



Catholic Courier

DIocese OF ROCHESTER, NEW YORK ■ VOL. 106 NO. 7 ■ THURSDAY, November 17, 1994 ■ 75¢ ■ 20 PAGES



Healing for the holidays:

Weary souls seek spiritual support

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

Marilyn Legault knew that the Christmas of 1978 was going to be far different than any other she'd ever experienced.

Ten months earlier, her 13-year-old son, Michael, had died following complications from a viral infection.

"You're busy, busy, busy — as long as you're busy, it's OK," remarked Legault, who serves as secretary at St. Margaret Mary Church in Apalachin.

Yet after her other children had gone to bed that Christmas Eve, the sense of loss hit Legault full force.

"It was overwhelming. My husband and I just cried and cried and cried. After he went to bed, I stayed up all night listening to music," she recalled. You remember previous Christmases — the happy times."

As another holiday season is poised to begin, another parishioner at this Tioga County church, Salve Alzate, is attempting to prepare herself for a similar emotional struggle. This past August, Alzate's 8-year-old son, Eric, died after a lengthy battle with brain cancer.

"Thanksgiving, we plan on going away. Christmas, I don't know what to do," said Alzate. "I ask my husband, 'Should we have Christmas?' Everything is 'should we.'"

Struggles such as those by Legault and Alzate poignantly illustrate a widespread dilemma at this time of year: how those with heavy hearts can endure what is intended to be a joyous season.

"On TV you see grandma with the turkey, and that's not reality," said Legault.

"Around holiday time, people are more conscious of family hopes that never transpired," remarked Father Patrick L. Connor, who serves as pastor of Elmira's Eastside Catholic Parish.

"There's a lot of grief about what they didn't have, and as they get older they see that a little more. Christmas isn't what it's supposed to be," agreed Amy Denenberg, who serves as director of Transitions — Counseling for Healthy Living, a division of Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier.

Yet Deacon J. Gregory Doyle emphasized that as difficult as it may seem, holiday doldrums can be more easily combatted than most people realize.

"They play old tapes and they don't see the possibility of those tapes renewing," he said. "(But) they can choose serenity at any moment of their lives."

Deacon Doyle is executive director of Matt Talbot Ministries, which is based in Rochester and also includes a recently opened branch in Watkins Glen. The non-profit service provides various forms of reconciliation counseling.

Deacon Doyle said that an important first step in the healing process is to share one's emotions.

"I would encourage people to seek a priest or minister to begin with. Then there are a lot of different

Continued on page 18

Illustration by Mary Kay Williams