



Earl Gresens (left), Judy Marth (center) and Alice Batog hold hands in prayer during the Holy Thursday Mass at Southview Towers' Integrating the Handicapped into Society ground.

Project helps disabled gain control

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — When Stephen Kasper moved into Southview Towers in 1988, he experienced a "shock."

"I came basically from an able-bodied environment," noted Kasper, who had been living at home with his family.

At Southview Towers, 500 South Ave., Kasper discovered he would be living in a building that houses more than 190 people — elderly residents and individuals with a variety of physical, mental and emotional disabilities.

"I didn't know whether to stay in my apartment or to leave the whole building," he admitted.

But Kasper, who has been quad-



Dan Skinner reflects during a memorial service for Daryl Brutsman at Calvary St. Andrew's Church, Rochester. Brutsman died Feb. 9, 1992.

riplegic since a 1981 automobile accident, remained in the building, in part thanks to Integrating the Handicapped into Society, Inc.

"It was a good way to integrate with such a wide variety of people," declared Kasper, who is now a member of the board of directors at IHS.

"Without IHS, people wouldn't know what to do here," he added.

"I think IHS (creates) a spirit of community," observed Judy Marth, IHS's secretary. "It's a sense of family."

IHS was formed in 1970 by Father William Frankhauser, SJ, who had been working with disabled individuals in the Rochester area since the 1960s. The organization moved into Southview Towers in 1977. Father Frankhauser left the organization for Buffalo in 1987.

Father Michael Upson, current program director of IHS, said the agency provides those with disabilities a chance to live on their own.

"We're a support group," Father Upson explained. "We're helping people with disabilities so they can live independently. Most of the work here is one-on-one, just supporting people as they try to live their lives."

Alice Batog, an IHS board member, is certain where she would be without the support she receives from the agency.

"If it wasn't for IHS, I would be living in a group home or a nursing home," observed Batog, who has cerebral palsy.

As part of its support efforts, the agency offers a variety of social activities — including dinners, parties, coffee hours and trips — money-management training, food distribution, religious services and counseling.

In the process, the agency works with the management of Southview Towers, the residents' tenant association, social service agencies, and individual's case workers and personal aides.

The organization helps to promote not only independence, but also understanding among the residents, Father Upson said.

"One of the problems I find with elderly residents and some of the indi-



Photo courtesy of Peggy Gorow
Peggy Gorow and Daryl Brutsman celebrated their "commitment ceremony" Aug. 18, 1990. The reception took place at IHS.

viduals with one disability is they might not understand other disabilities," the priest said.

IHS even helps dispel notions about people with disabilities, observed Marth, who has multiple sclerosis.

"The community here has taught me so much about the 'abilities' of people, not the 'disabilities' of people," Marth declared.

As part of his duties at IHS, Father Upson is on call night and day to help with a variety of problems — ranging from emergency counseling, intervening in disputes and assisting people suddenly taken ill to dealing with death.

"A lot of things that go on here can't be planned," Father Upson acknowledged.

The organization, nevertheless, has to do some planning, Father Upson observed. Because activities must be arranged around the residents' schedules, many programs are held at meal times — when aides are available to help people get to where events are taking place.

This limits the amount of time available for these activities, Father Upson said. "What sometimes happens is we have to cancel things because it can't



Cindy Thrush and her boyfriend, Kevin Figgler, meal.



Carol Witkowicz (right) offers Stephen Kasper group's Monday-night meals.