CATHOLIC COURIER DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER, N.Y

Christmas

Church Women United heeds call year-round

By Kathleen Schwar Freelance writer

The wish for peace motivates Church Women United year-round, as it has since the war-torn Christmas season of 1941. Members don't even take time out for a Christmas party - at least in Rochester.

"We don't party and we're not a party group," said Sally Dodgson, an American Baptist and president of Church Women United in Rochester and the Vicinity, Inc. "Well, we did have a very nice tea after our Advent program. But we are a working group."

The Pearl Harbor attack in 1941 determined Church Women United's theme. The group was organizing nationally at the time to perform services ecumenically that could not be done by one church. Rochester-area women, who organized in 1922 as the Women's Committee of the Federation of Churches, soon joined the movement.

Official Roman Catholic involvement in the organization came about after Vatican II. (A local historical sketch notes, however, "An early ecumenical event occurred in 1942 when Christmas carols were sung in the New York Central railroad station with Roman Catholic women.")

Today, peace and justice concerns keep the organization's women - and men - active in several units around the diocese (there are 96 units throughout New York). Throughout the year the group, for example:

monitors courts.

· educates and advocates for housing and the environment.

• runs food cupboards.

• assembles care kits for prisoners.

 and visits homes of truant children to help increase school attendance.

Rochester's unit is the only one in the state outside New York City with a paid staff - a secretary and administrative coordinator - and office, 17 S. Fitzhugh St. "Rochester is a very, very active unit," said Anne Martin, a Lutheran and acting director of CWU, in New York.

But the work is done "way too quietly" and only with a few Roman Catholics, according to Barbara Hoffman, a parishioner at Rochester's Ss. Peter and Paul Parish. Hoffman is in her third year as the Roman Catholic representative on the organization's board, which consists of about 30 interfaith representatives. Hoffman hopes to get the word out to Catholics through peri-



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer Sally Dodgson, an American Baptist, is president of Church Women United in Rochester and Vicinity Inc.

> odic notices and perhaps by making presentations to interested groups and individuals.

> Hoffman was drawn to CWU through her work downtown, rehabilitating buildings in the West Main Street area. The organization's people are understanding and open-minded, she said. "We are all so similar. It's a very, very uplifting experience."

Catholic women's participation in CWU is continuing

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to grow across the country. It is notable in units such as Elmira's, where Margery Nurnberg, former director of the diocesan Department of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, is active. "They are having some very very good, very centered prayer together and are working together," Nurnberg said.

"I think they are looking for a place to be ecumenical. Some are looking for a different way of expression they aren't getting in their churches," Martin said. As with many religious organizations throughout the country, however, CWU does face a "graying;" its work nationally depends on women averaging 60 years of age. The 1,800 units that existed 10 years ago have dropped to 1,500.

One highly regarded project is the Rochesterarea CWU's Task Force on Courts, begun 25 years ago out of black ministers' concern for fairness.

Programs most often develop in collaboration with other groups. "Our women are more conceptual, really pioneers in getting things started," Martin said. CWU Rochester's Literacy Volunteers, for example, has become independent.

Ken Glingler of Irondequoit's St. Andrew's Church is one of a few men who have heard the call to CWU, thanks to his wife, Lucille. "I was a little reluctant, and said, 'How many men are involved?' he recalled. Ten years later he is still involved, as is she, as a court observer.

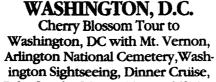
The 25 observers attend court procedures and report findings in a newsletter. "Some judges said, 'If you want to do some good, go help the Red Cross,' or something like that," recalled Susan Soper, task force coordinator and a Unitarian Church member.

But others have expressed appreciation. Results include clearer and more audible proceedings, more efficient handling of DWI cases, and stopping one town court's practice of routinely reducing charges of speeding and disobeying stop signs to littering charges.

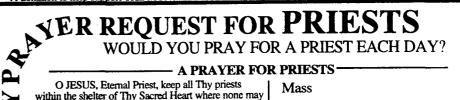
The project is just one reason for Hoffman's commitment. "What can one do to be inclusive with other people, to collaborate, to give hope, to be kind, to care? Church Women United does all of those things," she said.

To find out more about Church Women United, write CWU in Rochester and Vicinity, Inc., 17 S. Fitzhugh St., Rochester, N.Y. 14614-1488, or call 716/454-1813 The organization will hold its annual meeting in Rochester on Jan. 20.





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harm them.

Keep unstained their annointed hands which daily touch Thy Sacred Body. Keep unsullied their lips purpled with Thy Precious Blood.

Keep pure and unearthly their hearts sealed with the sublime marks of Thy glorious priesthood.

Let Thy holy love surround them and shield them from the world's contagion.

MONTHL Bless their labors with abundant fruit, and may the souls to whom they ministered here below be their joy and consolation and in Heaven their beautiful and everlasting crown. Amen.

O Mary, Queen of the clergy, pray for us; obtain for us a number of holy priests. Amen

Rosary

Fasting

Day Offering

Eucharistic Adoration Offering of Sufferings Divine Mercy Chaplet

Or whatever the Lord inspires you to offer Him on behalf of His Priests.

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