

# DIOCESAN NEWS

## Concern over Haiti brings experts together

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

Haiti may not be grabbing front-page headlines anymore, but its people's plight is foremost in the minds of some diocesan Catholics who met recently at St. Louis Church in Pittsford.

About 80 people attended an April 12 reception in the parish's Reddington Hall for Father Rick Frechette, CP, director of Our Little Brothers and Sisters' Orphanage and Hospital in Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital.

Father Frechette also served as the homilist at St. Louis for the April 12-13 Masses. He spoke for the *Catholic Courier* following noon Mass April 13.

In the wake of Haiti's April 6 elections for its senate and local commissioner offices, Father Frechette — and area Haitian experts — expressed a mixture of pessimism and hope for Haiti's fragile democracy. Only 5 to 10 percent of Haiti's eligible voters turned out for the elections, according to several reports.

"We're always concerned about the political situation in Haiti, but the low voter turnout — there's nothing new about that," Father Frechette said.

Most Haitians have more immediate concerns — like avoiding starvation — Father Frechette emphasized. He did note that the human rights situation improved greatly after a U.S.-led multinational force reinstated President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1994. The ex-priest has since left office, replaced in 1996 by his democratically elected successor, Rene Preval.

But many of the problems — illiteracy, unemployment, unsanitary living conditions — that fueled Aristide's rise still plague the vast majority of Haitians, Father Frechette said.

"It takes more than the election of officials and the return of Aristide to fix these problems," the priest said, noting that Haiti lacks almost everything, from clean water to foreign investment, that could improve the lot of its citizens.

The priest said he is studying medicine



Submitted photo  
**Father Rick Frechette, CP, carries one of the many children he works with at an orphanage and hospital in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.**

at N.Y. College of Osteopathic Medicine in Old Westbury, and travels for four-day periods to Haiti every six weeks. He plans to finish his medical studies within a year.

This marked the priest's fourth visit to St. Louis, which has long supported his work, as have such diocesan parishes as St. Mary's in Waterloos, Holy Trinity in Webster and St. Bridget's in Rochester, according to Bob McNamara, a St. Louis parishioner. McNamara oversees New York Friends of the Orphans, which, among other projects, raises funds for Father Frechette's work.

McNamara's organization encourages area Catholics to sponsor orphans at Father Frechette's home for \$20 or more a month. Sponsors help the children obtain food, clothing, shelter, medical care and education, he said, adding that diocesan Catholics now sponsor 32 such children. Also attending Father Frechette's ter-

ception were Maureen Nielsen, a parishioner at Corpus Christi Parish in Rochester, who said she works at Lanfami Selavi — Family Is Life — a home for street children in Port-au-Prince; and Dr. Michael R. Mirwald, a parishioner at St. Joseph's Church in Penfield, which has funded the provision of medicines and other health-care services for Haiti. Both spoke to the *Courier* in separate telephone interviews.

Mirwald echoed Father Frechette's observations that although Haiti is less violent than when it was ruled by military dictatorships, it is still a nation seething with potential unrest. Yet, Haiti's wealthy elite — about 3 percent of the population — continues to ignore the living conditions that most of its people suffer, he said.

"The people are so, so distraught, and on such a low level, I don't even know how they lasted this long," he said.

Expecting to head back to Haiti sometime in May, Nielsen said Haiti's situation seems to be regressing after hopes were raised during the U.S. occupation.

"There's been an increase in random violence due to the fact that the people are still poor," she said.

She added that the low voter turnout in recent elections was understandable.

"I don't think they're losing faith in democracy," she said of the Haitians. "I just think they're fed up."

But Mirwald and Nielsen also said that although no one can change Haiti's terri-

ble plight overnight, diocesan Catholics can do much to alleviate the suffering of individuals there.

For example, Nielsen said she's still hoping to obtain donations of children's medicines and school supplies to take back to Haiti. She's also working to bring a young Haitian girl to Rochester for heart surgery. And Mirwald said parishes like St. Louis that support his work have greatly affected the lives of people who otherwise wouldn't receive health care in Haiti.

Meanwhile, Rose-Marie Chierici, a native Haitian and Rochester resident, said Corpus/Haiti — a committee of Corpus Christi parishioners — continues to expand its work in the rural village of Borgne, Haiti. Over the past two years, Corpus/Haiti has raised \$40,000 to rebuild a health clinic in the village, send U.S. physicians and schoolteachers to Borgne, and begin sanitation projects there, Chierici said.

Such efforts by diocesan Catholics and others keep people like him focused on Haiti even if its larger problems seem overwhelming, Mirwald said.

"For those few people that you have helped momentarily — or even significantly helped — you do make a difference," he said.

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New York Friends of the Orphans can be reached at 716/381-5952; Corpus/Haiti, at 716/473-1373; and Dr. Mirwald at 716/527-3378 — leave your number on the machine.

### Ecumenical, interreligious office seeks candidates

The Diocese of Rochester's Office for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs is seeking nominees for the Commission for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs.

Candidates must be individuals who embrace Synod values, have time and energy to work with the commission, and have expertise in ecumenical and/or interreligious relations. They

need to be sponsored by a parish minister, pastor or pastoral administrator. Nominees will undergo an interview process.

Individuals selected for the commission will serve two- or three-year terms. Nominations are due by Monday, April 28.

For information, contact Deacon Brian McNulty at 716/328-3210.

## Father William D. Lum pleads not guilty to abuse charges

By Kathleen Schwar  
Staff writer

Father William D. Lum, 53, pleaded not guilty April 18 in Greece Town Court to four counts of third-degree sodomy. Father Lum, a diocesan priest since 1969, was released on his own recognizance. A disposition date is set for May 21.

The Monroe County District Attorney office filed the charges, based on complaints by a man who was a minor at the time of the alleged incidents.

In his deposition, the victim stated that he had met Father Lum while working as a receptionist in the rectory of St. Joseph's Church, Penfield. Father Lum had served as temporary administrator of the parish for a few months in 1991.

The deposition alleges that crimes took place in the rectory of Our Lady of Mercy Church, Greece, and elsewhere on several occasions between June 15 and July 1, 1992. Father Lum had become pastor of the Greece church in 1991.

"All it is is an accusation," the priest's

attorney, John F. Speranza, told the *Catholic Courier* following the April 18 arraignment. "Anybody can make an accusation," said Speranza, who added that he needed time to study the charges.

According to Lt. Bill Mackin, acting captain of the Greece Police Department, the Monroe County District Attorney's office began an investigation into the charges in October 1996. Mackin said his department was apprised of the case about a month ago.

An Assistant District Attorney unassociated with the case told the *Courier* that the charges are Class E felonies, each carrying a potential penalty of up to four years in prison.

Father Lum had requested a leave of absence from Bishop Matthew H. Clark and took leave July 17, 1996. He lives at St. Stanislaus Church, Rochester, but has no ministerial assignment, according to Liz Brown, diocesan director of communications.

In addition to the postings in Penfield and Greece, Father Lum's prior assign-

ments were as associate pastor, St. Margaret Mary Church, Irondequoit (1969-73); associate pastor, St. Louis Church, Pittsford (1973-75); chaplain, University of Rochester (1975-1990); director of diocesan campus ministry (1978-80, 1984-90); and parochial vicar, Holy Cross Church, Rochester (1990-91).

Father Lum also served on the board of the *Catholic Courier* (then the *Courier-Journal*) from 1982 to 1987.

The priest explained his resignation to parishioners in a July 14 letter printed in the *Our Lady of Mercy Church* bulletin.

"Quite simply, I am burned out," he wrote. "This is not because of anything at Our Lady of Mercy. But I need to step away from active ministry for a while."

Stating that everyone faces pressure and stresses, he wrote, "The issue is how I have been dealing or failing to deal with those pressures and stresses, how I have been handling those things."

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