

# Priest provides hope for Puerto Rican youths

## Party honors Father 'Pepe'

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — If not for the beard, he could surely have been mistaken for one of the teenagers frolicking around Carter Street Recreation Center.

First, he was chasing after a volleyball in the 93-degree heat. Minutes later, he was swinging at a softball.

Without question, Father Jose Quintero — affectionately known as "Father Pepe" — believes in a hands-on approach when he ministers to youths.

"He's the kind of person who adapts to everything. If you've got a Halloween party, he'll go there and dance," remarked Angel Luis Alicea, who serves as youth minister for the Community of Hope cluster on Rochester's northeast side.

Father Pepe's two-year assignment at the cluster's churches is soon coming to a close as he prepares to return to the Diocese of San Juan in his native Puerto Rico on July 2. To show their appreciation for Father Pepe's efforts, Community of Hope parishioners honored him with an outdoor party this past Saturday, June 18.

"He was very nice and took care of a lot of the youth. We had a lot of fun with him," said Annalisa Castaneva, 15, whose Carter Street home served as the venue for the celebration.

"He started a basketball team and used to take all the youth to the movies," added Castaneva, who recently completed her sophomore year at Benjamin Franklin High School.

Father Pepe, 31, began his Rochester stint in August, 1992, when he was named parochial vicar at St. Michael's Church. In 1993 his duties expanded to additional parishes with large Puerto Rican representation, when St. Michael's combined with Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier to form the Community of Hope.

During his time at these churches, Father Pepe has helped develop a youth program which has swelled from less than 10 teenagers to its current total of approximately 50.

Father Pepe said that he frequently uses sports as a big drawing card with youths.



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer  
Oscar Rivera, who attends St. Michael's Church, receives help with his batting stance from Father 'Pepe' during an informal softball game at a June 18 picnic. The event was held to recognize Father Pepe's work with the youths of Rochester's Community of Hope Cluster.

"It's one way of connecting, the first important connection," he remarked. "This, and through other social activities."

The priest acknowledged that several Puerto Rican baseball players currently competing in the major leagues,

such as Juan Gonzalez, Carlos Baerga and Benito Santiago, are regarded as heroes by Puerto Rican youngsters.

Father Pepe, who speaks English fluently, is familiar with the plight of Hispanic youths in U.S. cities through his previous experience in Newark, N.J.



Angel Luis Alicea, youth minister for the Community of Hope, gives Father 'Pepe' a hug after presenting him with a plaque of appreciation.

"They feel discouraged and threatened. They feel that it is going to be very hard for them to make it. In general, they don't have much hope," Father Pepe commented.

The priest's main goal, he said, has been to instill some of that hope in this aptly named cluster.

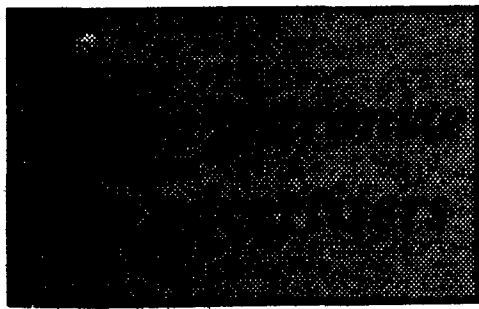
"I try to encourage them to be open to God — to deal with the violence and anger in a different way, by using reasoning and control," he explained. "Also to work as a team by getting together with their friends and building on those relationships. You see a lot of division with the families and parents, so having these other relationships can help a lot."

The smiles and laughter apparent on the faces of many youths at his farewell party would indicate that Father Pepe's efforts have been successful.

"We have some of them succeeding, and that's encouraging. We see the good things they're doing," said Father Pepe.

Alicea is now looking forward to continuing the momentum built by Father Pepe among the young Community of Hope parishioners.

"That's his idea, to keep recruiting people. In this job, you've got to find out how to reach the kids. It's kind of like fishing," Alicea remarked.



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