

Asians add to medley of diocesan diversity

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

By 1975, assimilation and intermarriage had blurred many of the distinctions among such early arrivals as German, Irish and Italian immigrants to the Diocese of Rochester.

Poles and Ukrainians, too, were undergoing integration into the mainstream church and society.

On the other hand, a stream of more recent newcomers — primarily Hispanics — has continued over the past 17 years, forming an ever increasing and distinct segment in the diocesan church.

But perhaps the most noticeable influx of newcomers to the diocese, has come from Asia, particularly Vietnam. And the bulk of these new residents to the 12-county region has arrived since 1975.

Asian exodus

According to Doris Meissner, senior associate at the Washington-based Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Asians now constitute 45 percent of the approximately one million legal immigrants to the United States each year, while Hispanics make up another 40 percent.

By far the largest group of Asians are Vietnamese and Amerasians — children of American servicemen and Vietnamese women.

This influx began with the fall of South Vietnam to North Vietnamese forces in the spring of 1975.

Ha Nguyen, coordinator of the diocese's Ministry to Vietnamese and Asian-Pacific Catholics, was among the South Vietnamese who fled their homeland in 1975.

The diocese currently has a Vietnamese/Amerasian population of 3,000-4,000, Nguyen estimated. Although most of those people live in and around the City of Rochester, some have settled in Palmyra, Penn Yan and Elmira, she noted.

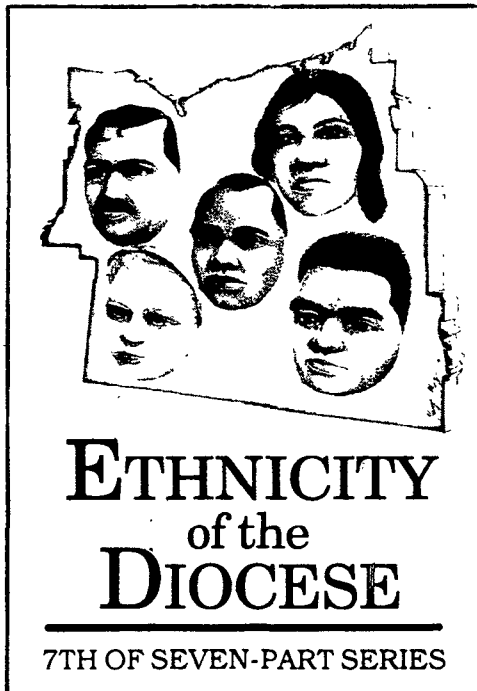
The Asian-Pacific population also includes small numbers of Laotians, Cambodians and Filipinos, Nguyen said.

The availability of jobs makes the

diocese an attractive area for these immigrants, Nguyen said, adding "Rochester is a nice, quiet place to live."

The healthy economy and an already existing Vietnamese population helped to encourage other Vietnamese to move to the area, Nguyen said.

Approximately 300 to 400 of the Vietnamese and Amerasian individuals are Catholic, Nguyen estimated. One of the largest concentrations of this population is in city neighbor-



hoods surrounding St. Anthony of Padua Church, 60 Lorimer St.

That parish hosts the monthly Mass in Vietnamese celebrated by Father John Thiep, a Vietnamese priest who has ministered to Vietnamese in the dioceses of Rochester, Syracuse and Albany since July, 1991.

That Mass — and an active Vietnamese Catholic community — has encouraged other Vietnamese to convert to Catholicism, Nguyen pointed out. And the community is itself beginning to sponsor Vietnamese immigrants to the Rochester area.

The hiring of Father Thiep is the latest step in the diocesan response to meet the needs of the Asian community. In the mid 1980s, the Catholic Fa-



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor

Van Huynh (left) looks on as Ha Tran (center) signs papers for Catholic Family Center's Scott Graham upon their June, 1991, arrival at the Greater Rochester International Airport. Translator The Nguyen (right) explains the documents. Rochester's Vietnamese Catholic community sponsored resettlement for members of the Tran and Huynh families.

mily Center began a resettlement program that aided area parishes sponsoring immigrant families. The ministry to Vietnamese began as one of the activities in the former Division of Urban Services, evolving into Nguyen's full-time position in 1990.

Thus the Ministry to Vietnamese and Asian-Pacific Catholics has become the third office created in the diocese to meet the needs of distinct ethnic groups; following the Office of the Spanish Apostolate (1967) and the Office of Black Ministry (1976).

Hispanic growth

Although Asians now represent the largest block of legal immigrants to the United States each year, the Hispanics still represent the largest ethnic group arriving in the mainland United States, noted Father Laurence Tracy of the Office of the Spanish Apostolate.

Father Tracy pointed out that among these Hispanics are Puerto Ricans — U.S. citizens who are not counted as immigrants — and undocumented aliens. He estimated the diocesan Hispanic population at 40,000 people — more than 30,000 of whom are baptized Catholics.

Frequently overlooked in discussing the diocesan Hispanic population is the number of Hispanic migrant workers who live and work in the region; Father Tracy observed. The migrant population in Wayne County is approaching 1,000, he said, and western Monroe County counts 1,500 to 2,000 Hispanic migrant workers.

Some of these workers now live in the diocese all year in such places as Rochester, Newark, Geneva and Brockport, Father Tracy said.

Meanwhile, he observed, the makeup of the Hispanic population has begun to shift. Although Puerto Ricans remain the dominant group, the number of Mexicans has increased. The population also includes a growing number of Guatemalans, Hondurans, Salvadorans and Costa Ricans who have fled political turmoil in their homelands, he said.

Political unrest

Central Americans are not the only group to flee violence in their native lands. A number of Haitians, for example, settled in the Rochester diocese

after leaving their island home during the repressive regimes of Francois and Jean-Claude Duvalier.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, Polish communities, too, witnessed a small influx of new immigrants — and a resurgence of ethnic pride.

In her book *Shoulder to Shoulder: Polish Americans in Rochester, N.Y. 1890-1990*, Kathleen Urbanic noted that the combination of a Polish cardinal's election to the papacy in 1978 and the rise of the Solidarity Trade Union in 1980 helped to pull the community back together.

When martial law was imposed in Poland in the winter of 1980-81, Urbanic recorded, the local Polish community responded by raising approximately \$96,000 in relief funds by March, 1981. That same month, a committee formed to sponsor the resettlement of Poles fleeing martial law and eventually helped a number of Polish families settle in the diocese.

Unrest in Ukraine and in the Baltic republics of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia also led small numbers of people to leave their homelands and to settle in the diocese in recent years.

The future

"The same reason my grandfather came from Bavaria in Germany is the same reason Puerto Ricans are coming here today," Father Tracy said, "to find jobs and better living conditions."

The priest noted that his grandfather arrived here to find a home at St. Michael's, which now serves a primarily black and Hispanic population.

"Some of our parishes have traditionally served low-income and immigrant populations," Father Tracy continued. Thus, while the ethnic makeup may have changed at parishes like St. Michael, St. Anthony of Padua and St. Bridget, he noted, "the socioeconomic makeup of the parishes has not changed."

During the next 20 to 30 years, the diocese may develop a primarily Hispanic population, Father Tracy acknowledged. Such groups as the Portuguese, Brazilians and Jamaicans may also start increasing in numbers, he said, and thus add their traditions and culture to the ethnic melting pot that is the Diocese of Rochester.

Better than brunch

If you yearn to return to good old-fashioned, sit-down Sunday dinners, you'll find that early afternoon dining at The Spring House is better than brunch. On Sundays from noon to 3 p.m., The Spring House offers traditional American dinners at prices calculated to fit your budget. Any of seven entree choices for only \$8.95. Soup or fruit cup is included. And you get your pick from the famous Spring House dessert menu at no extra charge.

Early evening fare, too

The same menu and price is available to early evening diners at The Spring House who order between 5 and 6 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday. Favorites like roast turkey, boneless breast of chicken, sole or flounder, sliced tenderloin or London broil.

Of course, at these low prices, we cannot accept coupons during these times; nor can we make this offer on holidays. But any other early Sunday afternoon or Tuesday-Thursday evening, you can be sure of a tasty meal, friendly and capable service and the charming atmosphere of a Landmark colonial inn.

The Spring House
You can always count on The Spring House.
3001 Monroe Avenue (near Clover Street)
Reservations: (716) 586-2300
Access for the disabled at rear of restaurant