

DIOCESAN NEWS

Migrants need pastoral services of the diocese

EDITORS' NOTE: This is the second of three articles focusing on ministry to migrant workers.

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

For much of her life, Rosa Espinosa has travelled throughout the United States and Mexico as a migrant farmworker. It's a life that kept the 20-year-old woman from fulfilling a cherished dream — making her first Communion.

"That's very special to me," said Espinosa, a native of Mexico. "I have a lot of faith. I'm a very believing person."

Espinosa, who speaks English fluently, spoke of her love for Catholicism as she sat in the common kitchen of a migrant worker camp on an apple farm in Orleans County.

She was joined by her 17-year-old friend Dora Rosario, who also made her first Communion with Espinosa at Brockport's Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church in mid-October.

Like most migrant farmworkers from Latin America and the Caribbean, Espinosa and Rosario wander through such states as Texas, Florida, the Carolinas, Georgia and New York, earning a living by picking crops the nation both eats and exports. It's a life that does not lend itself to the kind of stable, parish-centered Catholicism common in this country.

Espinosa explained that she and her parents almost never stayed in one place long enough for her to attend sacramental preparation classes. And even if they did stay somewhere for a while, farm work meant that they labored whenever the sun shone, including weekends.

"My parents never had time," she said. "They worked Sundays, Saturdays."

Rosario had a similar tale to tell, translated from her native Spanish into English by Pamela Edd, a master of divinity student at St. Bernard's Institute. Edd is performing catechetical work in the migrant camps as part of her field work for her degree.

Edd gave five one-hour classes on the Eucharist to the two women, both of whom travel with their husbands, at the camp over the past couple of months. For Rosario, who initially felt shy about seeking the sacrament because she thought she was too old to receive it, making her first Communion was a crowning moment in her life.

"For me, it was something so special because it was a way to grow spiritually," she said.

She added that if there were one service the Catholic Church could provide her and her fellow migrant workers, it



Dora Rosario, left, and Rosa Espinosa, migrant farmworkers from Mexico, recently made their first Communion at Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Brockport.

S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

would be to celebrate the Mass in the camps themselves when the migrants have some free time.

The church knows that migrants hunger for the Mass, noted Father Enrique Cadena, associate pastor of Corpus Christi Parish in Rochester, who spends about one-quarter of his time in migrant ministry. Indeed, the diocese has provided Masses in Spanish in camps as well as at parishes in Brockport, Sodus, Penn Yan, Geneva and Newark.

Unfortunately, however, in an era when Spanish-speaking priests are decreasing in number, as is the number of priests overall, migrants may come to miss Eucharistic liturgies even more than they currently do, Father Cadena said.

"I could kill myself just celebrating Masses all the time," he commented.

Ironically, the decline in diocesan clergy comes at a time when Catholic migrant workers are coming to the diocese in greater numbers than in decades past, according to a pastoral plan issued in February by the Diocesan Regional Hispanic Ministry Group.

The pastoral plan points out that until the 1990s, most farmworkers in New York were not Catholic. Individual priests who did celebrate the Mass in farm camps spent more of their time serving the non-spiritual needs of the



workers than the spiritual.

In 1995 and in the future, however, the diocese must focus on preparing lay Spanish-speaking ministers who can meet the workers' growing pastoral needs, the plan contends. That contention was echoed by many of the diocese's current migrant ministry workers.

Father Cadena and several other ministry workers have called for the diocese to establish three full-time positions for Spanish-speaking lay ministers. These ministers would oversee migrant ministry in areas around Sodus, Brockport, and Penn Yan, where migrant workers tend to live and work. Proposals to obtain funding for the ministers' salaries from the U.S. bishops are still in the works, Father Cadena and other ministry workers said.

Meanwhile, the pastoral plan adds that

more volunteer ministers need to be drawn from the diocese's Hispanic community. According to the plan, that community has tended to focus its Spanish-speaking ministry in such urban Hispanic areas as inner-city Rochester.

The diocese's transient farm laborers need basic Catholic catechetical education and sacramental preparation, according to Father Cadena. Many migrant ministry workers added that they have learned — sometimes through discouraging experience — not to overload migrant workers with too much catechetical material at study sessions and retreats. Given their hard life and long work days, migrant workers tend to prefer single sessions of catechetical work or a limited weekly series of classes, to the two- or three-day workshops and retreats parishes often offer, the specialists said.

In the end, however, if migrant ministry, whatever form it takes, is to survive into the next decade, priests, deacons and religious who perform it must be able to hand their torches to Spanish-speaking lay ministers, according to ministry workers.

"This ministry has been centered around clergy," commented Jerry Skerrett, a permanent deacon at St. Mary's of the Lake in Ontario, and editor of the pastoral plan. "This whole ministry could get decimated."

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The final article in this series, Nov. 23, will focus on the diocese's advocacy work for migrants, and on the New York bishops' recent decision to make farmworkers' rights a legislative priority in 1996.

Discussion will examine state of welfare system

FAIRPORT — The Social Ministry Committee of the Church of the Assumption, Church of St. Jerome (East Rochester) and St. Joseph's Church (Penfield), will offer an evening of reflection on the welfare system Wednesday, Nov. 29, 7:15-9:15 p.m., at Church of the Assumption, 20 East Ave.

Father Daniel McMullin, Assumption's parochial vicar, will begin with a prayerful reflection. Discussion will feature Donna Ecker, director of Bethany House of Hospitality in Rochester, a home for women and children, and Mary Jo Marshall, a legal assistant with the Fair Hearing Office of the Monroe County Department of Social Services.

A question and answer session will conclude the evening. For information, call 716/388-0040.

Parishioners hold Mass in former St. Lucy's

Former parishioners of St. Lucy's Church joined Bishop Dennis W. Hickey at the church building Oct. 21 to celebrate Mass and ring the church bell — the first time the bell had been rung in some 20 years.

Also attending the service were about 15 women religious who had taught at the parish school, and members of the 11th Ward Originals men's group and St. Lucy's Ladies Auxiliary.

In addition, 25 former altar boys from the parish — who ranged in age from their early 40s to 87 — took part in the procession with Bishop Hickey.

The Mass was followed by coffee downstairs in the church.

St. Lucy's Parish was created in 1913 to

serve the Italian community of the Troup Street neighborhood. The parish closed in 1975, and the church building is now the home of the Lily of the Valley Church of God in Christ. That church gave permission for the members of the former Catholic parish to celebrate the Mass, and the current pastor, Elder William Everett, offered a greeting before the service.

Former St. Lucy's parishioners have also held banquets in 1975, 1976, 1990 and 1994. In addition, the 11th Ward Originals and the St. Lucy's Ladies Auxiliary stage yearly events such as luncheons, dinners, picnics and dances.

Videotapes of the Oct. 21 celebration are available from Joe Cortese (716/346-0244) or Toni Vito (247-5228).

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