

Parishes taking social teachings off the shelf

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With the aid of the three regional social-ministry agencies of the Diocese of Rochester, however, dozens of parish social ministry committees in the 12-county area now are exploring ways of linking charitable efforts to a concerted attack on the circumstances that lead so many to seek their charity.

Fifteen parishes sent representatives to Catholic Family Center's Feb. 21 public policy day at Rochester's Asbury First United Methodist Church.

Members of Catholic agencies and parish social ministry committees joined CFC employees, community groups and unions to lobby state legislators on an array of issues ranging from universal health care to urban violence to services for youths, the disabled and the elderly.

"The waiting lists for all services grow daily," CFC Executive Director Carolyn Portanova stated in a lobbying day address. "The answer and solutions to these problems lie in our ability to effect major social change," she maintained.

In the audience listening to Portanova sat Eleanor Falkowsky, a member of the social ministry committee of Holy Spirit Parish, Webster. Falkowsky pointed out that she and her committee had worked for more than a decade on such projects as a Thanksgiving dinner for Vietnam veterans and supporting outreach efforts including Rochester's Melita House, a home for unmarried pregnant women.

Falkowsky noted that she wants her committee to highlight more of the problems the region and country face — and to examine those problems in the light of church teachings.

"With the way conditions are now, we're trying to bring more social issues into the parish," she said, citing the abortion debate as one such issue. "We try to bring all the information that we can get to the parish."

Brian Kane, director of CFC's Department of Justice and Peace, noted that his office surveyed committees like Holy Spirit's in fall of 1991 in order to learn what areas parishes need guidance from his agency. Part of his department's response to concerns raised in the survey will be a parish social ministry retreat March 14 at Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Greece.

So far, Kane said, Holy Name's committee members will be joined at the retreat by social ministry committees from St. John's, Spencerport; St. John the Evangelist, Greece; St. Joseph, Penfield; St. Rita, Webster; and St. Pius X, Sacred Heart and Ss. Peter and Paul, Rochester.

"The retreat is really to help people get back in touch with theological and biblical teachings (underlying) social ministry," Kane explained, adding that the retreat is entitled "To Proclaim the Good News of Justice."

Across the nation, the 1991 centennial commemoration of *Rerum Novarum* — Pope Leo XIII's encyclical on social conditions and labor — has sparked an upsurge of interest in church social teachings among parish social-ministry advocates, commented Joan Rosenhauer, outreach coordinator for the Department of Social Development and World Peace of the United States Catholic Conference.

In a phone interview from her office in Washington, D.C., Rosenhauer told the *Catholic Courier* that her department had sold more than 100,000 copies of the conference's 1991 informational packet on church social teachings. Many of those copies went to parish social-ministry leaders, she said.



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor

And here in the diocese, some parish social ministry leaders have implemented the desire of the USCC to see individual churches tackle tough social issues with the guidance of church teachings.

War in the Persian Gulf presented parishioners at Sacred Heart of Jesus in Perkinsville an opportunity to examine the conflict in the light of the church's just-war theory, noted Jane Kallaus, chairman of the parish's social ministry committee.

Kallaus recalled that the 1991 conflict brought Kathleen Dubel, director of Justice and Peace at the Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry, and other speakers to the parish for a discussion of the just-war theory as battles raged on the other side of the globe.

Most of the parishioners who attended the meeting still felt the war was justified, but after hearing Dubel and the other speakers, Kallaus said she considered her own opposition to the war to be supported by Catholic teaching.

In the future, she said, she would like her committee to examine more issues from a political point of view.

Dubel pointed out that such sentiments as those expressed by Kallaus resulted from the U.S. bishops' 1980s emphasis on social statements evaluating issues ranging from economics to abortion to war. Dubel's and the other diocesan regional offices have taken up the bishops' approach, encouraging parish social-ministry members to complement charity with study of church social teachings, she said.

"That's really when you start asking questions," she concluded.

A member of the social ministry committee at St. Alphonsus in Auburn,

Stasia Sage began asking questions about child care after attending a 1987 social-ministry training program coordinated by Kevin Hennessy, justice and peace director for the Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry.

Drawing his inspiration from the Gospel of Luke, one program speaker said that most social problems could be solved if every child was treated with the dignity and attention Jesus emphasized in his actions, Sage recalled.

So impressed was she by the speaker's insights that Sage and other social ministry committee members decided to set up a council to serve as a resource and referral agency for child-care providers.

Five years later, the two-year-old Child Care Council of the Finger Lakes in Waterloo bears witness to the efforts of Catholic social ministry advocates such as Hennessy and Sage. The council boasts an annual operating budget of almost \$140,000, and its services include aid to businesses trying to establish day-care programs and help for child-care providers seeking state certi-

fication, Sage noted.

Interestingly, these Finger Lakes' social-ministry advocates unknowingly anticipated the national campaign announced in November, 1991, by the U.S. Catholic Conference, the public-policy arm of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. That campaign is entitled "Putting Children and Families First."

Citing the horrendous conditions in which millions of the world's children grow up — if they're lucky enough to make it that far — the conference is encouraging Catholics to work for social policies designed to nurture children.

As part of the U.S. church's initiative on behalf of children, Diocesan Social Ministry plans to mail out bulletin inserts to parishes in March that call on Catholics to "seek justice for the world's hungry people," according to Judy Taylor, a spokeswoman for the office.

One-fifth of U.S. children face hunger every day, Taylor noted, and Social Ministry wants to provide background information on the issue to pastors, whom it will ask to channel the information to parish social ministry leaders.

Taylor added that ultimately, the diocese hopes to involve a large number of parishes in a letter-writing campaign on various legislative issues around hunger. The letters will be collected at parish liturgies on May 31 and delivered to each parish's respective governmental representatives. Some parishes may concentrate on issues of local hunger, whereas others may contact their state or national legislators, she said.

While many social ministry committees are looking to become more politically active, most parishes still concentrate on fulfilling the basic needs of the hungry, poor and homeless. Given the vast array of social problems facing the nation and the world, diocesan observers pointed out that no society or system can be changed overnight merely through legislative efforts and studies of church teaching.

And until the day universal social justice arrives, Catholics in the pews will be among those who staff the soup kitchens, man the clothing-distribution centers and raise the funds to help the disadvantaged cope with their plight.

"Just to feed them and clothe them is just a temporary thing," Falkowsky commented. "But you can't forget you do have to do some Band-Aid treatments."

EDITORS' NOTE: The Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry is sponsoring its third annual Parish Social Ministry Day from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on Saturday, March 28. Entitled "Building God's Kingdom: With One Heart and Many Hands," the retreat will take place at St. Stephen/St. Francis School Hall, 17 Elmwood Ave., Geneva.

Father Neil Miller, pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Rochester, will be the keynote speaker. Registration fee is \$10. Call Kevin Hennessy at 315/789-2686.

FLOSM distributes funds from Operation Breadbox

GENEVA — The Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry, 110 Exchange St., has allocated approximately \$4,800 in Operation Breadbox funds to 34 food cupboards in the Finger Lakes region.

Operation Breadbox allows parishes and organizations the opportunity to support Third World development projects as well as local hunger programs. The grants, ranging from \$50 to \$400, were given to organizations that provide emergency food supplies to

94,000 individuals in the region.

Among the programs and organizations receiving funds were: St. Alphonsus Emergency Food Pantry and St. Mary's Parish, Auburn; St. Felix Community Cupboard, Clifton Springs; St. Francis Parish, Phelps; FLOSM's Emergency Assistance program; St. Vincent de Paul Society of St. Mary's Parish, Canandaigua; St. John's Food Pantry, Clyde; and St. Thomas Parish, Red Creek.