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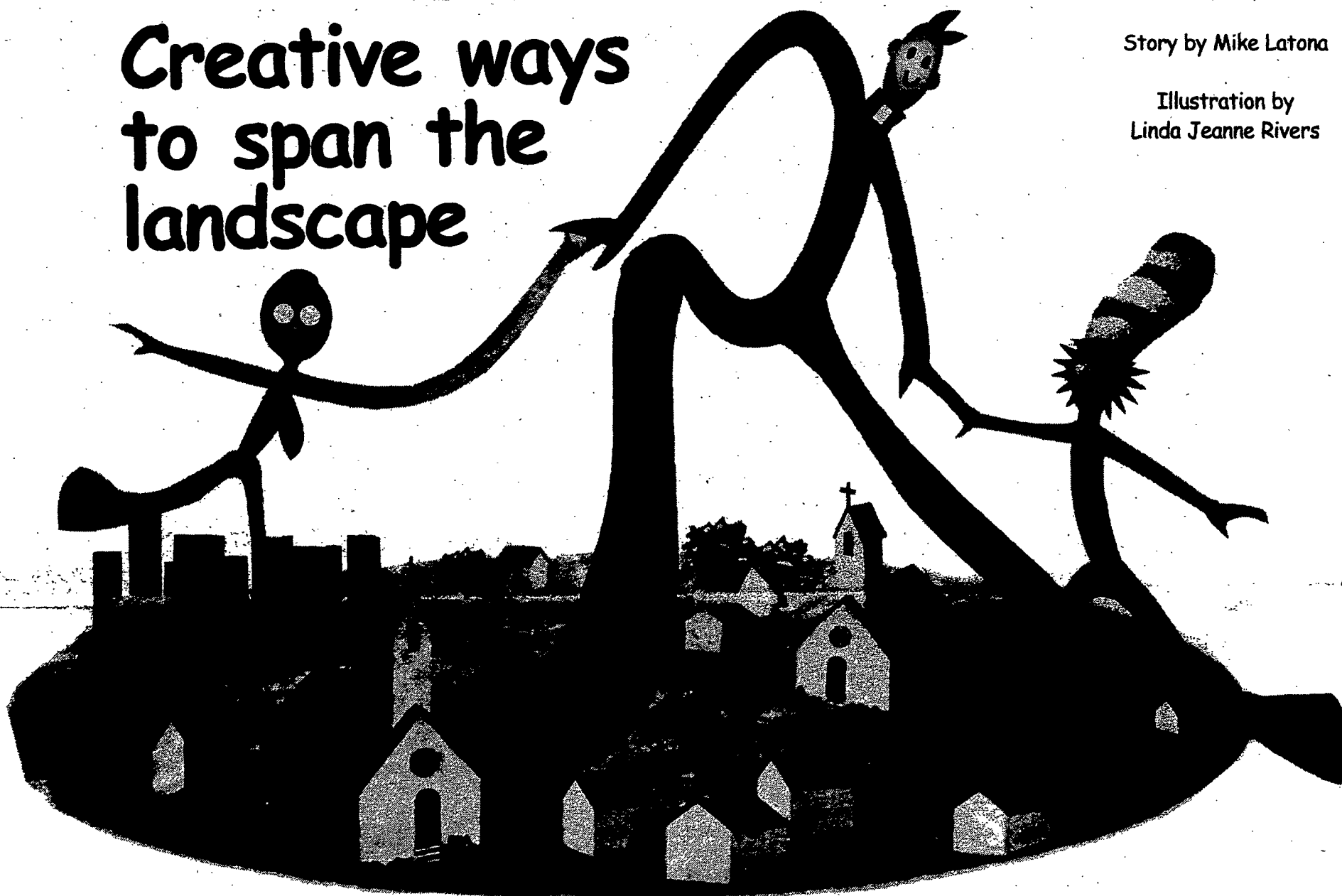
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Creative ways to span the landscape

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Illustration by
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Planning process stretches resources

In many ways, the Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium process has generated creative methods for parishes to stretch staff and financial resources to a wider community.

- Parishes in Tompkins and western Livingston counties have proposed hiring youth ministers to oversee all the faith communities in their respective regions.

- Eight faith communities in western Livingston County are expected to establish a collaborative contingency fund, using 1 percent of Sunday collections.

- Eight faith communities in the Greece-Hilton-Hamlin-Spencerport-Brockport area of Monroe County plan to share a young-adult advisory board.

- Clusters are being formed this summer in the Owego-Newark Valley-Cattonk section of Tioga County, and in the Dansville-Wayland-Cohocton-Perkinsville section of Steuben and Livingston counties.

Despite these innovative approaches, however, such factors as declining Mass attendance and the shortage of priests mean some parishes have problems that the planning process can't easily correct. In a six-church section of southern Cayuga County, for instance, as many as three churches could close over the next five years — a process that could begin this summer.

Good or bad, many faith communities face significant changes as their 1997 planning process moves toward implementation of five-year plans beginning July 1, 1998.

"Every parish, even if you don't think you have a problem, is involved in the discussions," said William Pickett, diocesan director of planning. "As the number of priests continues to decline, this process is going to affect everybody."

According to the diocesan Office of Priest Personnel, there are currently 180 full-time diocesan priests serving approximately 200 faith communities. Pickett noted that based on current retirement and ordination projections, that number will shrink by 18 priests over the next five years. The figure does not include priests who die during that time, he added.

What it involves

The planning process covers 35 geographical groupings of parishes and such other faith communities as campus and prison ministries; hospital chapels; migrant communities; and women's religious communities.

The first stage has involved 12 groups that have been planning since last summer. Fourteen more groups begin their process this year; eight in 1999; and one in 2000. Planning groups are composed of pastors, staff members and parishioners who have met at both the parish and regional level.

According to Pickett, most of the 1997 planning groups have submitted their final draft to his office for review or are close to doing so.

Pickett added that Bishop Matthew H. Clark must approve final drafts when a parish changes canonical status; if a staffing change leaves a parish without a resident priest; or if other changes would involve considerable increases in parish or diocesan funding.

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