



# CATHOLIC COURIER

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## Coming up!

Watch for these and other features in next week's issue:

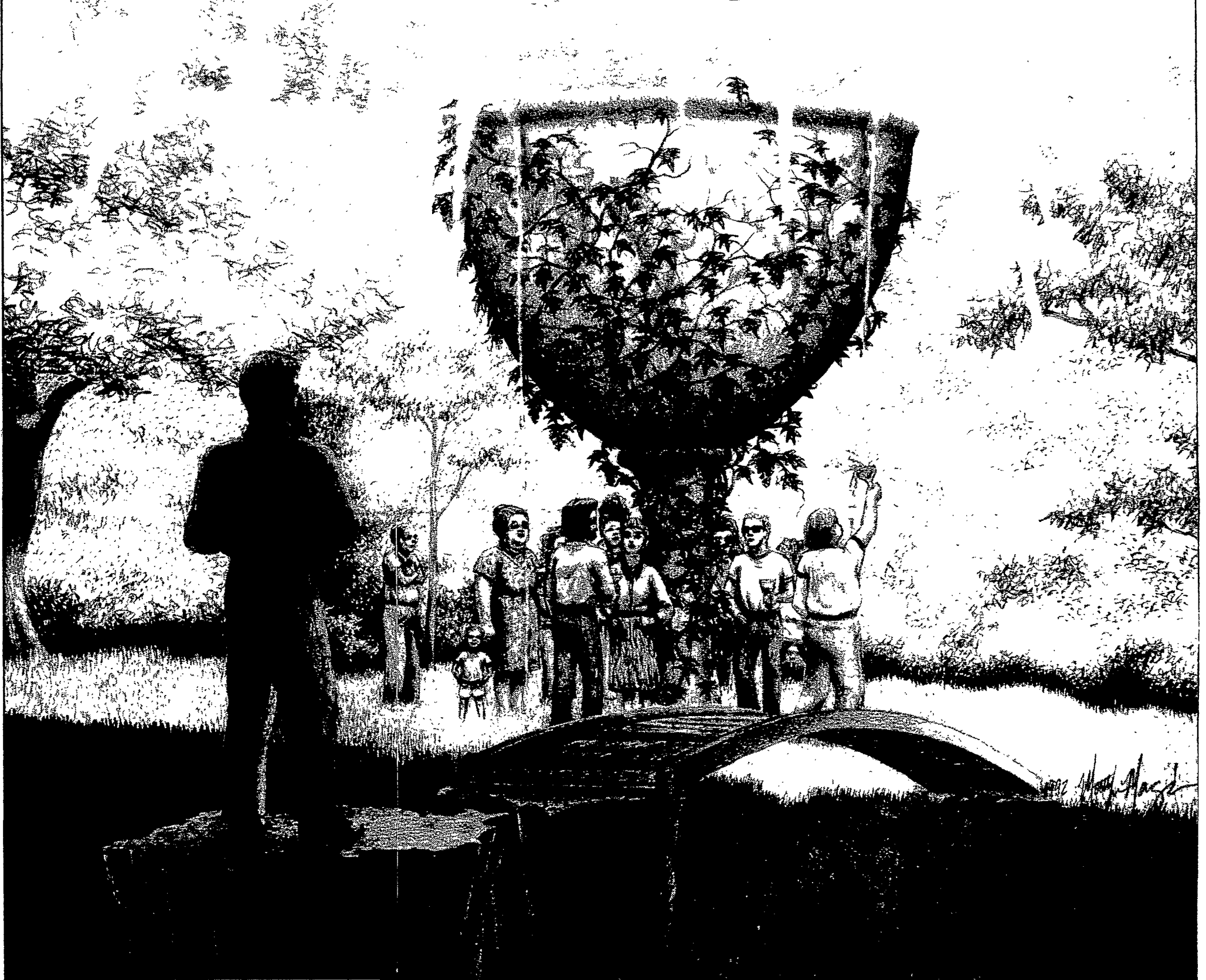
### 'Insight'

on the 50th jubilee of Bishop Joseph L. Hogan;

### Summer Guide

this second annual pull-out presents activities for a fun-filled season.

## Church tries to build bridges for lost flock



By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

**E**xcommunication. The word itself reflects serious consequences, and its definition adds to that perception.

According to the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, excommunication means "to cut off from communion" or "to exclude from fellowship in community."

Yet excommunication's original intent was not a permanent exclusion — although that is how the term was interpreted for many centuries, and still is sometimes perceived today.

Following the Second Vatican Council and the process that produced the Revised Code of Canon Law, excommunication has largely been restored

to its focus of building bridges — not walls — for those who have cut themselves off from the faith community.

"Excommunication is a medicinal penalty, hopefully used as a last resort to bring the offenders to the realization that they've done something that's alienated themselves from the community," said Father Kevin McKenna, the Diocese of Rochester's director of Legal Services. "It's supposed to do some healing and curing."

Indeed, the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Religion* states that "its purpose is not to punish a delinquent Catholic, but rather to encourage his speedy recovery."

Excommunication's origin can be found in Matthew 18:15-17, when Jesus instructs His disciples: "If your brother

sins (against you), go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, 'so that every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector."

This passage reflects the many stages entailed in the often complex process of excommunication.

Only baptized Catholics are subject to excommunication. According to the revised Code of Canon Law, excommunication can be brought on by: public profession of doctrine opposed to

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