

# Directors share concerns of serving Hispanics

By Kathleen Schiwar  
Staff writer

GREECE—Few people in the church realize that by 2020 or sooner, half the Roman Catholics in the United States will be of Hispanic origin, according to Msgr. Aniceto Villamide, vicar for Hispanics in the Bridgeport, Conn., Diocese.

"The resources are not there. I don't think we are prepared to serve the challenge of these numbers," he said during the 21st annual Northeast Conference of Directors of the Hispanic Apostolate, held May 5-7 at the Borromeo Prayer Center. The monsignor is president of the conference.

"So the task of the conference is to open ways, to create consciousness, to make people aware, to find ways to serve those people," he said. "If we do not serve them, other churches are going to serve them. If we do not attend to their spiritual needs, other churches are going to do it."

Of the 32 dioceses in the northeast region (from Maine to Virginia) that have a Hispanic apostolate or office, 24 were represented at the Rochester meeting, including directors born in the United States, Spain, Colombia, Cuba and Puerto Rico.

During the meeting, they planned for Encuentro 2000, a national gathering of Hispanics and other cultural groups scheduled for July 2000 and to be hosted in Los Angeles by the U.S. bishops.

They also shared concerns about new immigration laws. And they talked of hopes for Amnesty 2000 — an attempt to free from deportation fellow Hispanics who have worked for years in the United States but have no papers.

"The new immigration laws are affecting our people very badly," Msgr. Villamide said. He noted the Hispanic office directors knew many people who have been forced to leave the country.

"I am thinking of one family in my parish," he said. "She had to leave; he stayed with the two kids born here. And she is having a difficult time to come back."

Hispanic immigrants often approach the ministers for advice, he said, and "Most times we feel very frustrated because there is nothing we can do."

Immigration law revisions of 1996 set a



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Deacon Carlos Vargas of St. Francis of Assisi Church, Rochester, left, listens to Bishop Matthew Clark at a Mass May 6 at the Pastoral Center, during a meeting of the Northeast Conference of Directors of the Hispanic Apostolate.

penalty for undocumented people, according to the Legal Aid Society. Under the revisions, people who have lived here illegally 180 days must wait three years to return to this country, or 10 years if they've lived here illegally for more than a year.

Msgr. Villamide has hopes for Amnesty 2000, a project being developed for the church's Jubilee 2000 year. Amnesty has its roots way back in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the monsignor noted, with jubilees being a time for forgiveness.

"We are not so stupid or naive to think we have the power (to free all undocumented Hispanics from the law)," he said. "But we have to think how we can serve and help these thousands of people."

Perhaps undocumented Hispanics who have lived here for a certain number of years and are making a contribution could be allowed to stay, for example, he said.

"If the whole church starts to talk about that, we will create a consciousness," he said. "If bishops start talking about the issue and start to press on this issue, I think possibly something can be done."

Five or 10 years ago, the majority of Hispanics in this region were from the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, he said. But then more Central and South American Hispanics, as well as Mexicans, began mov-

ing here, he said. "So the immigration issue is quite new for our region."

He noted many undocumented Hispanics, many of whom are former students and tourists who overstayed their visas, face many injustices: Lawyers promise help they can't promise, employers pay unfair wages.

"It is a big problem of our ministry, the poverty of these people," Msgr. Villamide said.

One way the church will increasingly reach out to Hispanics in general is through its Northeast Institute for Pastoral Formation, according to the directors. Opened in January with offices in New York and Washington, it is sponsored by the northeast region's bishops.

Margarita Roque, former Hispanic ministry director for the Washington, D.C., Archdiocese, is now director of the institute. Its mission is to train Hispanic lay people, especially at the parish level.

Although St. Bernard's Institute does offer a program for Hispanic ministry, Roque noted, "No diocese has everything."

The Hispanic Pastoral Institute at SBI offers a three-year program and eight courses, including Scripture and sacra-

ments classes.

Sister Pat Schoelles, president of SBI, said that despite the range of courses offered at the local institute, "We're hoping to do some networking with (the Northeast Institute) to help us." She particularly mentioned migrant ministry training.

The Northeast Institute has courses covering the gamut, from catechesis and evangelization to family/youth ministry and pastoral care of the sick, as well as ministry among migrant workers. The institute sends out teams of professors to a diocese for two or three convocations.

"The impact has been tremendous," Roque said during a conference break. Already the Boston Archdiocese has taken advantage of the training, sending 67 people to courses, she said.

"We pray together, think together and grow together," Roque said, explaining the approach is not lecturing, but a church experience. "We want to make people realize all Catholics have a mission to proclaim the Good News through the sacraments."

Although 76 percent of Hispanics who are born Catholic remain Catholic, she said, 24 percent don't.

"If we work well in the Catholic Church especially with Hispanic people, we still have a wonderful chance with the Hispanic community," she said. "We can make it."

Hispanic Catholics have faced not only proselytizing by various sects, she said, but also unwelcoming Catholic parishes. "That is one of the elements. We cannot deny that," she said. Learning Spanish is not necessary to be welcoming, she added.

"I always say much more important is the attitude of the person, than the language the person speaks," she commented. "A priest may not speak Spanish but if he is really welcoming, he will attract these people. ... It is your attitude, smile, the leadership you establish in a parish."

"The language of the heart is the language that counts."

The Hispanic directors held their meeting in Rochester to honor Brother Luis Ruberte, H.Ch., outgoing 17-year director of the Rochester diocesan apostolate.

"We love him dearly," Roque said.

## Livingston outreach opened

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

Catholic Charities of Livingston County has established a Hispanic/Latino Outreach Program coordinated by Robert Andino, a 46-year-old bilingual native of San Turke, Puerto Rico, who has lived in New York state since 1977.

Andino is working 10 hours per week at the agency's Mount Morris office, and is also a student at Genesee Community College studying to be an alcohol and substance abuse counselor. Andino's hours at the agency are from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Monday and Wednesday. He can be contacted at Catholic Charities at 716/658-4466.

The outreach program, begun in March, is designed to make Hispanics in Livingston County more aware of the services available to them through Catholic Charities, according to Andino and Tim McMahon, executive director of the agency. McMahon said he wanted Catholic Charities to work with other social service agencies in the area to reach both the settled Hispanic population and migrant Hispanics who work in the county. Andino added that he is "starting from scratch" and is still developing the content of the outreach program.

McMahon estimated that more than 1,000 of Livingston County 63,000 citizens are Hispanic. Most are from Puerto Rico, although a number are second- and

third-generation residents. McMahon added that language and cultural barriers between the Hispanics and the rest of the county's residents have kept Hispanics somewhat isolated.

"You get the impression that Hispanic families tend to keep a very, very low profile, and tend to develop their own networks," McMahon said.

Andino's comments echoed those of McMahon.

"Most of the Spanish-speaking came directly from Puerto Rico, and some of them don't speak English," he said.

Andino noted that he has often served as an informal liaison between Spanish-speakers in Mount Morris and the English-speaking population since his family moved there in the late 1970s.

"I've been doing this for 20 years, and now I'm getting paid for it," he said with a laugh.

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## Recognizing

\* Deacon Thomas Carr, director of the Diocesan Office of Deacon Personnel, was elected treasurer of the National Association of Diaconate Directors, during NADD's meeting April 22-25 in San Diego.

\* Karen Franz, general manager and editor of the *Catholic Courier*, was recently reelected to the board of directors of the Catholic Press Association. Currently treasurer of the CPA, she is running unopposed for the office of vice president.

\* Virginia V. David was named 1998 Social Worker of the Year by the Genesee Valley Division of the National Association of Social Workers. David is associate professor of social work at Nazareth College of Rochester.

\* Members of the St. Stanislaus Parish's St. Ann Society prepared dinner for the families at Rochester's Ronald McDonald House May 3. The house offers hospitality to families whose children are under treatment for serious illness.

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