

Tier discussions address sensitive subjects

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

With topics such as homosexuality and racism, and speakers such as Father Charles E. Curran, the first-ever Southern Tier Adult Lenten Series provoked varying opinions and responses.

And that was just fine with the series' organizers.

"Maybe the old idea of issues being dealt with in black-and-white in the Catholic Church was not as prevalent," remarked Mary Lou Tangorre, who served on the series' planning committee. "There was some gray area; some room for discussion."

"We Catholics have a responsibility to be more accepting and loving of people, regardless of their lifestyle or any moral issue," added Tangorre, a parishioner at St. Patrick's Church, 604 Park Place, Elmira.

The Lenten seminars were conceived last fall during a monthly meeting of Southern Tier parishes, according to another planning-committee member, Sister Deanna Gears, SSJ.

"We really took it right from the Synod," said Sister Gears, the chaplain at Holy Family Catholic Schools in Elmira. She noted that Catholic moral education ranked as the third priority to emerge from the diocesan General Synod held Oct. 1-3, 1993.

The six-part Adult Lenten Series ran from Feb. 20-March 22, at various Southern Tier parish locations. Each two-hour session included a diocesan priest or woman religious as guest presenter, followed by a question-and-answer period. Average attendance was approximately 125 each program, said Sister Gears.

Other topics of discussion included euthanasia and abortion; in-vitro fertilization, contraception and sterilization; sexism; and violence. Speakers included diocesan priests and women religious.

Father Curran, who spoke on "Conscience and Conscience Formation" at the first lecture on Feb. 20, sparked some controversy with his appearance.

In 1986, the Rochester native was declared by the Vatican as no longer-qualified to teach as a theologian at Catholic

University of America because of his views on birth control and moral theology. Father Curran is now teaching at Southern Methodist University in Texas.

Dan Sheffield, chairman of the Elmira-area Catholics United for the Faith (CUF), was displeased that such a person would be invited to speak as part of the series.

"It sends some signals to me about the agenda of diocesan teaching," Sheffield commented. "To promote Father Curran or any other moral dissenters, I see that as a slap in the Holy

Father's face."

Sheffield and other members of CUF — an international association of lay Catholics known for its aggressive pursuit of orthodoxy — protested the series by distributing literature outside of three subsequent sessions.

Tangorre said she "was not surprised" about CUF's dispute "because of the topics."

Yet Sister Gears said most participants appreciated the series "because they deal with these things on a day-in-and-day-

out basis, and they want a forum."

"They want us to do more," Sister Gears added. "They asked, 'Do we have to wait until next Lent?'"

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EDITORS' NOTE: Videotapes of the Adult Lenten Series will be available in the near future at two Southern Tier locations: Misericordia Retreat Center, 1400 Maple Ave., Elmira; contact Sister Betty Hughes, RSM; and the Cluster Catechetical Office, 809 Westlake St., Horseheads; contact Mary Jo Earley.



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer



Easter Cantata

The Bethel Choir and Band (above) joined with guest narrator Jack Strom (left) in presenting 'Six Hours One Friday' on Sunday, March 27, at Bethel Full Gospel Church, 321 East Ave., Rochester. Under Steve Harrow's direction, the Easter Cantata included Strom's narration of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus interspersed with the choir's music and dance.

Newark parish plays host to panel on assisted suicide

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

NEWARK — Jean Cass recounted a story about a man who spent his last days at the House of John, a hospice operated out of a Clifton Springs house owned by St. Felix Parish.

"He said the very last week he was with us, 'This is the best week of my life. I feel as if I'm on vacation,'" reported Cass, the hospice's co-director.

The man had used his final months to reconcile with his brother and his daughter, Cass explained, noting, "He died a very peaceful man."

Cass shared this story at St. Michael's Church Hall, 401 S. Main St., during a March 23 panel discussion on assisted suicide. Approximately 35 people attended the discussion, which had been organized by the parish's social ministry committee.

The panel included Cass, a St. Michael's parishioner; Father Daniel Tormey, pastor of St. Mary's, Scottsville and a member of the Department of Medical Humanities at the University of Rochester Medical School; Alice Robson, program director of the Mary M. Gooley Hemophilia Center; and Dr. David Hannan, of the Arcadia Family Practice. The panel was facilitated by Malcolm B. O'Malley, executive director of the Newark-Wayne Community Hospital Foundation.

The idea for the panel came out of discussions in a social ministry committee meeting during which committee members talked about severe pain, noted Father Charles F. Mulligan, parochial vicar at St. Michael's Church. That discussion, in turn, grew out of talk about the consistent ethic of life — one of the five priorities established by the diocese at its General Synod, Oct. 1-3, 1993, Father Mulligan explained.

In organizing the panel discussion, Father Mulligan continued, the social ministry committee also created an opportunity for adult education, helping to fulfill yet another Synod recommendation: lifelong religious education.

"I think that adult learning takes place through conversation, and I hoped to promote learning through discussion of the subject," Father Mulligan observed.

The event included presentations by the panel members, small group discussions and a question-answer session directed at the panel.

Leo Kamalsky, a member of the social ministry committee and one of the event's organizers, noted that each panel member spoke about his or her particular area of expertise with the question of assisted suicide, but that they shared a common view.

"Basically everybody on the panel had the same idea — that life be assisted as long as possible," Kamalsky observed. "I think there was total agreement that

we respect life and that we assist the person and support them as much as possible."

Kamalsky reported, for example, that Father Tormey addressed the idea that Christianity teaches followers to be social beings, and therefore that what each person does — including choosing assisted suicide — affects the community at large.

Kamalsky observed that Robson "gave a dramatic talk" about a young man who had hemophilia and who developed AIDS as the result of a blood transfusion.

A central focus of the discussion was pain, the issue that had prompted organizing the panel in the first place, Kamalsky noted.

Cass pointed out that pain is indeed one of the two major fears people have about dying.

But, Cass noted, there are now so many ways to fight pain that, in most cases, it is no longer something to be feared. Indeed, she observed, out of the 10 people who have been patients at the House of John since it opened last September, only one experienced severe pain.

As for the other major fear — abandonment — the hospice movement is having a decided impact.

In hospices, and because of the growing popularity of the hospice philosophy, people are getting the support they need to face death. This often allows them the time to focus on healing rela-

tionships — as was the case with the man whose story she recounted.

Indeed, she agreed to take part in the panel because she wanted to share her experiences in working with people nearing death.

"I wanted people to know that life is worth living up to the end — every minute of it," Cass said.

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