

Catholic Courier

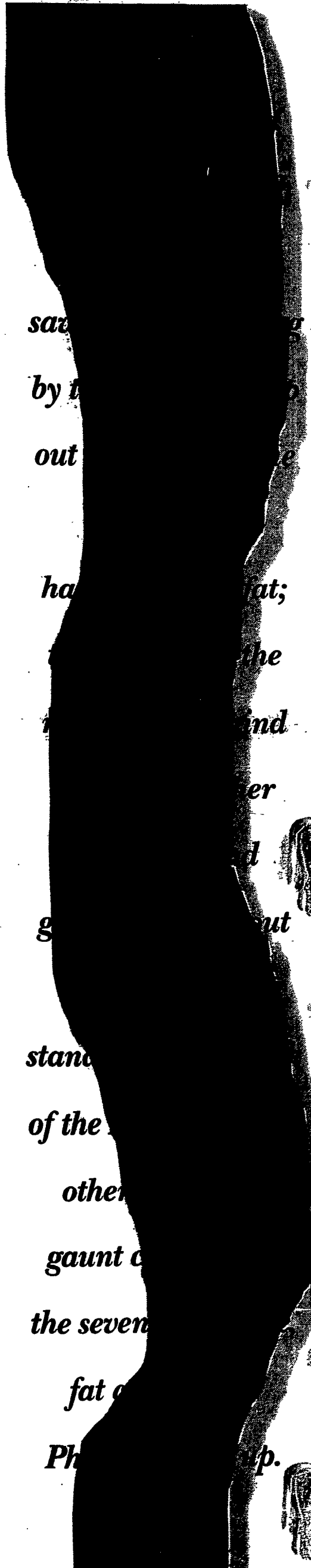
DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

VOL. 107 NO. 36

THURSDAY, June 6, 1996

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12 PAGES



Dreams tell 'parables' of lives

By Kathleen Schwar
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Genesis 41 tells of two dreams that disturbed the Pharaoh.

In one, he saw seven fat cows coming up from the Nile River. Seven gaunt cows followed, and ate the first seven. In another dream, seven shriveled ears of grain sprouted behind seven healthy ears and swallowed them up.

The agitated Pharaoh summoned "all the magicians and sages of Egypt." None could interpret his dreams — until Joseph, the slave, was called. Joseph explained that the dreams were God's warnings that seven years of famine would follow seven years of great abundance.

Pharaoh paid attention to Joseph's interpretation, and Egypt escaped the worst of the famine.

Today spiritual directors encourage paying attention to dreams as an everyday, accessible way to aid spiritual growth — though not to foretell the future.

"I find that dreams and imagery provide the most consistent access route into the spiritual domain," wrote Fredrica R. Halligan, then a therapist at Fordham University, in a 1993 *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*. Dreams, she stated, are a "numinous wellspring to nourish psychospiritual growth."

But how many people remember their dreams as well as the Pharaoh, or know a "Joseph" to interpret them?

Sister Judy Reger, SSJ, a spiritual director who explores dreams with many of her spiritual directees, is increasingly asked to lead dream workshops in the diocese. And even she has to work to understand her dreams.

"Often I feel, 'This will never make sense to me,'" she said at an April 20 workshop on "Dreams and Spiritual Direction" at the Sisters of St. Joseph motherhouse in Pittsford.

Sister Reger, who studied dreams during her training at the Institute for Spiritual Leadership, which is affiliated with Loyola University in Chicago, said she tries to record and reflect on most of her dreams. The practice is similar to keeping a spiritual journal and is often combined with one, as well as with Scripture reading, she explained. Even a voice or an image, she added, "may be the kernel of the dream."

Sister Reger believes that dreams resemble prayers in that they are communication with God.

"God is not limited to the time of day we are up and awake to communicate with us," she contended. "God is not limited to way we think and the images we have in our waking hours."

Understanding dreams is important to readers, as books on the same have seen an upswing in demand in the past 18 months, said Jay McKee, national sales manager for Paulist Press.

"Our dream books do very well, extraordinarily well actually, specifically within the Catholic retail market," he said. "People are seeking deeper meaning in their lives."

Continued on page 10