

DIOCESAN NEWS



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Auxiliary Bishop Dennis Hickey, left, begins Mass with Greek Melkite Bishop John Elya Feb. 8 at St. Nicholas the Wonderworker Parish outside Rochester.

Melkite bishop praises relations in Rochester

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

GATES — Strong ties between Eastern and Latin Rite Catholics were celebrated when the bishop of all Greek Melkite parishes in this country presided at a liturgy Feb. 8, at St. Nicholas the Wonderworker Parish.

Jewels glistened from the crown of Bishop John Elya as he addressed worshippers who gathered in the former St. Jude's Church. The bishop's appearance marked his first visit to the St. Nicholas the Wonderworker community in three years. Auxiliary Bishop Dennis W. Hickey, of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, served as a concelebrant.

"I am very honored to have our other bishop, Dennis, here," Bishop Elya remarked to the congregation.

During his homily, Bishop Elya — noting that St. Nicholas is the only Greek Melkite parish located within the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester's boundaries — commented, "The humble reed lives in the shadow of the mighty oak."

Yet he pointed out that St. Nicholas, an Eastern Rite church, works harmoniously with the local Roman Catholic community. For instance, he noted that St. Jude's Parish has graciously lent its former church to St. Nicholas until the Greek Melkite parish's new church is constructed.

The Feb. 8 service — known as a "divine liturgy" — lasted two hours and was attended by approximately 100 people. Parishioners appeared to be enthused by their bishop's presence during the service and the luncheon that followed, noted Father Kenneth Sherman, pastor of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker.

"This kind of gives them some recognition for their efforts," Father Sherman remarked.

Because the 43 parish communities in the Greek Melkite Eparchy of Newton, Mass., are spread around the country, Father Sherman explained that Bishop Elya does not visit the Rochester area very often. During lunch, the bishop jokingly threatened that he won't visit the St.

Nicholas community again until its new church has been erected.

"That's the challenge. Otherwise I'll come at night and they won't see me," said Bishop Elya, a native of Lebanon who has resided in the United States since 1958.

St. Nicholas' new building will be located at 1492 Spencerport Road in Gates. Although the rectory has been constructed on the site and is occupied, groundbreaking for the church has not yet taken place.

John Sarkis, a St. Nicholas parishioner and coordinator of the building project, noted that about 30 percent of the church's estimated \$600,000 cost has already been secured through donations and pledges. Sarkis added that ground will hopefully be broken before this summer, with the church to be completed within three months' time.

Approximately 75 families are associated with St. Nicholas the Wonderworker. Most of these Greek Melkites are of Lebanese descent. Others come from Palestinian and Egyptian backgrounds.

As an Eastern Rite faith, Greek Melkites follow the traditions of the Byzantine Rite, which was developed during the fourth century when the Roman Empire split into east and west.

Although Eastern and Latin Rite liturgical services follow the same basic form, there are some noticeable differences: Eastern Rite services are called divine liturgies, not Masses; priests face away from the congregation during divine liturgies; Eastern Rite liturgies contain more singing than in the Latin Rite; and Eastern Rite Catholics depict religious images chiefly through iconography (paintings), whereas Latin Rite Catholics employ statues.

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Speaker: Patients live longer, but troubled by AIDS stigma

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

GENEVA — Attitudes toward people who have AIDS have changed somewhat for the better since the disease first began making headlines in the early 1980s, according to Alice Robeson, AIDS training coordinator at Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester.

But, unfortunately, Robeson said, too many still view people with AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) as unworthy of the compassion they might extend to people with other diseases.

"There are still people who rather than baking casseroles when when finding out your loved ones died of AIDS, ask you to move out of the neighborhood," Robeson said. "Yes, jerks get AIDS, but so do nice people."

Robeson, a clinical educator at Strong, made her remarks Feb. 10 during her keynote speech at the "Day of Sharing," an all-day conference on "Human Immunodeficiency Virus — HIV — and AIDS." According to statistics provided at the conference, 543 people are living with AIDS in the Finger Lakes Region.

The conference, held at the restaurant Club 86 on Avenue E, was sponsored by the Diocese of Rochester and Catholic Charities Community & Residential Services. Attended by 35 people, the conference was designed to help participants formulate how the diocese can better respond to AIDS.

Robeson noted that because HIV — the virus that causes AIDS — is often acquired through sexual activity or intravenous drug use, those who have HIV are still stigmatized as "sinners." Yet, she said, other diseases may also be linked to unwise behaviors, but do not carry the same stigma.

"How many of you, when someone you love has a heart attack, goes to them and say: 'You deserved it! Now, you know better!'" she asked rhetorically.

Conference information explained HIV is transmitted in the following ways:

- Through unprotected sex — vaginal,

oral or anal — with anyone who has the virus.

- By sharing needles or syringes with some who is HIV-positive.

- From an HIV-infected woman to her child during pregnancy or childbirth, or during breastfeeding.

- From transplanted tissue or organs with HIV, or from HIV-infected blood, blood products or plasma. This form of transmission has been rare since 1985, when blood centers began routinely screening donated blood for HIV.

People who have sexually transmitted diseases, and women on the birth control pill, are at a greater risk of contracting HIV, Robeson added. Steering clear of intravenous drug use and sex are the best ways to avoid contracting HIV, she said.

However, she maintained that all people should learn about how to have what is called protected sex, and other ways of preventing HIV transmission. She acknowledged that some church communities do not want to publicly discuss protected sex for fear of being seen as endorsing sex outside of marriage. Yet, such worries are unfounded, she stressed.

"Information, per se, does not endorse or condone behavior," Robeson said during a follow-up interview to her talk.

Robeson shared with her audience some good news about AIDS, pointing out that contracting HIV is "no longer a death-sentence."

In the past, 95 percent of people who contracted HIV would develop AIDS within 15 years, she said. However, in recent years drugs have been developed that attack HIV's ability to reproduce itself within the body, she noted, though no drugs actually kill HIV in the body. Combinations of these drugs are allowing people with HIV to live much longer than in years past, she said.

Robeson said she was available to present educational programs at parishes, and could be contacted at 716/275-7655.

Diocesan Catholics wishing to learn more about HIV/AIDS can also contact Jane Hallinen at 716/339-9800, ext. 242.

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