

DIOCESAN NEWS

Genesee Hospital honors chaplain

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Father George Norton, director of Genesee Hospital's chaplains' office, is not just a boss to his office coordinator, Jan Dejager. He's also been a needed friend.

Two years ago, Dejager's husband, John, died. She recalled Father Norton's invaluable role as she mourned the loss of her spouse.

"He tends to be there," she said of Father Norton. "He may not say a lot, but he knows what is needed."

Discerning what patients and their families need to hear — and not hear — are part and parcel of Father Norton's job at Genesee Hospital, located at 224 Alexander St. It's his deftness with such work that earned him the hospital's 1995 Most Valuable Partner Award.

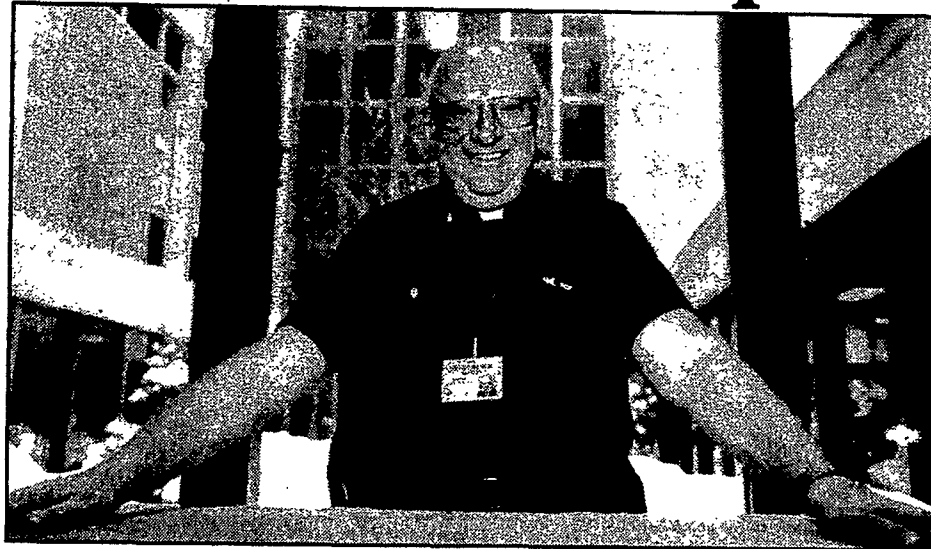
The award recognizes employees for contributing to the improvement of the institution's quality, care and services. The hospital honored him publicly at a recognition dinner Dec. 4 at the Burgundy Basin Inn in Bushnell's Basin.

Father Norton, former public relations officer for the Diocese of Rochester, was ordained here in 1983, and was a radio and television journalist in Rhode Island for several years before entering the priesthood. Despite his extensive public speaking experience, the priest admitted he couldn't find the words needed to express how he felt upon receiving the Most Valuable Partner Award.

"It took me right off my feet," he said. He added that he was humbled by the award's significance.

"The award has my name on it, but it's really an award that goes to all the people who help me and support me," Father Norton observed.

Apparently many of those people find Father Norton an invaluable source of help to the hospital, according to excerpts from some of the award nomination letters published in the December issue of "Genesee People," the hospital's in-house newsletter.



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Father George Norton, director of Genesee Hospital's Chaplains' Office, recently won the hospital's Most Valuable Partner Award.

"Any time day or night, Father George will be there," one nomination letter read. "He will drop everything ... always pleasant, always comforting, always there, for anyone, regardless of religious affiliation. We don't have a prayer without him."

If the staff likes him as much as the letters indicate, it's in part, the priest stressed, because Genesee Hospital considers a patient's spiritual care as important as his or her physical care.

"You feel like you're part of the team," he said of Genesee. "The staff has a strong awareness of patients' emotional and spiritual needs."

Along with a Protestant minister and a rabbi, Father Norton is responsible for the spiritual care of patients and their families in every unit of the hospital. Father Norton says Mass every day at noon in the hospital chapel, and is on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, a schedule that suits him just fine.

"I've never had a 9-to-5 job per se," he said.

The bulk of his work consists in aiding patients and their families through the fear and anxiety that often accompany

them during their stay at Genesee, Father Norton noted. Each situation demands a different touch, he explained, pointing out that he lets patients and their families do most of the talking.

"Usually, I try to make my first visits very low-key," he said. "I usually just introduce myself by name ... and tell them I will keep them in my prayers."

The chaplain also lets patients and their families know he is available to offer spiritual, emotional and — in the case of Catholics — sacramental support.

Many patients are curious about the sacrament of anointing the sick, he said, wondering whether its use is only reserved for the dying. It's a misconception the chaplain clears up on a regular basis.

"I anoint as many people who are not in a life-threatening situation as I anoint people who are in a life-threatening situation," he commented.

Employed since 1989 at the hospital, Father Norton has no plans to quit, and, indeed, seems to have found his niche as a priest in this world.

"I love and thrive on this kind of work," he said with a smile. "I enjoy people to start with ... It's healthy for me."

Christmas Appeal suffers huge decline

More than \$45,230 has been donated to the 1995 Catholic Courier/Catholic Charities Christmas Appeal.

But this year's figure marks the second consecutive year in which the appeal has suffered a serious financial decline, according to Judy Taylor, appeal coordinator.

The 1994 appeal garnered about \$10,000 more than this year's, Taylor said. In 1993, she added, the appeal drew more than \$70,000. Hence, the appeal suffered a drop of \$25,000 in donations over the last two years, she said.

The appeal is a cooperative effort of Diocesan Catholic Charities and the *Catholic Courier*, which publicizes the appeal through a series of articles during Advent. Funds donated to the drive are allocated to diocesan agencies that disburse the monies to individuals facing short-term financial crises, but who are ineligible for assistance from other sources.

Taylor speculated that the fact that this year's direct-mail solicitation to past donors started later than in past years may have hurt the campaign.

"Our mailing went out in early December, rather than late November," Taylor said.

She noted that the appeal's direct-mail drive relies on volunteers who were kept away from the diocesan pastoral center for several days last fall due to bad weather.

Lee Strong, associate editor of the *Courier*, pointed out that the paper is studying new ways of promoting the appeal in 1996.

EDITORS' NOTE: To contribute to the appeal, send a check payable to "Christmas Appeal" to: Christmas Appeal, c/o Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Rochester, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624.

— Rob Cullivan

Diocese signs with mediation center for conflict resolution

By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

The Diocese of Rochester has designated the Mediation Center of Rochester as conciliation agency for the diocese. It will be available as a third party, to help people settle their disputes confidentially and professionally.

According to center officials, the agreement appears to be unique and may become a national model.

"Conflict is a normal ingredient in life," the Rev. Richard W. Harrington, the center's coordinator of church mediation, said in a written statement. "But most people believe that there should be no conflict in religious life."

As of Jan. 1, the diocese began subsidizing mediation. Churches or individuals, paying on a sliding scale, may in confidence contact the center, which will help determine whether its mediators can help in a particular situation.

"If we can bring people together to talk through their conflicts, I wouldn't put a price tag on it," said Father Kevin McKenna, chancellor and liaison to the diocese's Conciliation Board. "I think the benefits will be enormous. ... This will be a positive impact on how we do business as a church."

"The Gospels would instruct us to begin with the individual or committee we are having difficulty with — to talk through it if it can be handled at that level," he added.

For employees, the next step is to con-

tact the Human Resources Department, before the center. But for a parishioner, the next step may be the Mediation Center.

The diocese had for a number of years a board for conciliation whose members actually became conciliation agents, Father McKenna said. "But it kind of fell out of use a few years ago."

"Our people were serving out of good heart," recalled Karen Rinefierd, a board member back in 1988.

Although several people on the board had counseling backgrounds, she attributed the board's dissolution to a lack of mediation skills and a lack of incentive for conflicting parties to participate. Eventually a national study found such diocesan boards ineffective, she said.

Dick Pelino, chairman of the latest Conciliation Board, was assigned by diocesan officials to "jump start" the reconciliation process two years ago. He said the board will review the center's work using anonymous cases "to assure ourselves we have a procedure to bring healing to all elements of the church."

Other dioceses hire a conciliator or appoint someone on staff to coordinate conciliation, according to Father McKenna, but, "They're already an employee of the diocese, so questions obviously are going to be raised about the neutrality of somebody who is working for you."

"What we hope takes place," he explained, "is through education our pastors, priests, and eventually staff persons are going to come to know the Mediation

Center and the people who work there and be familiar enough with the process that a trusting relationship will be there."

Father McKenna cited another advantage of the diocese/center agreement, besides neutrality: The Mediation Center's mediators have a background in ministry. "They bring a nice theological perspective, a Gospel perspective," he said. The nine mediators, some of whom are ordained, include Lutheran, Episcopal, Roman Catholic and Presbyterian backgrounds.

The Mediation Center was founded in 1981 by the Rev. John W. Heister, a Presbyterian. It has served couples, families, schools, institutions, businesses, and the community, and began focusing on church issues in the past six to eight years. It has presented workshops on family issues to the diocese and programs to other denominational districts.

Heister praised the diocese saying, "It is the wisdom of the diocese to understand that many people with a problem will not turn to the diocese for help, because they feel, particularly if it is a pastor, he could jeopardize his career. It is a systemic problem. They let it fester and then it explodes. This allows people to get help immediately when the problem is confined at a lower level."

He described one situation the center diffused earlier for the diocese.

A priest and his administrative assistant, a younger woman, disagreed on views of the ministry, Heister said. But with eight hours of mediation, they all

developed an agreeable job description.

The center, however, will not mediate in issues of doctrine, pastoral leadership assignments, and matters excluded by canon law.

Father McKenna gave other examples of where mediation might help.

"I've seen a number of parishes entered into conflict around renovation plans, for example," he said, "when a parishioner wants to redesign the sanctuary of a church. Many times other members of the community don't like the particular way the design is going, and perhaps prefer the more traditional types of sanctuaries be maintained. This is a great source of tension and conflict. A significant number of people leave because they are no longer comfortable with that."

Mediators also may help when parishes are working to consolidate or cluster or on some other cooperative effort, he said.

And, he said, "I've seen serious disruption of communities in the past when a valued and loved minister of the Gospel, a priest or staff member, has left."

Mediators can be sure concerns and values of both sides are heard and work toward a peaceful resolution, he said.

The Mediation Center also will provide training later during the agreement. Mediation Center brochures will be placed in churches. The center is at Suite 5G, 2024 W. Henrietta Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14623. Its phone number is 716/272-1990.