

## 'Mini' conventions focus on issues facing seniors

More than 300 seniors attended 27 meetings held throughout Monroe County in October and November to help set the agenda for the White House Conference on Aging, scheduled for May, 1995.

Local meetings, which were facilitated by elderly community outreach case-workers with the Catholic Family Center's Elder Services Department, focused on two topics: health-care reform and the future of aging.

"The response has been very good," noted Bobbie Kenny, program manager of the outreach program. "We feel that the seniors don't have many chances to express their opinions in a way they feel would count."

In fact, Kenny said, many participants were so enthusiastic about the discussions that it was necessary to extend a number of the meetings beyond the one-hour format. In some cases even second sessions were scheduled so discussions on certain issues could continue.

Senior citizens at the meetings expressed concern over a number of topics, Kenny reported. Special emphasis was placed on expanding transportation programs, the state of Social Security and its cost-of-living adjustment, funding for people with disabilities, and nutrition programs.

"They are concerned not only for themselves," Kenny added, "but for the seniors that will follow."

Comments concerning the two main  
Continued on page 13



During a Nov. 12 meeting at East Rochester's Village Office, Vic Wilkens (center) and Virginia Rinaldo (right) joined other members of East Rochester Seniors in a vote to determine which benefits they would like to see included in any health care reform package passed next year. Results and comments from similar meetings held throughout Monroe County in October and November will be used at the White House Conference on Aging in Washington, D.C. next year.

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## Parish's blind organist learns life begins at 80

By Father Kenneth Borowiak  
Catholic News Service

LINCOLN, Neb. — It's hard to determine whether Marie Hassel deserves credit most for being the organist at her parish for 44 years, for recently celebrating her 80th birthday or for accomplishing her 60-year musical career despite being blind since early childhood.

And Miss Hassel has no plans to retire from teaching piano or from playing the organ for Sacred Heart Parish.

To celebrate, the parish planned a party for the woman who was hired as organist in 1950.

Born in North Dakota in 1914, Miss Hassel lost her eyesight at the age of 1 because of a tumor. Miss Hassel graduated from the Nebraska School for the Blind and the University of Nebraska.

As a student, her friends would read

music to her as she translated it into Braille.

Learning to play the piano keyboard by memory, Miss Hassel never considered blindness an impediment, but a challenge.

"Blindness is like any disability," she said. "You have to be patient, meet it as a challenge rather than a handicap. And always keep a sense of humor — laughter gets you a long way."

Her love of music has been a lifelong devotion.

"At one time, I was teaching 46 students piano weekly," she said.

That workload is now down to 20 students a week, but Miss Hassel also is still active in her parish Altar Society and the Third Order Franciscans. And she expects to continue her activities as long as she can.

"If they say life begins at 80, I can say, 'Hello, world. Here I come.'"

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