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FEATURE



File photo

One of the main priorities of Pax Christi is nuclear and general disarmament of such weapons as the Intercontinental Ballistic MX Missile.

Rebirth

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kings counties are actively involved in Pax Christi.

This network travels regularly to Syracuse for meetings with the Upstate Pax Christi chapter based there. In addition, members distribute materials — provided by Pax Christi USA — to parish social-ministry committees in the Southern Tier.

In Rochester, Bezila said, Pax Christi is currently focusing efforts on the protest of Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps groups being formed in the Rochester City School District. She said John Marshall High School offered such a program in the past year, and Edison Technical High School is planning to launch one in the fall.

Bezila tabs these ROTC programs as "the militarizing of our youth — we believe it really manipulates them." She charged that the Junior ROTC programs prey on impoverished students looking for a way to escape the inner city.

Father Paul F. English, CSB, is one of several Monroe County-based priests involved with Pax Christi Rochester. He said one of the goals of his involvement is to enhance "how insights in Scriptures are helping us in our own day — to live a radical Christian life in a society that rejects the Christian message."

Father English pointed to the consistent ethic of life as an example of society rejecting Christ's teaching. Such forms of killing as murder and starvation are illegal and considered widely unacceptable, yet Father English noted, the death penalty, war, abortion and eu-



File photo

Pax Christi Rochester members conducted a prayer vigil outside the Rochester Riverside Convention Center Oct. 1, 1993, during the Diocese of Rochester's General Synod.

thanasia fall into the "acceptable" category for many Americans and their leaders.

"The consistent life ethic would say those forms are unacceptable, too," said Father English.

The Basilian priest, who serves as campus minister at St. John Fisher College, plans to travel to Las Vegas, Nev., in early August to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the U.S. nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Following an Aug. 5 convocation at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, participants plan to travel to nearby Mercury, Nev., which serves as a U.S. nuclear testing site. There, they will stage a peaceful demonstration.

Dubel, meanwhile, said Southern Tier Pax Christi members are currently planning an August trip to Washington, D.C. for a similar commemoration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Dubel said Pax Christi places a special emphasis on preventing future nuclear warfare. "It's probably of the most consistent and persistent peace organizations raising concerns about the existence of nuclear threat," she said.

Pax Christi's voice is vital, Bezila asserted, because "I think we have not made any basic changes in our willingness to conduct war."

"We're all lulled into thinking we're in a time of peace, but we are not doing any meaningful disarmament," Bezila stated. "We're destroying some of our obsolete weapons, but we're testing and building new nuclear weapons."

50 years

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Christi.

It was founded in 1945 in France to promote reconciliation among French and German Catholics in the wake of World War II. It spread further in Western Europe in the late 1940s and 1950s. In 1952, Pope Pius XII approved Pax Christi as a Catholic peace movement.

During the Cold War it opened up contacts with religious and civic leaders in the Soviet bloc in an effort to build bridges between East and West. It also concentrated on nuclear disarmament and improving East-West relations.

Pax Christi adopted Pope John XXIII's 1963 social encyclical "Pacem in Terris" ("Peace on Earth") as its charter, with its emphasis of peace as a product of justice and respect for human rights. The encyclical also served to awaken Christian concern for economic and development plights of poor countries.

In the 1970s Pax Christi spread to the U.S., Canada and Australia. In the 1980s it established branches in the Third World and is currently moving into the ex-Soviet bloc.

But the changing times does not mean that Pax Christi has abandoned its interest in previous issues, said De Jonghe.

"Disarmament and security are still important but from a different perspective," he remarked.

Disarmament revolves around how to safely dismantle nuclear weapons and such issues as the millions of land mines which threaten civilians in countries embroiled in civil war, he said.

Earlier this year, Michael Affleck — who ran St. Joseph's House of Hospitality in Rochester from 1984-89 — became the national coordinator of Pax Christi USA.

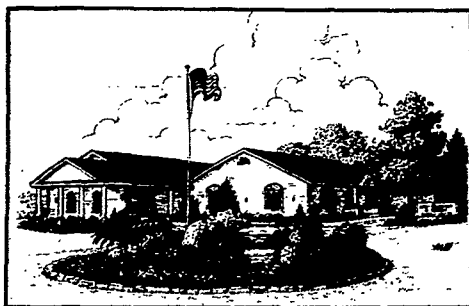
He succeeds Benedictine Sister Anne McCarthy, who resigned in August of 1994, citing differing agendas and structural problems within the organization.

Affleck, who became the national coordinator in January, made a three-year commitment with the option to continue, according to Nancy Small, chair of the Pax Christi USA National Council.

Since leaving Rochester, Affleck has served as coordinator of justice and peace programming at the Center for Social Concerns at Notre Dame University and, most recently, international issue coordinator for Greenpeace International's ozone campaign, working out of Syracuse, N.Y. He is also co-founder of the Nevada Desert Experience, an anti-nuclear weapons effort.

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