

Hispanics feel pinch of diocesan budget cuts

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The Diocese of Rochester announced earlier this month that it would eliminate 19 staff positions to accommodate a projected 1992-93 budgetary shortfall.

Among those whose jobs were eliminated were three people who work with the diocese's Hispanic population.

The impact of those layoffs — coupled with personnel changes outside diocesan control — is rippling throughout the Hispanic community.

The three people who lost diocesan positions are Valentina Ortiz, full-time secretary in the Office of the Spanish Apostolate; Father Laurence Tracy, pastoral assistant for the office's Rochester area; and Rodrigo Alconero, migrant farm worker advocate for the Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry.

Independently, meanwhile, the Mexico-based Missionaries of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Holy Spirit have decided to transfer their locally stationed members to assignments in other dioceses. The Hermanas Guadalupanas, as they are known in Spanish, have served Hispanics in the Rochester diocese for the past 24 years.

And, in another unrelated move, the archbishop of El Salvador has recalled Father Nicolas Menjivar, who had served as administrator of Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier Parish, 34 Teresa St.

These changes also coincide with a reduction of services to local Hispanics by city, county and state governments.

"In that total context, in terms of the cuts in the community, to add this loss of resources (from the diocese) will have an impact," observed Father Tracy, who July 1 will become temporary administrator at Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier and continue serving as sacramental coordinator at St. Michael's Church. "These are people who have few resources across the board."

The loss of Father Tracy alone seems certain to have a major impact on ministry to Hispanics.

By his own account, Father Tracy was a member of 37 community groups, organizations and boards. He said Masses in migrant camps in Wayne and Monroe counties. He staffed the Spanish Apostolate's field office at 873 N. Clinton Ave. He taught in the Instituto, the diocesan program for training Hispanic lay ministers.

"Now that the position of Father Tracy has been cut, that is affecting tremendously the community in terms of his ability to work with the people in the community," declared Mario Escalante, executive director of the Spanish Action Coalition.

"Speaking from my perspective of

working with migrants, (Father) Larry Tracy is the only person that I'm aware of who was aware of the needs of migrants all across the diocese," noted Sister Mary Jane Mitchell, SSJ, director of Hispanic Migrant Ministry.

Sister Mitchell reported that Hispanics in the Brockport area are beginning to develop a sense of community, and part of what fostered that sense was the weekly Mass Father Tracy celebrated at Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church.

"Between Rochester and Tonawanda, this is the only weekly Mass in Spanish," she observed.

For the time being, the diocese has arranged for priests to say Spanish Masses in Brockport and Geneva, noted Father Peter C. Clifford, director of Parish Support Ministries, which includes the Spanish Apostolate office.

Meanwhile, the diocese is talking with Hispanic priests from other dioceses about serving in Rochester, and

has nearly closed a deal with at least one, Father Clifford continued. In addition, the Spanish Apostolate is planning to send teams of volunteer lay ministers into the migrant camps.

Sending such volunteers to the camps would be good, Father Tracy observed, adding that he used volunteers whenever he could. But, he explained, such volunteers will not have the long-term contacts he had gradually developed in the Hispanic community.

Father Tracy noted that his role had expanded beyond saying Mass or providing the sacraments to serving as a liaison to community groups, the legal system and social services. Such a function requires that an individual work in a full- or part-time position and be visible to people needing assistance, he said.

In that role, it helped that he was a priest, Father Tracy continued, citing his work at the North Clinton Avenue

office.

"This was our point in the Spanish community," the priest explained. "This is how people can access the Hispanic Apostolate. We just hope we are able to continue it. And you had a Spanish-speaking priest in the office. People would come in here for counseling."

Father Tracy said he, Father Clifford, and Brother Luis Ruberte, HCH, director of the Office of the Spanish Apostolate, have discussed ways to maintain involvement with some of the groups of which Father Tracy is currently a member. But, he said, some of those groups will have to go without diocesan representation and input.

Although the impact of eliminating Father Tracy's post is most obvious, the diocesan cutbacks run much deeper.

Sister Mitchell's program — which is jointly sponsored by the dioceses of Rochester and Buffalo and serves migrant workers in Monroe, Orleans, Niagara and Genesee counties — lost \$1,000 in support from the Rochester diocese. This year's subsidy — \$4,000, down from \$5,000 last year — is \$3,000 less than what she had requested.

The resulting financial squeeze is forcing her to scramble for other means of supporting the ministry. "That takes away a lot of time from my work," Sister Mitchell commented.

Scrambling for funds also occupies personnel at the Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry, which lost diocesan support for its Migrant Farmworker Advocate program.

A pilot program, it was designed to help train parishioners for ministry to migrant farm workers. The program was on the verge of expanding its efforts beyond the four Wayne, Ontario and Yates county parishes that were involved in the pilot study, observed Giovina Caroscio, FLOSM's executive director.

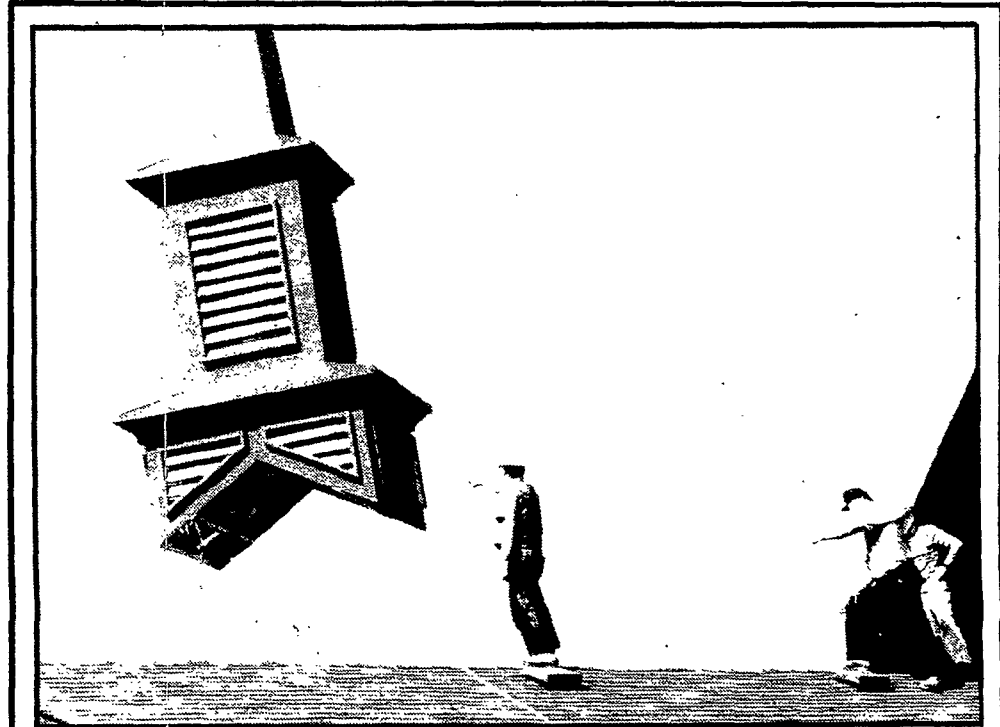
Without a program director, however, that effort to train ministers cannot continue, Caroscio noted.

"It's really unfortunate that we are not going to be able to do that without the staff person there to carry on the position that we've designed," Caroscio said. "The real sad thing for me, is that this (past) year the program really took off."

In looking at the diocesan cutbacks, Escalante commented that the diocese was sending the wrong message to Hispanics.

Particularly troubling, he said, is that the decision was made without consulting people in the Hispanic community.

"The decision is being made by somebody, and that somebody is not part of the community," Escalante remarked. "We expect more from the church."



A steeple for St. Elizabeth's

Above, Burr Hearon of Campbellsville Industries, Inc., in Kentucky guides a new 40-foot steeple into place at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church, Hamlin June 4. On Aug. 9, Bishop Matthew H. Clark will dedicate the church for the parish which is celebrating its 10th year. At right, Father William Aman watches as members of the parish help to install the new steeple.

photos by Erik Kunkel



McDermott's lawyer argues for dismissal of charges

WAVERLY — The attorney for Leo McDermott — the former music director at St. Mary's of the Lake Parish in Watkins Glen and ex-head of the Praise and Power Youth Choir — has asked that all sexual-abuse charges against his client be dismissed.

On June 16, James A. Baker argued before Waverly Town Justice Frederick Luther that the charges be dropped because:

- the alleged 16-year-old victim, then a member of the Praise and Power Youth Choir, was not harmed physically; and McDermott's actions were not serious enough to warrant the charges;

- the charges stemmed from a conversation McDermott allegedly had with the youth and thus interfered with the accused's right to free speech;

- Gerald A. Keene, Tioga County's assistant district attorney, prejudiced the case by discussing it with the press;

- and because of Keene's statement and other publicity about the case, McDermott could not receive a fair trial in Waverly.

Baker said he expected Judge Luther to rule on his motions by mid-July.

McDermott is facing charges of third-degree sexual abuse and third-degree endangering the welfare of a

child. The charges stem from two alleged incidents. During a van trip from Elmira to Waverly McDermott allegedly grabbed the youth's buttocks and attempted to persuade him to have sex with him.

The second incident reportedly took place when McDermott allegedly showed the youth a picture of a 13-year-old boy with whom he had a relationship. He allegedly urged the Waverly youth to have a similar affair with him.

If found guilty, McDermott could a face maximum sentence of one year in prison on the endangerment charge, and of three months in prison on the

abuse charge.

The former choir director was employed by St. Mary's Parish from September, 1990 to November, 1991, when his position was terminated. He led the 70-member Praise and Power Youth Choir — an ecumenical group to which the alleged 16-year-old victim belonged — until he resigned Jan. 12, 1992, after reports surfaced that he had been convicted of corrupting a minor in Ohio in 1989.

The Ohio conviction stemmed from a four-year relationship McDermott had with the music student. McDermott served eight months in an Ohio prison as a result of that conviction.