

Crime-weary churches seek area improvement

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Eileen Dillio, a parishioner at Our Lady of Good Counsel Church, 640 Brooks Ave., wanted city officials to know she was fed up with crime on and around Chili Avenue. Her teenage sons attend youth group meetings at St. Augustine's Church, 440 Chili Ave.

"I am afraid to bring them here," she said at a public meeting with city officials in St. Augustine's on Jan. 22. "I am afraid to leave them here at night."

The meeting was organized by Interfaith Action, a community action federation of 11 Catholic and Protestant churches in Rochester. It includes the Roman Catholic Community of the 19th Ward cluster: St. Augustine's, Good Counsel and St. Monica's Church, 831 Genesee St.

Members of Interfaith Action, including Dillio, spoke at the meeting along with officials representing the city's council, mayoral office and police.

Attended by 124 people, the meeting was a follow-up to an Interfaith Action meeting last September. City officials made a number of promises in September to revitalize the Chili Avenue area, which residents said was plagued by crime and building deterioration. Interfaith Action members held the follow-up meeting to criticize what they saw as the city officials' failure to fulfill some of the promises.

Interfaith Action members told city of-



Greg Francis/Staff photographer
Rochester City Councilwoman Maxine Childress Brown, left, fields questions from concerned residents at St. Augustine Church Jan. 22. At right is Paul Leech of the Roman Catholic Community of the 19th Ward, and Sister Camplon Bush, SSJ.

ficials Jan. 22 that fear of crime was a prime reason people wanted to move out of the Chili Avenue neighborhood, much less visit it. One audience member said his family had been held up at gunpoint recently, while another said her son had witnessed a shooting.

To exemplify the point, Deacon Brian McNulty, of the Roman Catholic Commu-

nity of the 19th Ward, spoke about Elisha House, a home for the dying jointly operated by St. Augustine's and St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, and directed by his wife, Episcopal Deacon Lynne McNulty.

"We rely on volunteers from many parts of the community to come here," Deacon McNulty said of Elisha House, which is next-door to St. Augustine's. "When they find out the address ... they think 'Uh, that's a bad part of town.'"

"We have lost volunteers who say 'I can't come here,'" he added.

Rochester Police Lt. Sherman L. Scott, Genesee Section, acknowledged that spontaneous "crimes of opportunity" — purse snatchings, stick-ups and car thefts — continue to take place in the area. However, he added that over the last several months, police had arrested 25 people in the area, including a number of drug dealers, and had had success in discouraging loitering on Chili Avenue corners.

Interfaith Action members also focused on a city council member's promise last September to work for increased street lighting in the area. Dillio wondered aloud about why the Chili Avenue area had yet to see its street lighting improved. Interfaith Action members like Dillio see such an im-

provement as a way to discourage criminals from operating in the area.

"I don't understand what the problem is, what the holdup is," she said to the city officials. "I just want you to turn on the lights."

Rochester City Councilwoman Maxine Childress Brown said that she had found the process to improve the area street lighting fraught with bureaucratic and technical delays. However, she said that lighting improvements should begin by mid-February.

Interfaith Action members also criticized city officials for their handling of "Operation Uplift" on Nov. 19. Operation Uplift is a community improvement program that involves several city, as well as Monroe County, agencies. Agency employees visit a neighborhood on a certain day, concentrating on such tasks as cleaning the streets and trimming trees. The city's Neighborhood Empowerment Team (NET) administers the program.

Interfaith Action members said the Chili Avenue Operation Uplift last November was poorly publicized, and that only a few agency leaders bothered to show up for it. NET administrator F. Glenn King, who oversaw the effort, said he had difficulty coordinating all the agencies that should have been involved, and he admitted that the effort was a "failure."

"It was designed poorly," King said, adding that he wanted to slate another Operation Uplift for the area.

When pressed by Interfaith Action members to commit to an Operation Uplift by the end of February, King said it would better to wait until weather conditions improved, but he added that an Operation Uplift might be possible as early as March. He and Interfaith Action members met after the meeting, and will meet over the next several weeks to discuss Operation Uplift.

Many in the audience seemed skeptical of the statements made by Brown and King at the meeting. Paul Leech, an Interfaith Action officer-at-large, said the group would take a "wait-and-see attitude" toward them.

"My family has lived here for 15 years," Dillio said. "I'm really getting tired of all the promises that people make to us, saying they're going to make it a better place to live."

Obituary

Fr. John Whalen, longtime pastor

Father John S. Whalen, a diocesan priest for nearly six decades, died Jan. 26, 1998, at Rochester General Hospital. He was 85.

Father Whalen had resided at St. Thomas More Church in Brighton since his 1982 retirement. He was also the longtime pastor at Our Lady of Mercy Church in Greece and St. Patrick's Church in Mount Morris.

A Rochester native, Father Whalen was baptized at the former St. Patrick's Cathedral and confirmed at Blessed Sacrament Church. Following his 1939 ordination, he became assistant pastor at St. Jerome's Church in East Rochester. He remained in there until 1943, when he began a three-year stint as chaplain in the U.S. Navy.

Following his military duty, Father Whalen was assistant pastor at Holy Rosary in Rochester (1946-51); St. Mary's in Elmira (1951-53); St. Lucy in Rochester (1953-54); and St. John the Evangelist (Humboldt Street) in Rochester (1954-58).

Father Whalen's first pastorate was at Greece's Our Lady of Mercy, whose founding pastor, Father Michael O'Brien, had died suddenly during the parish's first year. Father Whalen served at the parish from 1958 to 1974, overseeing development of the parish's buildings and grounds.

"He pretty much organized the whole parish from that point on. He left the parish in fine shape, really," said a close friend, Father James F. Slattery, who had known Father Whalen since the late 1920s.

Upon leaving Our Lady of Mercy, Father Whalen became pastor of St. Patrick's in Mount Morris. He remained there until retiring in 1982.

Auxiliary Bishop Dennis W. Hickey, another close friend, said that Father Whalen's blunt honesty was one of his most notable characteristics.

"You knew where he stood on everything," Bishop Hickey said.

Father Whalen also remained active in his priestly ministry during retirement, said Sue Morrison, a secretary at St. Thomas More. She noted that Father Whalen dutifully celebrated daily Mass right up until the day he went into the hospital earlier this month.

"I will miss him terribly. He was very good to me," Morrison commented.

A Mass of the High Priest was set for Jan. 28 at St. Thomas More, with Bishop Hickey to serve as celebrant and homilist. The funeral Mass was to take place Jan. 29 at St. Thomas More, with Bishop Matthew H. Clark serving as celebrant and Father Slattery as homilist. Interment was planned for Rochester's Holy Sepulchre Cemetery.

Father Whalen is survived by two sisters, Sister Mary Louis Whalen, SSND, and Sister Ruth Whalen, RSCJ; and several nieces and nephews.

- Mike Latona

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MONDAY	7:30 p.m.	St. Jude's Church	4160 Lyell Rd., Rochester	716-241-4322
WEDNESDAY	7:30 p.m.	Holy Family Home School Assoc.	680 Jay St., Rochester	716-226-8900
	7:30 p.m.	Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church/St. Andrew School	621 Portland, Rochester	716-226-8488
SATURDAY	7:30 p.m.	Good Shepherd Church	1288 E. Henrietta Rd., Rochester	716-354-8516
	8:00 p.m.	St. Thomas the Apostle Church	41 Cambridge Dr., Rochester	716-226-2843

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