

# MOVE On the



Maria Vega, right, prays with her father Pelegrin Vega and Nereida Caraballo during a rosary recitation Oct. 2 at the Rochester home of Jose Feliciano Sr.

## Hispanic Teens:

Rochester-area Hispanics in the Brockport area from Texas four years ago. His parents don't speak English — and although his own grasp of the language has improved, Llanza still struggles to understand what the teens are teaching him by example. High school is a challenge.

"Sometimes it's tough, but I talk to the kids for me," said Llanza, who resides in Mexico for nine of his 17 years.

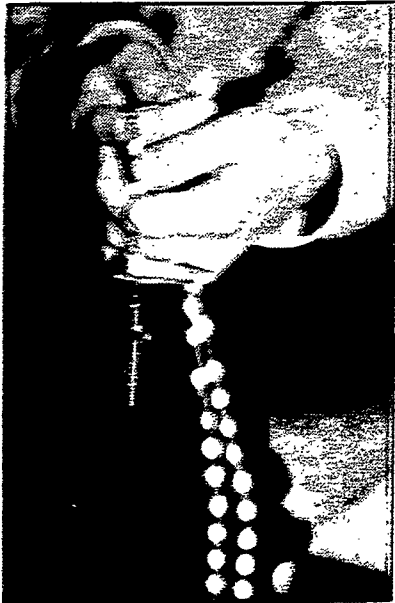
Sister Mary Jane Mitchell, SSJ, director of the Brockport-based Western Monroe-Cattaraugus County Hispanic Ministry, said language is one of many issues facing the Hispanic teens in her area.

"Our children are a very pronounced minority in their schools. They are separated by language and race and we're always working against those obstacles," Sister Mitchell said.

Hispanics from all backgrounds struggle to mesh with other Americans because of stereotyping, according to Jesus Vega.

"A lot of Hispanics put Americans on a pedestal, thinking they have all the opportunities. And Americans look at the Hispanics as peasants," Jesus, 18, commented.

"I just get labeled as a Hispanic, not as a person," Hoylan Fernandez, 17, added.



to become a pediatrician.

The flaw with generalizing, Sister Mitchell said, is that Hispanic teens represent a wide range of nationalities and economic backgrounds. "You can't tie them all together," she said.

Because Hispanics often encounter an unaccepting society, she added, the process of fitting in can be slow at best.

"We have to work on building their self-esteem," Sister Mitchell said.

During these times of uncertainty, pleasant rituals reflecting one's heritage can help ease fear and doubt. And many Hispanic families return to those roots by focusing on their heritage's Catholic traditions.

Jesus and his sister, Maria, said they gained considerable strength from the St. Michael's Church parish community after their family moved to Rochester from Puerto Rico in 1989.

"Church was the only place we could see Hispanic people and communicate," said Maria, 19. "We have a lot of faith. I think that's what's helped to keep us going against the obstacles we face."

Her brother added that adult parishioners frequently affirm him.

"They say we're the role models for the teenagers. It kind of gives you that boost you need for the week," Jesus said.

Jesus and Maria are lecturers at St. Michael's, one of three churches in the Community of Hope. This cluster is located in northeast Rochester, where the city's largest concentration of

"People don't think I work hard." For the record, Hoylan carries a 3.8 grade-point average at Our Lady of Mercy High School, where she is a senior, and is planning

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Story by staff writer Mike Latona • Photos by Greg Francis

# Celeb striving accep

Hispanics resides.

Attending the Spanish-speaking Masses at St. Francis Xavier Church on Sundays is often enough to make Danny Muñoz, another Community of Hope parishioner, feel at home. He said he enjoys the festivity of these Masses, which feature music with guitars and maracas.

"Spanish Mass is more alive. It puts blood into your body; it gives you life," said Danny, 15, whose parents were born in the Dominican Republic. He was born in New York City.

Although Hoylan and Ricardo said they sometimes feel alienated, they offset those feelings by observing their cultural religious customs.

Hoylan, who was born in Rochester, has made two trips in recent years to her parents' homeland of Nicaragua. She observed that Nicaraguans "celebrate a lot of religious holidays, more than the Americans."

"They parade statues through the streets and have fireworks and food," said Hoylan, from St. Jude's Church in Gates. Hoylan added that groups of townspeople travel from home to home during the Christmas season, acting out the Nativity scene.

Ricardo said that Mexicans even turn such somber observances as All Souls Day, Nov. 2, into festive occasions.

"We have big parties," said Ricardo, from Brockport's Church of the Nativity. He explained that Mexicans in Brockport celebrate the lives of loved ones — rather than mourn their departures — on what he calls the "Day of Death."

Puerto Rican holiday customs, also, differ from American traditions, the Vegas said. For instance, Christmas presents are normally exchanged on the Feast of the Three Kings, Jan. 6.

And during Holy Week in Puerto Rico, Maria said, "Everyone had to carry small crosses through the towns for the Stations of the Cross." She added that Puerto Rican natives not only observe Stations of the Cross on Good Friday, but on every other

day of Holy

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