

Auburn youth fight to end racism

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

AUBURN — Racist leaflets recently circulated at Auburn High School have produced a ripple of counter activities in this Cayuga County community — much of it church and youth initiated.

Kathleen Cannon, director of diocesan Urban Services, and Jacquelyn Dobson, director of the diocese's Office of Black Ministries, Oct. 13 drove to Auburn to meet with Father Lee P. Chase, parochial vicar at St. Mary's Parish, and Kathleen M. Fuchs, director of youth ministry at St. Mary's and St. Alphonsus parishes.

Cannon and Dobson shared with Father Chase and Fuchs resource materials — including church teachings about racism and possible ways to address the issue — and offered their support and assistance if needed.

On Oct. 19, approximately 20 students — most of them members of the youth group at St. Mary's and St. Alphonsus parishes — held a brief rally in front of the school to condemn racism. After school that same day, some of those same students met with black students to discuss forming a "Unity Club" at the school to help promote racial understanding. In addition, a black youth has now joined the parishes' youth group.

Meanwhile, Fuchs is continuing to hold discussions with school officials about offering racism and conflict-resolution workshops at the school. In addition to meeting with faculty Oct. 19, Fuchs reported that students are trying to organize a meeting on Nov. 11 — Veterans Day — to further discuss ways to address the problem.

"I think they are afraid in general," Fuchs observed of Auburn High School officials. As for the students, Fuchs added, "The kids have never really been together. Adults have never taught them how to be together."

Thus the initial contacts they are making are positive signs, she said.

Gwen Webber-McCleod, a community activist concerned with racism and a former president of the Auburn chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, is even stronger in her enthusiasm for what the students are doing.

"Student government issued a statement. Kathy and her group — I think the students are taking the initiative,"



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Joe Sheppard (second from right) reads a statement denouncing racism outside Auburn High School. Sheppard was one of about 20 students who gathered Oct. 20 to protest racist activities at the school.

Webber-McCleod said. Even school officials seem to be recognizing the situation's severity — something, she claims, they have not always done in the past.

"I think the superintendent and the school-board president see the seriousness of the issue, and seem to be ready to take some action," she said.

Webber-McCleod recommended a community team be formed to go into the school and provide support for students should other racial incidents occur — similar to those people that counsel classmates of a student who has died or during other traumatic situations. She also emphasized that the school needs to look at more than just a talk

or a workshop to address racism.

"They need to go beyond the Band-Aid approach," Webber-McCleod said.

Cannon noted that one of the recommendations she and Dobson shared with Father Chase and Fuchs is that any attempt to counter racism will involve a long-term commitment.

"Any initiative is going to have to be ongoing and sustained," Cannon said. "It isn't going to be something they can do just once."

She added, "Don't be discouraged by numbers. Your actions speak. When you commit to these actions, what that (commitment) says about your beliefs says a lot more than large numbers of people."

Awards

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"A lot of what happened there in terms of the quality of the building and how it looks was also driven by the concerns of the parish," Healy said.

In addition to parishioners, Labella Associates, and himself, Healy noted that the award also honored the contractor, Frank J. Marianacci, Inc.

"They probably lost as much sleep over the details as I did," Healy said of the building's contractors.

The church's interior has vaulted wood ceilings, stained-glass rose windows, and an etched-glass background at the narthex where yet another award-winner stands — the church's mahogany statue of St. Catherine.

The parish made the pages of Modern Liturgy, a national magazine, in September when Sister Catherine Muehlbauer of Buffalo won a BENE award for her statue depicting the parish patroness.

The statue, which stands eight feet high on its pedestal in the narthex, "presents a strong womanly feature in movement," the magazine said.

Sister Muehlbauer, who carved the statue after she was commissioned by the parish, belongs to the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur.

These two awards came on the heels of a third honor, given in 1992 by Wolverine Technologies of Livonia, Mich., to John Duvall of Victor, for his work on the church's vinyl siding.

Wolverine gave an Award in Excellence to John Duvall, Inc., which specializes in roofing, siding, windows and gutters, according to Duvall's wife, Marilyn. She noted that her husband's company used Restoration Stockbridge siding to create a historically authentic look for the new edifice.

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Women's retreat held for Oct. 28-30 in Fair

ELMIRA — A weekend retreat titled "Prayer — Deepening the Heart" will take place Oct. 28-30 at the Notre Dame Center, 17400 Maple Ave.

The scheduled guest speaker will be Sister Virginia Wilson, RSM, who will lead participants in Taizé and Centering experiences of prayer. There will also be an opportunity to share prayer with monks from Mount Sacchar Monastery.

This retreat is open to single women ages 18 or older who wish to join other women in prayer to discover more deeply their direction in their lives.

For details, call Sister Virginia Wilson, RSM, at 716/244-0923.

Training workshop for ARC

ROCHESTER — A training workshop for the Archdiocesan Resource Center (ARC) will be held Oct. 28-30 at the Notre Dame Center, 17400 Maple Ave.

The workshop is designed to help parishioners and staff members understand the needs of disabled children and young people.

The workshop will be held from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Oct. 28, 29 and 30. Registration is free. For more information, call Sister Virginia Wilson, RSM, at 716/244-0923.

The workshop is open to all parishioners and staff members who are interested in learning more about the needs of disabled children and young people.

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Raffle in Tier features grand prize of \$25,000

ELMIRA — A grand prize of \$25,000 will be awarded in the "Discover '94" raffle to benefit Catholic schools in the Southern Tier.

The "Pot of Gold" raffle drawing will take place on Friday, Nov. 25, at 7 p.m. at the Holy Sepulchre Cemetery, 2301 Dewey Ave., Elmira.

The raffle tickets are available to purchase a ticket, call 716/244-5432 or 734-6399.

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Mooney reunion Nov. 25

PITTSFORD — The Cardinal Mooney High School class of 1969 will hold its 25th-anniversary reunion on Friday, Nov. 25, at Monroe Golf Club, 155 Golf Ave.

Class members who have not already been contacted about the reunion should call Eileen Verkest Seever at 716/637-2572.