

# DIOCESAN NEWS

## Parishioners fight strip club plans

By Lee Strong  
Associate editor

ROCHESTER — There's no denying Bernardine Gordon's determination.

"We don't want it. We don't need it. It's not going to do anything for our neighborhood," she declared to more than 125 people gathered at Church of the Most Precious Blood July 27 to protest plans for a strip club near the church.

The meeting was intended to prepare for an Aug. 3 meeting of Rochester's Planning Commission. That is when the commission will consider a special permit application for Edward Geska and Ronald Zavaglia to open Centerfolds, an adult entertainment club, at 1485 Mt. Read Blvd.

Speakers at the July 27 meeting voiced concerns that the club will lead to an increase in crime and prostitution in the neighborhood, and adversely affect other businesses and property values.

At the meeting, people volunteered to take petitions to their home churches, to take part in a door-to-door information and petition drive, and to attend and speak at the Aug. 3 meeting.

Efforts to fight the club began after Gordon received a notice July 21 announcing the planning commission hearing con-

cerning the club, which would be just three-tenths of a mile from Most Precious Blood Church on Stenson Street, and half a mile from her Lexington Avenue home.

"I was stunned. Outraged," Gordon recalled. "I have three grandchildren living with me. I don't want any of this in my neighborhood."

She remembered that parishioners of Holy Rosary Church on Lexington Avenue successfully fought a topless club in 1995, so she contacted the church for advice. She was referred to Interfaith Action, a community support and organizing group whose staff member Brian Kane provided assistance with the fight against Centerfolds.

Gordon's son-in-law, Jim Shepard, who has been overseeing the door-to-door efforts and petition drive, noted that even though they had only begun circulating petitions July 22, by the July 27 meeting they had more than 300 signatures.

As he was going door-to-door, Shepard said, he was surprised to find that many people had not known about the club.

"They were totally shocked," he said.

Gordon noted, however, that as word has gotten out, people have begun to act, pointing to the unexpected number of people who came to the July 27 meeting and the

number of telephone calls of support she has received.

"It's been fantastic," she said. She is not deterred by public comments from city officials that the permit will probably be approved because the club would be in one of the city's two areas allowing such clubs.

"If they feel they can walk all over us without opposition, they're wrong," Gordon declared. "We're going to fight this."

Rochester City Councilman Robert Stevenson pointed out at the July 27 meeting that foes of the club have grounds to fight it. He cited part of Rochester's City Code covering special permits such as that needed for the club; one consideration is whether the proposed operation would "contribute to the general welfare of the neighborhood or community."

"I maintain that this use does not contribute to the general welfare of the neighborhood or community," asserted Stevenson, a Sacred Heart Cathedral parishioner.

Gordon said that if the group should fail to halt the planning board's approval, they will consider legal action.

But, she added, she is optimistic that the issue will not come to that.

"We're very hopeful that they are going to listen to us," Gordon said.



Greg Francis/Staff photographer  
Jim Shepard hands his wife Maureen a signed petition against a proposed strip club near Church of the Most Precious Blood July 22.

## Bishop Clark co-leading 11-day interfaith mission to Israel

By Kathleen Schwarz  
Staff writer

A group of 24 Rochester area people, many long involved in dialogue as Christians and Jews, were scheduled to head to Israel July 30 for an 11-day pilgrimage to further strengthen their bonds.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark, Rabbi Alan Katz of Temple Sinai in Brighton, and Rochester Mayor William A. Johnson Jr., an American Baptist, were designated leaders of the group.

The mayor's father died July 26, but after funeral services in Washington, D.C., he planned to try to meet up with the group in Israel.

The Rochester Interfaith Leadership Mission to Israel is sponsored by the Commission on Christian Jewish Relations, of the Jewish Community Federation of Greater Rochester and the Greater Rochester Community of Churches.

For some of the pilgrims, such as Deacon Brian McNulty, diocesan ecumenical officer, the trip will be their first to Israel. For others, it will be a return trip — Rabbi Katz' 17th, for example.

Bishop Clark is returning for a fourth visit.

However, the bishop noted, "The principal difference is this is consciously, deliberately, systematically an interfaith trip for (Christians) and Jewish people for the precise purpose of understanding others' faiths and deepening relationships."

"I think it's a wonderful idea," he said. "This is one more way of deepening understanding of one another's traditions."

The trip is packed with tours, meetings, talks and studies, focusing on religion and history, the Middle East peace process and Israeli politics, archaeology and history, social issues and interreligious issues.

The tentative agenda includes the Garden of Gethsemane, Western Wall, Sea of Galilee, the Dead Sea and Masada. Meetings are expected with Christian Arabs, a rabbi from the Melitz Centers for Jewish-Zionist Education, Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert, and others. The trip coincides with Israel's celebration of its 50th anniversary.

The trip is partly an outgrowth of the Rochester Agreement of 1996, which formalized Catholic-Jewish relations. But it goes beyond the agreement to include other Christians who also have been deepening relations with Jews over the years.

"There is strong groundwork for people

wanting to be together," Rabbi Katz said. And while tolerance is often a first step for some people, he said, "I believe this trip will give us more understanding about our connection of roots and will further our understanding and appreciation."

Father Joseph Brennan, a retired diocesan priest active for decades in furthering Christian-Jewish relations, said, "We've been talking about this (pilgrimage) for years." He noted the Women's Interfaith Coalition had made such a pilgrimage in the 1970s, and "They obviously bonded together closely as a result of that."

The current mission also includes Sister Joan Sobala, SSJ, on sabbatical; Sister Susan Nowak, SSJ, assistant professor of religious studies at Nazareth College; Sister Pat Schoelles, SSJ, president of St. Bernard's Institute; Father Dan Tormey, completing a term as spiritual formation director at the American College, Catholic University of Louvain in Leuven, Belgium; Father James Lawlor, new pastor of St. Catherine's Church, Mendon; Suzanne Schnittman, diocesan consistent life ethic coordinator; Joan Pearson, an SBI student; and Jane Napier, an SBI board member;

The Rev. J. Paul Womack, president of the Greater Rochester Community of

Churches, a United Methodist; and Lawrence Fine, executive director of the Jewish Community Federation; American Baptist Rev. Dwight E. Cook; Episcopal Rev. Felicia B. Clark; Unitarian-Universalist Rev. Richard S. Gilbert; University of Rochester professor and Episcopalian, Frederick C. Jefferson Jr.; and Joseph U. and Lois Posner, Michael Schnittman (husband of Suzanne Schnittman), and Nathan L. Jaschik, all active in the Jewish community.

The American Jewish Committee's Project Interchange arranged this trip as one of several intensive educational experiences for religious, political and civic leaders.

However, McNulty noted, "The kind of diversity we bring as a group is very unusual, in that it's religiously mixed, racially mixed, gender mixed, and we get along together well."

"We are going there with a fairly good example of how diversity can work together for the good of the community, and trying to learn how they use diversity so we can improve what we do here together," he added.

Aside from such expectations, he said, "I'm excited as all get-out, to assist my bishop in liturgy at a place like Bethlehem is enough to make the trip right there."

The deacon and Bishop Clark both talked of increasing understanding rather than "romanticizing" the Israel of today.

"I think people around our diocese would have a pretty good insight into the importance of that today, when life can be so fractious and divided sometimes, and when it can be easy in our culture to dismiss people who think differently," the bishop said.

"I hope this will be an example of the real possibilities among religious groups which hold different beliefs, that there is much in common," he said.

"With us the work is well on its way," noted Isobel Goldman, director of community relations for the Jewish Federation. "... We can go to the (Western) Wall together and observe Shabbat and we can hear the bishop do a Mass in Bethlehem two days later. We're ready for this experience, but our communities aren't necessarily ready for this experience."

"So we need to be the messengers who come back. ... Everybody on the trip knows it has to go beyond us and further."

## Work fostered by historic agreement continues

Since the 1996 signing of the Rochester Agreement, copies have reached around the world.

"It has gone quite far," said Joseph Kelly, a Nazareth College professor and one of the writers of the agreement. It is believed to be the first in the country that formalized relations between Catholics and Jews in a community.

He noted that Cardinal Edward Cardine, head of the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, praised the document while speaking last year in Chicago.

"We were pretty pleased he picked that up," Kelly said.

Locally, the agreement has spawned exchanges of youth between temples and churches, as well as a clergy-sponsored conference on marriage issues and social services-sponsored conference on spirituality and health.

"The agreement is not just sitting in a drawer," Kelly said.

The agreement of the diocese,

Rochester Board of Rabbis and Jewish Community Federation of Rochester was to be a "sound and lasting basis" for continuing area Catholic-Jewish relations.

For example, it set up interfaith groups of clergy, educators and social services professionals to meet regularly.

"It is the opportunity to sit down with Jewish educators and listen to them share their faith story and tradition and how they teach that," said Johan Engstrom, youth ministry coordinator at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Brighton, regarding the educators group he has joined. "And because it is so intentional, there's no hesitation to ask questions."

He noted his parish is in an area with a large percentage of Jewish residents, and he feels parishioners should understand each other's faiths.

"I'm saying it is tremendously important we have an understanding of differences in faith and traditions. ... Otherwise we set ourselves up for a horrible situation again," he said, referring to per-

secution of Jews, particularly the Holocaust.

In December one of his counterparts, Robin Shiffman of Temple Sinai, will bring children to Lourdes parish to learn about Catholicism.

"The exchanges that have grown from that (agreement) are marvelous," said Pat Fox, director of religious education at St. John the Evangelist on Humboldt Street, Rochester. Fifteen educators meet in their core group, he said, and conferences have drawn 60.

Still, the work done cannot be taken for granted, Kelly cautioned.

"The real danger is a document like this can become show, a kind of window dressing," he said. "You have keep reeducating clergy and laypeople (who are new to the community)."

One danger the agreement should help avoid, he said, is that "people quickly forget how bad the relationships were before the (Second Vatican) council."

—Kathleen Schwarz

EDITORS' NOTE: Catholic Courier staff writer Kathleen Schwarz and photographer Greg Francis are accompanying the group and will provide more coverage in the next three weeks.