we should not tolerate unacceptable poverty."

Amidei's speech was one of a series of World Food Day events sponsored by the Genesee Valley Food Bank. The day also featured an afternoon international teleconference on hunger issues at the University of Rochester.

The former director of the Food Research and Action Center in Washington, D.C., Amidei has battled hunger and poverty with the power of her voice — which has been heard in radio and television interviews — and her pen, with which she has contributed to such publications as *Commonweal* magazine.

She also is the author of the newly published book *So You Want to Make a Difference: A Beginner's Guide to Social Advocacy*.

In her speech, Amidei asserted that millions of U.S. citizens — especially children — go hungry each day. To back up her contention, the Salt Lake City professor brought with her a wealth of statistics and information culled from the 1990 U.S. census. She said these data dispel the illusions she believes obscure the real causes of poverty and hunger in this country.

Explaining that the federal government considers a family of three impoverished when its combined income is \$10,000 or less, Amidei pointed to census data indicating that "over 33 million Americans are living in poverty."

Of that number, 40 percent are children,

she said.

"We are the only industrialized nation in which the largest poverty group is kids," Amidei remarked.

Contrary to the popular belief that many poor people are jobless, she said two-thirds of the nation's poor families include at least one person who is employed.

"So many people who do work don't have enough to feed and clothe their families," she said.

Part of the problem is that many families spend the bulk of their incomes on rent, she said, adding that millions of poor people are stuck in low-wage jobs. Thus more and more families are relying on public assistance to feed themselves, she added.

"We are now in the 22nd consecutive month of rising welfare and food stamp participation," she noted.

In addition to increasing numbers on welfare, food banks and soup kitchens in most major cities are overloaded with customers, she said. It's a situation that's stretching the volunteers of churches and service organizations to the limit.

"Volunteers won't do it," she said of efforts to combat hunger in the nation's cities.

"Hungry children cannot eat a thousand points of light," she continued, alluding to President George Bush's campaign slogan about solving social problems through volunteer efforts.

In order to end poverty, the nation must change its social and economic policies, the professor argued. She said poverty has increased across the board for every ethnic and age group in U.S. society since 1980. Yet this downward trend was not always the case, she said, noting that through 1980, the elderly — the poorest group in the nation in 1960 — had seen a gradual improvement in their economic lot as a result of expanded social services.

Such periods of improvement can be repeated, she commented. Concerned advocates for the poor should lobby politicians for expansion of other social services that benefit impoverished families, Amidei said.

She dismissed arguments that efforts to expand social benefits would fail in the

current era of tightening governmental budgets. She cited several states in which small lobbying groups had succeeded in influencing legislators to increase social service funding in the last few years.

And such groups need to ally with one another to increase their chances of successfully influencing politicians, she said.

She recalled, for example, that advocates for the elderly in one state teamed up with lobbyists for low-income mothers to persuade the legislature to expand maternity benefits. Then, when the elderly lobbyists needed extra voters to push for nursing-home reform, the maternal advocates took up the cause of the elderly.

But expanding social-service benefits is not the only step needed to end U.S. poverty, Amidei said. Activists also must talk to employers about paying a "living" wage to breadwinners, and about providing them with health benefits.

Lobbyists for the poor should remember that anti-apartheid protesters succeeded in persuading many U.S. companies in South Africa to end discriminatory hiring policies, she said.

"If we can ask that of American businesses in South Africa, why can't we ask that of American businesses in south Rochester?" she asked rhetorically.

Amidei wrapped up her speech by noting that most incumbent office-holders were re-elected by the lowest margins ever in the fall of 1990. Hence, 1992 represents a rare chance for social activists to use their lobbying power to change the government's attitude on poverty, she said.

She concluded with a reference to the revolutionary change that has swept the Soviet Union in the last few months.

"I'm not asking you to face tanks," she said. "I'm just asking you to speak up."



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

Eastern-rite ceremony

During Oct. 20 ceremonies at St. Nicholas the Wonderworker Church, Rochester, Archbishop Ignatius Ghattas, eparch of the Melkite Greek Catholic Diocese of Newton, Mass., tonsures Edmond Elhilow. The ceremony bestowed on Elhilow the minor order of reader, which is the first step toward diaconal ordination in the Eastern Rite.

School-marketing consultant resigns from position

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Richard Della Costa, the diocesan school-marketing consultant, has resigned his position, effective Nov. 1.

No one yet has been named to replace him in that position, he said.

Della Costa's resignation comes more than one year after he was hired in August, 1991.

As a marketing consultant, Della Costa worked primarily on promoting diocesan city schools, which have suffered the most from declining enrollment in the past decade.

Della Costa also worked with the communications committees of the four quadrant governing boards and with the individual schools in each quadrant. He helped such committees in the Northeast, Southeast and Southwest quadrants to publish quarterly newsletters, and he worked on a promotional brochure to parents for the Northeast Quadrant.

He also coordinated the diocesan financial-aid program for Catholic school students.

Della Costa said he believed many Catholics had not accepted the reorganization of parish-based Catholic schools into a quadrant-based system. Unless diocesan Catholics are more sure what kind of schools they are promoting, they will fail to attract new students to the qua-

drant schools, he observed.

"I don't think people are thinking 'system,'" he said. "I think we're still in the midst of restructuring."

Della Costa stressed the importance of quadrant leaders, school parents, staff members and administrators teaming up to promote each quadrant as a whole unit, rather than spending their efforts promoting the schools located in their home parishes.

For example, Della Costa said, instead of just volunteering at open houses promoting enrollment in their children's schools among neighboring families, school parents could also volunteer to staff open houses on behalf of all the quadrant schools.

Despite his concerns over the implementation of the quadrant system, Della Costa said he believed that parents, staff and administrators are beginning to understand the need to sell quadrant schools as a whole. He also left his post with a generally positive view of the diocesan church.

"I think on a personal level, I really came to understand the Catholic culture," he said, adding, "There's a lot of room for diversity in (the Catholic church), which I think is not always the case especially in some fundamentalist organizations."

Della Costa said he was leaving the post to pursue a career in television, film and video production work. He has also produced shows for public television and cur-

rently teaches at the Visual Studies Workshop, 31 Prince St.

"I'm just at the point where my career demands that I jump into this," he explained.

Currently, he is co-producing a pilot program for cable TV entitled *People, Love and Romance*. The program was created by SoLong Productions, a Rochester-based company whose promotional information kit described the series

a "thirty-minute weekly reality-based show featuring segments exploring the latest in relationships."

Della Costa said that SoLong is still working to land a distribution deal with a major cable television company or a network. He pointed out that *People, Love and Romance*, will most likely be broadcast locally by fall of 1992. If it garners good ratings, then the show will have a shot at national viewers, he said.

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