



# Catholic Courier

DIocese OF ROCHESTER, NEW YORK ■ VOL. 106 NO. 6 ■ THURSDAY, November 10, 1994 ■ 75¢ ■ 16 PAGES

## Finding moral vision



By  
**Rob Cullivan**  
*Staff writer*

### *Church offers wisdom of the ages to faithful*

**D**eacon Thomas Driscoll acknowledges that many Catholics prefer not to listen to the church when they make difficult moral decisions. Yet by doing so, Catholics may actually increase, rather than lessen, the anxiety they feel about making such decisions, he said.

"Practically, they cheat themselves of the wisdom of the ages," remarked Deacon Driscoll, minister of Christian formation at Pittsford's St. Louis Church.

"I encourage people to listen to the church, to read the Bible," added the deacon, who helped write the 1993 diocesan Synod paper on lifelong religious education. The topic was eventually chosen as the Synod's top priority.

The deacon added that just as Catholics regularly look upon difficult moral challenges in their own personal lives, the church itself has had to take into view complex ethical situations as it struggled to form its own moral vision through the ages.

He explained, for example, that the church did not always approve of the practice of usury, nor did it always uphold the right of conscientious objection. Such teachings were gradually worked out over the centuries, he noted, as the church attempted to apply Christ's principles of love, mercy and justice to life's dilemmas.

Today's church continues to find itself facing new issues, such as ethics in health care, for which it must come up with guidelines that Catholics can apply to difficult decisions, he said.

"Jesus didn't say whether I should put my mother in a nursing home," Deacon Driscoll observed. "He said I should love my mother."

How to love one's mother, or, for that matter, the human race, is a question for our *conscience*, which Deacon Driscoll insisted is far more than a little voice that makes us feel guilty when we do something wrong.

"It is our very essence of being," he said.

Indeed, Vatican II's "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" supports the deacon's contention when it calls conscience "man's most secret core and his sanctuary."

"By conscience, in a wonderful way, that law is made known which is fulfilled in the love of God and of one's neighbor," the document continues.

Yet, forming conscience is a difficult task — one that many Catholics are looking to the church for help today, the deacon said.

To help adult Catholics form their conscience, the deacon has created a three-part education series titled Basic Christian Morality. It's just the kind of topic parishioners at St. Thomas More Parish in Brighton

want to learn more about, according to Patricia Bach, religious education coordinator.

"It is one of those things they're crying out for," she said. "They say 'We want to know more about morality, especially in today's world.'"

Bach added that her parish surveys have

consistently shown a large number — usually 40 percent — of St. Thomas More parishioners want to learn more about Catholic morality. Such events in recent years as the Persian Gulf War, which was harshly criticized by many U.S. bishops, have also prompted Catholics to wonder why and how the church reaches its moral conclusions, she said.

"I think what they're doing is they want to find out what exactly the church is saying, but they're going to make up their own minds anyhow," she said.

Deacon Driscoll will serve as teacher and discussion moderator of a Basic Christian Morality series at St. Thomas More Church, 2617 East Ave., from 7:30-9:30 p.m. on three consecutive Wednesdays. The series, which began Nov. 9, continues Nov. 16 and 23.

Father Kenneth R. Overberg's 1991 book, "Conscience In Conflict: How to Make Moral Choices" serves as the reference book for the series.

The deacon noted that on the first night, he gave an overview of the history of ethics in the Christian tradition. The evening also explored how people in Biblical times through today have formed their moral vision by examining some of the subsequent eras.

The first evening's handout noted that in ancient Israel, moral living was embodied in adherence to the Ten Commandments, which manifested a covenant between God and His people. Then, during Jesus's life, Christ centered His teachings on the Reign of God, and called people to repentance.

Jesus made specific moral demands such as asking

Continued on page 14