

# Home's chapel raises federal agency's ire

By Kate Pipkin  
Catholic News Service

BALTIMORE — The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development is studying a makeshift chapel set up in a senior citizen home in Baltimore built with federal funds.

HUD officials consider the building, Lemko House, federally funded because the agency financed its construction, and HUD holds the mortgage on it and provides financing to some residents. And that means, they add, that the chapel's existence in part of a multipurpose room violates federal law.

All the elderly residents want is to attend religious services in the building they call home, and all HUD wants is for those residents to put away any religious symbols when they're finished.

Lemko residents, most of whom are Latin- or Eastern-rite Catholics, object to HUD's stance. "Why are they picking on God?" asked resident Mary Karpovich. "That's unbelievable."

Larry Hatcher, deputy manager at HUD's Baltimore office, told *The Catholic Review*, Baltimore's archdiocesan newspaper, that the dispute has gone on since Lemko was built nine years ago, and the flames are fanned every few years when a resident complains about the chapel's existence.

Judy Valone, 60, disputed Hatcher's assertion. "I've talked to every resident here and they see nothing wrong with it," she said.

The makeshift chapel, according to residents, is a non-denominational chapel available to any resident day or night. They paid for the icons, candles and other religious symbols.

Hatcher said although Lemko is not

allowed to maintain a permanent chapel — regardless of whether it is non-denominational — "it is permissible for residents to reserve the multipurpose room and conduct religious observances so long as all religious symbols are removed from the room upon completion of the religious event."

Resident James Weir, head of the Committee to Save Lemko Chapel, said the chapel is "open 24 hours a day. The residents refuse to take anything down."

The chapel has been used for a wedding and the baptisms of a resident's grandchildren.

Mass is celebrated regularly at the chapel by Father Ivan Dornic, an Eastern-rite priest, and Conventual Franciscan Father Matthew Kotkowski, associate pastor at Latin-rite St. Stanislaus Church.

Anna Riggsbee, 80, is afraid she'll have to go to church outside the building if the chapel is dismantled.

"I have bad knees and I can't walk far," she said. "When I can come here anytime I want and pray, it makes me feel good."

## Program seeking seniors to volunteer

ROCHESTER — The Retired Senior Volunteer Program, known as RSVP, is recruiting seniors ages 60 and older to fill critical volunteer positions at non-profit and health-related agencies in Monroe County.

Volunteers are needed to fill positions as friendly visitors, child-care providers, classroom assistants, classroom tutors, literacy tutors, clerical aides, hospital aides, data entry clerks, library aides, handymen, tour guides, respite care givers, receptionists, mentors and more.


According to Mary Rose McBride, RSVP's director, agencies are relying on volunteers more and more as federal, state, local and grant monies shrink.

"Our files are bulging with volunteer requests," McBride stated. "We need to let seniors know that they can share their life experiences and talents while also enriching their lives."

RSVP provides registered volunteers with supplemental accident and health insurance, a partial transportation reimbursement and recognition.

Seniors interested in learning more about volunteer opportunities anywhere in Monroe County are invited to call RSVP at 716/454-3224.

RSVP is a part of ACTION, the federal domestic volunteer agency, and is supported by the Regional Council on Aging and the United Way.



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