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Peter and Paul Parish, part of the East-side Catholic Parish in Elmira, where, she quipped, she and her relatives comprise most of the active black Catholics.

In addition to being a eucharistic minister, Bragg is a member of the Catholic Daughters of America, the parish life committee that reaches out to Elmira's poor, the Ladies of Charity and a volunteer at St. Joseph's Hospital.

But even though she has been a member of the Elmira parish since her family moved to the Southern Tier from Maryland in 1914, her high level of involvement hasn't always been the case, Bragg acknowledged.

"Some of the priests weren't as friendly as they are today," Bragg recalled. "We just went to church. We never bothered (the whites), they never bothered us."

But Bragg was "bothered" when she was excluded at least one time.

"I wanted to join the sodality," Bragg said of the organization which brings together young men and women for social and spiritual activities. "I never could. This woman always had an excuse to keep me out."

Bragg also recalled a time when her aunt, a member of a religious order, wanted to come to Elmira to visit. But because she was black, no convent in the city would provide her with a place to stay. Her visit had to be cancelled.

In the 1950s, however, one of the parish priests invited Bragg to come to a parish party and serve punch — much to the surprise of some of the Tier church's white members.

"It just seemed as though they couldn't get over it — that I was involved in the parish," Bragg said. "Things started to get better."

Although some friends tried to encourage her to do so, Bragg said she never desired to leave the church because of the prejudice she faced.

"(The church) did wonders for me," Bragg said. "It gave me a happy married life. It's just been great for me."

Norma Holmes also cares deeply about the church, but that affection is tinged with a desire to see more openness to black Catholics.

"I love that church, and I know how

good and great it should be," noted Holmes, a member of the diocesan Liturgical Commission and the wife of Deacon John Holmes, director of the Office of Deacon Personnel.

In attempting to help the church become more open to blacks and to black spirituality, Holmes serves as co-chairperson of a newly formed diocesan multicultural committee to help promote more multiculturalism in worship services. This committee met for the first time Feb. 22.

"I do think the church as a whole needs to learn what multiculturalism is,"

Holmes said. "They need to learn how to have respect for other (people and styles of worship)."

Meanwhile, Holmes has also been involved with a group of lay black Catholics who want to see more activities for blacks in the diocese.

"There's no sense of community whatsoever among the blacks in Rochester," Holmes observed. "We don't know each other."

Community is important to Holmes. She

converted to Catholicism in the 1960s before marrying her husband in Elmira. The couple later moved to Rochester, where they became involved at Immaculate Conception Parish, a parish where blacks were encouraged to be active in the church. Through the parish, the Holmeses also became busy in national black Catholic conferences and events.

Those gatherings with black Catholics helped to energize Holmes then — and they continue to do today. She noted that she and her husband travel as much as possible to take part in such events.

Ironically, Holmes and her husband have chosen to be part of a church where there are few other blacks — St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Hamlin. In addition to serving as a lector, she is involved with the liturgy committee.

The couple have been accepted at the parish for the most part, Norma Holmes said, although there was a recent incident in which a woman objected to Deacon Holmes performing a wedding ceremony because he was black. The young couple who were being married nonetheless insisted on the deacon performing the ceremony, and Father William J. Amann, pastor, made it clear

that the deacon would hear the couple's vows.

Norma Holmes will continue to work and argue for more community involvement among black Catholics, and for more openness to blacks by the church.

"You have to hang tough," she said. "I love the church. I wouldn't dream of going anywhere else."

Maxine Childress Brown said she has also seen prejudice in the church. But she has also seen it in human-service agencies and the corporate world.

"That's life," she said. "There will be a paucity of blacks. Do I accept that? Of course not."

Brown, stemming from her social activist and political background, has suggestions for promoting black involvement in the church. Parish leaders should try to involve blacks in church activities; then, whenever possible, move some of these people from volunteer status to staff positions or appoint them to parish boards. Ultimately, blacks have to feel invited to be policy makers in parishes and in the diocese.

"That will act as a magnet to draw blacks to the church," Brown predicted. And, at the same time, it will help all church members become acclimated to a greater black presence.

Brown's own parish has made an effort to talk about blacks in the Bible and the early church.

"How reassuring it was for me as a black person to attend Mass and hear that St. Augustine was African," Brown recalled.

She has not been involved recently as she would like to be and hopes to be in the future in helping to promote the cause of black Catholics because of her teaching duties at Pittsford's St. John Fisher College and her city council work, as well as her involvement with the Frederick Douglass Museum project. In the past, she was involved with such activities as planning the black Catholic revival at St. Augustine's Parish in 1992.

Brown also took part in the diocese's General Synod in October, 1993. One of the reasons she was involved, she said, was to provide knowledge of government services — to prevent duplication of efforts. "I also saw my role as that of a black woman who is also a mother and a wife," she added.

Brown noted that the church is no different than society, where promoting blacks' acceptance remains a challenge.

"It doesn't happen overnight," Brown observed. But, she predicted, with continued efforts, "things will change."

Ex-priest will create diocese

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Archbishop George A. Stallings, ex-Roman Catholic priest and founder of the African-American Catholic Congregation, said he plans to establish a Southern diocese with headquarters at his church's Imani Temple in Lafayette, La.

Bishop Edward J. O'Donnell of Lafayette expressed concern last month about reports that the break-away church was seeking to convert black Catholics.

"The Imani Temple is not a part of the Catholic Church... Since they are independent, they are free to do what they consider right," Bishop O'Donnell said in a statement responding to queries from journalists.

But he said he hopes "that the Imani Temple respects our integrity as we respect theirs... We are concerned that the reason given by a Temple spokesman for establishing the headquarters here is because this area has the largest number of African-American Catholics in this country."

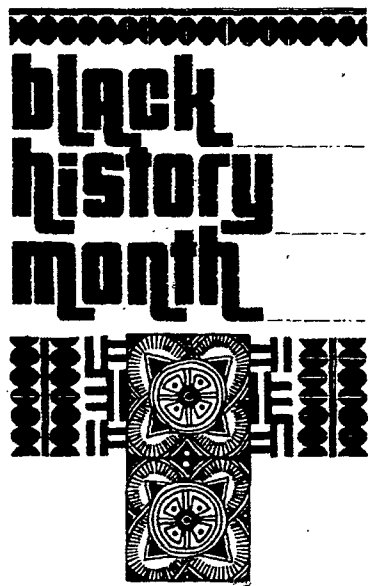
Many of the black Catholic priests and bishops in the United States come from Louisiana, long a stronghold of black Catholicism in the country.

Archbishop Stallings told Catholic News Service earlier this month that "it is not our intention to steal sheep from the Roman Catholic Church."

He said his congregation's efforts are aimed primarily at Catholics or other Christians who are not actively involved in any church.

Archbishop Stallings was a Roman Catholic pastor in the Washington archdiocese in 1989 when he formed his own congregation after he was denied a request to establish an African-American rite within Roman Catholicism.

He was excommunicated in February, 1990, when he formally declared the African-American Catholic Congregation independent from Rome, and three months later he was ordained a bishop by a bishop whom Catholic authorities do not consider validly ordained in the apostolic succession.



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	7:30 p.m.	Holy Family Church	899 Jay St., Rochester	716-328-3110
	7:30 p.m.	St. Boniface Church	15 Whalin St., Rochester	716-271-1468
	7:30 p.m.	St. Rita Church	1008 Maple Dr., Webster	716-671-1100
	7:30 p.m.	St. Theodore Church	170 Spencerport Rd., Rochester	716-429-6811
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	7:30 p.m.	St. Mary Lyceum Hall	15 Clark St., Auburn	315-252-9545
	8:00 p.m.	St. Charles Borromeo Church	64 Maiden Ln., Rochester	716-663-3230
TUESDAY	6:15 p.m.	St. Stanislaus Church	1150 Hudson Ave., Rochester	716-467-1472
	7:30 p.m.	Our Lady of Mercy Church	600 Denise Rd., Rochester	716-865-0775
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	7:45 p.m.	St. Helens School	150 Lettington Drive, Rochester	716-235-1210
WEDNESDAY	7:30 p.m.	Guardian Angels Church	2061 E. Henrietta Rd., Rochester	716-334-1412
	7:30 p.m.	Holy Family Home School Assoc.	899 Jay St., Rochester	716-328-4800
	7:30 p.m.	Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church	923 Portland Ave., Rochester	716-467-2725
	7:45 p.m.	Aquinas Institute	1127 Dewey Ave., Rochester	716-254-2020
	8:00 p.m.	Bishop Kearney	125 Kings Hwy. S, Rochester	716-671-1065
THURSDAY	6:15 p.m.	St. Stanislaus Church	1150 Hudson Ave., Rochester	716-467-1472
	7:30 p.m.	St. Anne Church	1600 Mt. Hope Ave., Rochester	716-271-3260
	7:30 & 9:00 p.m.	St. Michael Church	869 Clinton Ave. N, Rochester	716-325-4040
	7:30 p.m.	St. James Church	119 Brockley Rd., Rochester	716-482-9796
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SATURDAY	1:00 p.m.	St. Michael Church	320 S. Main St., Newark	315-332-2297
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