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Advent appeal

As the church calendar turns to the special season of Advent this weekend, the *Catholic Courier* and diocesan Social Ministry are once again joining to sponsor the Christmas Appeal — this is its 24th year — to help raise funds that will help people in desperate financial crises. Page 7.



Illustration by Mary Kay Williams

Efforts to implement document help remove racial blindfold

By Rob Cullivan/Staff writer

The church has been deliberately, even murderously bigoted and racist against various peoples in its history. A casual student of anti-Semitism could easily point out that fact.

Catholics also have cooperated with the wider society in dehumanizing such groups as the African-Americans who, in some areas of the South, sat in segregated church pews before the civil-rights movement ended such practices.

"But the church has made great strides in reducing its bigotry and racism since then," one might counter. "Surely, those days are long gone."

Yet observers of the church's race relations maintain the existence of another form of racism — one far less obvious than that expressed by neo-Nazis at a public rally, pining for the second coming of Adolf Hitler. This subtler racism is characterized by a white-run church unaware of its cultural blindness to the concerns of non-whites who share in the Body of Christ.

Even when the church gazes upon its minority

members, often it does so only briefly. Then, in its day-to-day affairs, the church continues to focus on its own majority-oriented concerns, liturgies and ministries.

In late September, 1992, the Diocese of Rochester acknowledged this type of racism in its "policies, practices and experiences" through a document issued by the Task Force on Societal Injustice.

Indeed, one of the examples of racism cited by the report concerned "the feeling expressed by Catholics of non-European descent of being excluded as full and equal members of the Church community."

This exclusion stems more from historical circumstance than from deliberate policy, but it is a racism that could be as alienating to non-white Catholics as open bigotry. According to those interviewed at the time of the report's issuance — and for this article as well — such racism could only be eliminated when white Catholics consciously endeavored to share dialogue, position, influence and power in the church with non-whites.

In particular, the task force report asked the diocesan church to concentrate on three areas for improvement — employment and business practices; education and awareness; and community building.

A follow-up report issued in September of this year listed 48 separate efforts to implement the task force's requests by Pastoral Center offices, Catholic Family Center, the Finger Lakes and Southern Tier offices of Social Ministry, several parishes and other diocesan programs.

The *Catholic Courier* interviewed several players in the document's implementation, and the details of some of their efforts are listed under the specific area they tackled.

Human Resources

Seven of the 12 employees hired in the last year at the diocesan Pastoral Center in Gates — staffed almost exclusively by whites up until this year — were minorities. Among those new employees are a maintenance worker, a secretary, an accountant and a department director, ac-

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