

DIOCESAN NEWS

Diocesan group wants to aid victims of abuse

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

A subcommittee of the Diocesan Women's Commission is currently exploring how parishes can aid women facing domestic violence, according to Gloria Ulterino, director of the Diocesan Office of Women in Church and Society.

The 12-member Subcommittee on Poverty and Violence has been meeting monthly since fall, 1996, said its chairwoman, Judy Nichols, pastoral associate at Sacred Heart Church in Auburn.

Both Ulterino and Nichols said the subcommittee would be releasing a pastoral plan of action by spring of next year. Ulterino said she wanted pastoral leaders to know it was important to address the problem of domestic violence openly.

"If the silence gets broken from the pulpit, it's like saying ... 'Someone understands. We can talk about this. You can get help,'" she said.

Ulterino and Nichols were interviewed by the *Catholic Courier* in the days after both women attended a day-long conference on domestic violence held at Third Presbyterian Church in Rochester on Tuesday, Oct. 28.

The conference was organized by Alternatives for Battered Women, Inc., a Rochester-based agency, and co-sponsored by the diocese as well as the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester and a number of Catholic, Protestant and Jewish congregations, and other groups. The conference was designed to help religious congregations deal with the domestic violence issue.

Paralleling the conference's purpose, Ulterino noted that the Subcommittee on Poverty and Violence may eventually suggest such actions for parishes as publicizing domestic abuse "hotlines" or phone numbers for referral to neighboring agencies that deal with the issue. For example, she said, abuse victims can find out what help is available in their area by calling the New

York State Adult Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-942-6906 (in Spanish - 1-800-942-6908).

The subcommittee has drafted a consensus statement that will be sent to Bishop Matthew H. Clark for his comments at the next meeting of the Diocesan Women's Commission, slated for mid-November, Nichols said. She added that the statement's conclusions were drawn from surveys and research the subcommittee conducted earlier this year on how parishes respond to domestic violence.

Nichols provided the *Catholic Courier* with a copy of the consensus statement draft, which concludes:

- Parish pastoral staffs "are seriously unprepared to address and respond to violence against women."
- "It is very rare in the parish that people come forward for help."
- The church has "a shallow understanding of violence against women."
- "Both church and society have an unwritten rule: 'Don't talk about this.'"
- The church "is not doing a good job of working to prevent violence against women."

Both Ulterino and Nichols said that many parishes do refer battered women to appropriate agencies when asked to do so, and that some parishes directly support agencies that deal with domestic violence. However, they stressed that the diocese needs to provide far more support to all its parishes in order to provide a broader-based solution to the problem.

As for the Oct. 28 conference at Third Presbyterian, an estimated 180 people attended the event, including Bishop Matthew H. Clark who said the opening prayer.

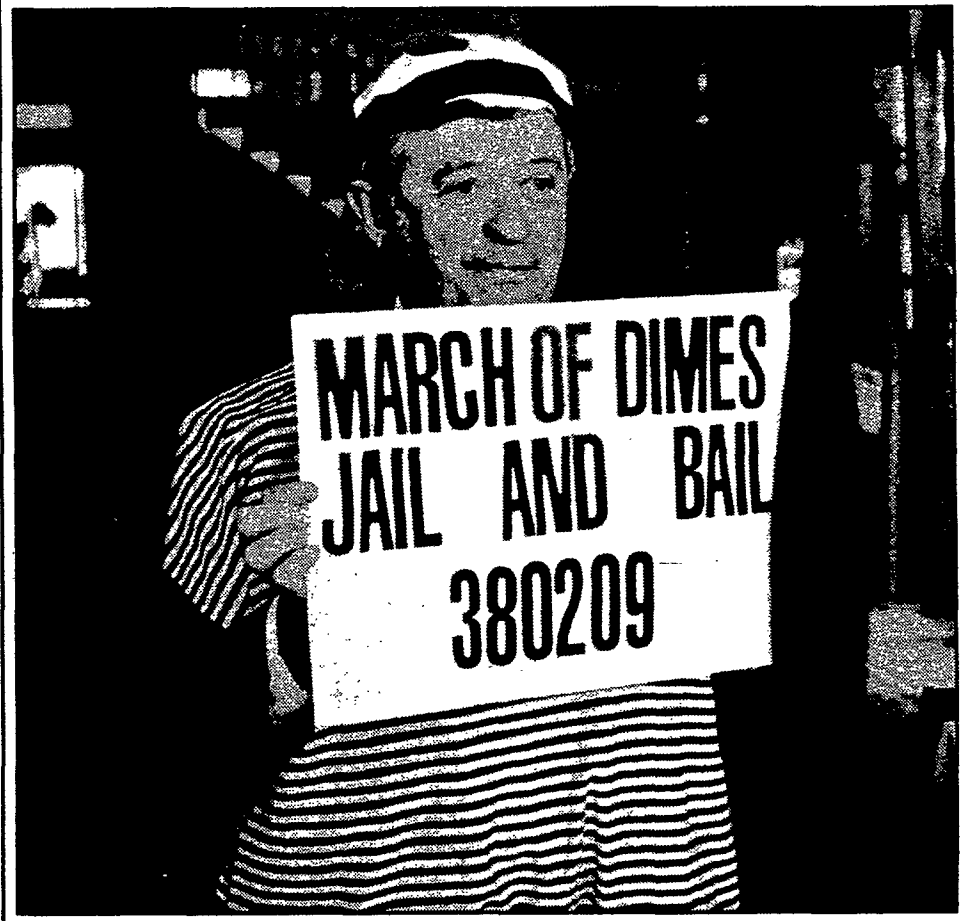
Among the many topics discussed were the similarities and differences between various ethnic groups and religions in dealing with domestic violence, according to Xochitl Palacios, Hispanic ministry coordinator at St. Francis DeSales in Geneva. Palacios participated in a panel discussion



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

"Plea" for charity

St. Andrew School principal Norm Fagnan was "arrested" by March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation volunteer Kristin Wallace (left), Oct. 30. He was sent to Pittsford Place Mall for a mug shot (below), and had to collect \$250 in donations from friends to pay "bail" for his release.



on the issue.

While Ulterino, Nichols and Palacios all stressed that domestic violence cuts across ethnic, racial and economic boundaries, Palacios pointed out that each ethnic group's women may deal with the issue in their own way.

For example, she said, some Hispanic women may see going public about their husband's beatings as a violation of their marriage vows, she said.

"Hispanic women don't usually go, 'You

just beat me up. I'm going to call the police,'" Palacios said.

Ulterino said the conference showed her that abuse "is everywhere and it is in everybody's faith community." She added that domestic violence is a highly misunderstood phenomenon.

"It's not about poor communication," she said. "It's not the fact that romance has gone out with the wind. It's about power and control — about how one person tries to control another."

Director advances Synod Goal Three's aims on many fronts

By Lee Strong
Associate editor

Gloria Ulterino enjoys the opportunity to occasionally attend the Chicago church where her daughter is a member.

The church community, Ulterino observed, reflects the culturally and ethnically diverse neighborhood in which it is located.

"You meet and are greeted by people who are every shade and color of skin," Ulterino noted. "My response to this is, this is God's people. This is the way it's supposed to be."

Ulterino's trying to help the Diocese of Rochester be more diverse and inclusive, especially when it comes to women. Since October 1996, she has been the director of the Office of Women in Church and Society, an office funded with Thanks Giving Appeal money.

The office was created as a result of the goals set by the diocese's 1993 Synod, Ulterino noted.

"It really came out of the voices of the people of the diocese," she observed,

pointing out that the goal emerged through discussions at parish and regional meetings, and then was voted one of the five priorities set for the diocese by delegates at the Oct. 1-3, 1993, General Synod.

Synod Goal Three — "To recognize and value the dignity of women in church and society" — calls for the inclusion of women at all levels of the diocese; attention to language and symbols to ensure that they reflect respect for and inclusion of women; and for active involvement by the diocese in issues of social and economic injustice that affect women.

Ulterino works closely with the diocesan Women's Commission to put the synod goal into effect. She noted that she is part of a commission group that has been studying the annual reports parishes submit detailing how they are implementing the synod goals. In terms of Goal Three, four areas have emerged in those reports as drawing attention or raising concerns: violence and poverty; spirituality; leadership; and inclusive language.

She and the commission have been addressing each of those issues, Ulterino reported. At Keuka Days (Aug. 18-20) for parish ministers, for example, she and the commission sponsored a number of workshops on such issues as women in leadership, domestic violence and inclusive language. The Women's Commission has also put out a resource binder that includes "All God's People," an adult education series focusing on inclusive language.

Meanwhile, Ulterino also helped to plan

the Oct. 28 Conference on Domestic Violence in Rochester (see related story); has been involved with a series of workshops on preaching and produces regular "homily hints" distributed through diocesan Centralized Mail; and has begun workshops on developing women's spirituality groups. In addition, she has been meeting with various diocesan and parish groups "because it's important to establish relationships with people." Indeed, one of her goals for the coming year is "to continue to get out there and meet with as many people as possible."

The response to her efforts have been positive, she noted. At the Keuka Days, for example, participants who attended the workshops she and the commission offered said that "they were opened up to

something new or on a deeper level. There was something to bring home and to talk about in their parish faith community," she reported.

In addition to continuing current workshops and program, Ulterino said she is continuing to promote inclusive language and "All God's People" — copies of which, she noted, are available through her office — and hopes to nurture discussion of ordination of women to the permanent diaconate.

While pleased with what has been accomplished in her first year, Ulterino said there is more to do.

"I feel like I've just begun," she said. "I think there has been some good beginnings, but there's so much more that I keep learning all the time."

Obituary

Sister Mary David Powers, SSND; 77

Sister Mary David Powers (formerly Sister Davidica), SSND, a teacher at St. Joseph's High School, Rochester, from 1968 to 1971, died on Oct. 7, 1997, in Wilton, Conn. She was 77.

Born in Somerville, Mass., Sister Mary David professed as a School Sister of Notre Dame in August, 1949. She subsequently taught at Catholic schools in New Jersey, Massachusetts and New York until 1992.

She worked at her order's motherhouse

in Wilton from 1993 to 1997, when she became ill and entered Lourdes Health Care Center there.

A Mass of Christian burial for Sister Mary David was celebrated in the motherhouse chapel on Oct. 10, 1997. Interment took place at St. Mary Cemetery in Bethel.

Donations in Sister Mary David's honor may be made to the SSND Development Fund, 345 Belden Hill Road, Wilton, Conn. 06897.