

CONTINUED...

Organizations

Continued from page 1

tion's purpose, bylaws and goals within the Catholic Church are examined in determining its legitimacy.

"All Catholics have the right to form and gather into common associations," Father McKenna said. He added that these groups can be both private and public.

Once an organization has applied through its diocese for recognition, the group is observed over a period of several months — or even years — by representatives of the diocesan bishop. Father McKenna frequently fills this role in the Rochester Diocese, he said, "because of the canonical issues involved."

Because the bishop has such a large say in determining which organizations are recognized, Father McKenna pointed out that groups such as Call to Action can be permitted to function publicly in some dioceses while being denounced in others.

"Different bishops use different criteria. The bishop is given a great deal of latitude and discretion," Father McKenna explained.

After recognition is granted, the organization cannot change its statutes or philosophy without further approval from the proper ecclesiastical authority.

One diocesan group still undergoing the process of developing statements and statutes is the Apostles of Divine

Mercy. This prayer organization, composed of both clergy and laity, was begun in the Rochester Diocese in 1994. The group is currently being evaluated by diocesan officials. (See accompanying story.)

"We suggested that they work on a document that clearly articulates their goals," Father McKenna said.

"They (the diocese) want to see if we're on the wall or off the wall," joked Apostles of Divine Mercy co-founder Father Donald E. McCarthy, CSB, parochial vicar at St. Rita's Church in Webster.

According to Father McKenna, organizations often have a financial motive as well. Groups designated as approved Catholic entities in the Rochester Diocese are not only placed in *The Official Catholic Directory*, but are also granted federal tax-exempt status.

Many of these groups also appear in the official diocesan directory for the Rochester Diocese, published annually by the *Catholic Courier*. According to Jeanne Mooney, directory editor, a policy was enacted last year that if an organization isn't already listed in *The Official Catholic Directory*, it cannot appear in the diocesan directory.

The reason for this procedure, Mooney said, was because "we had so many organizations calling and asking if they could be included."

However, despite the careful steps taken to officially recognize groups, the Catholic Church has no power to shut

down so-called "Catholic" organizations if they don't fit church requirements.

The word "Catholic," according to Father McKenna, is "not a copyrighted trademark with the Catholic Church. It would be very difficult to claim any kind of exclusive use."

Kathy Gallagher, associate communications director for the New York State Catholic Conference, has detected a recent rise in groups who use the word "Catholic."

"This is clearly because of the national presidential election. I think we're seeing a lot of groups calling themselves 'Catholics' trying to persuade Catholic pundits," said Gallagher, who added that the Catholic vote has the potential to swing this year's election.

Gallagher released a statement March 8 stating that Network has distributed press packets and ratings of elected officials to the Catholic press. However, Gallagher stated, the group "has no formal connection to the Roman Catholic Church and has not obtained permission of competent ecclesiastical authority to use 'Catholic' in its title or description."

The outbreak of questionable groups is so large, Gallagher stated, that she feels U.S. bishops should address the matter publicly.

"This is a huge issue. The bishops have to answer the question from the church's perspective," she said. "There's a lot of confusion out there among the faithful."

Adding to that confusion has been the

advent of the Internet. Thomas Lorusung, director and chief editor of Catholic News Service, noted that groups and individuals can call themselves "Catholic" on-line to promote their own agenda, with little chance of being traced.

"You say who you are. And if you are that, great. But if you're not, there's no way of finding out without a good deal of effort. Nobody's really got the answer to that one," Lorusung commented.

Catholic News Service, based in Washington, D.C., provides national and international reporting by satellite to Catholic publications in the U.S. and abroad. Lorusung said that his staff does not adhere to a set policy in determining if an organization is Catholic.

"It's a news judgment. If we have suspicion, we'll do some research," Lorusung said.

For known entities that are not officially recognized by the Catholic Church — such as Catholics for a Free Choice — Lorusung said CNS will quote members but add a disclaimer saying the group is unofficial.

Karen M. Franz, general manager and editor of the *Catholic Courier*, said the diocesan newspaper takes similar steps when quoting organizations that are not listed in either the diocesan directory or *The Official Catholic Directory*.

"If we find something that leads us to be suspicious, then we will seek a comment from a diocesan official who might give a sense of this particular group's agenda," Franz said.

Divine Mercy apostolate stresses constant prayer, devotion

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

Approximately two years ago, Sharon Norton and Judy Shanahan decided their devotion to Divine Mercy should no longer exist on simply a private basis.

"We said we felt the message needed to be spread in a wide area as soon as possible," recalled Norton, a parishioner at St. Cecilia Church in Irondequoit.

"Father (Donald E. McCarthy, CSB) said, 'You know what we have to do now — we have to start an association,'" added Shanahan, from St. John of Rochester Church in Perinton.

Norton, Shanahan and Father Mc-

Carthy followed through on this belief by founding Apostles of Divine Mercy, a group of Catholic clergy and laity.

Members promote devotion to the Divine Mercy of Christ while living out the charisms of St. Paul. The association is comprised of 23 people, all residing in Monroe County.

Currently, the apostolate is seeking official recognition as a Catholic organization in the Diocese of Rochester (see related story). The group is completing a set of statutes to be reviewed by diocesan officials.

In developing these statutes, the apostolate works closely with Father George Kosicki, CSB, director of Divine Mercy

International in Stockbridge, Mass. Stockbridge is also the site of the National Shrine of Divine Mercy.

Modern-day devotion to Divine Mercy has been inspired by Blessed Faustina, a Polish nun who died in 1938. According to Blessed Faustina's diary, Jesus made several appearances to her toward the end of her life, commanding her to spread the message of Mercy. Sister Faustina was accorded the title of Blessed by Pope John Paul II in 1993.

In the Rochester Diocese, the Apostles of Divine Mercy evangelize by distributing literature and taped material, and by making appearances at schools, nursing homes and parishes.

Shanahan and Norton said that the group hopes to expand beyond Monroe County in upcoming months. A six-month process of study and discernment is required for membership.

The apostolate meets monthly and divides into smaller groups for many of its evangelical activities. In addition, each member puts a high priority on private devotion to Divine Mercy.

"It's a way of life," Norton remarked. "We're a group of deep prayer," Shanahan added.

EDITORS' NOTE: For more information on this organization, write to the Association of the Apostles of Divine Mercy, P.O. Box 1003, Fairport, N.Y. 14450.

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