

What else?  
It's snow!  
- Page 3

Help for marrying,  
marrying again  
- Pages 6-7

Teens review  
'the talk'  
- Page 5



# Catholic Courier

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## Coming year renews ancient concept

*"This fiftieth year you shall make sacred by proclaiming liberty in the land for all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when every one of you shall return to his own property, every one to his own family estate. In this fiftieth year, your year of jubilee, you shall not sow, nor shall you reap the aftergrowth or pick the grapes from the untrimmed vines."*

Leviticus 25:10-11.

Pope John Paul II, by proclaiming the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, has prompted a great deal of reflection on Leviticus 25. Therein lies the Hebrew Scriptures' explanation of the Sabbath and the "Sabbath of Sabbaths," the jubilee year, and the commands for observing them.

Lev. 25 is so rich in themes, including let the land lie fallow, forgive debts, free the slaves, return the land and celebrate in gladness, that dioceses are developing varieties of ways for observing the Great Jubilee.

The wording of their themes may differ, but the same ideas are there, said Joan Workmaster, diocesan director of liturgy.

"Everybody throughout the world in the church is looking at how do we bring people together in a big celebration that speaks specifically to the whole theme of jubilee," she said.

"It's really hard to get a handle on, in some respects," acknowledged Paul Henderson, executive director of the U.S. bishops' office for the Jubilee Year, which he described as a clearinghouse. "We spent three years looking around the United States saying what's on the agenda of people, what's important in their lives."

The office has narrowed its primary focus to reconciliation and the Eucharist, he said. "We're focusing on a) accepting Jesus Christ, which leads to conversion, b) building communities of faith, and c) creating a just and peaceful world."

"I think the reality is as a church," he added, "it would be a shame if we were to miss this wonderful opportunity to do something and use the year 2000 to really move forward in faith. Also, what does it say to people if we can't get excited about celebrating 2,000 years of Christianity?"

Maria Harris of Montauk, N.Y., a religious education consultant who specializes in jubilee themes, pointed out that people throughout history may have tried to heed such commands as stated in Leviticus, but added, "We don't always get this coming together, coalescing as we approached the year 2000. Jubilee is this set of themes that are all coming together."

Her 1996 book, *Proclaim Jubilee*, is a key resource for many dioceses' jubilee observances, including the Diocese of Rochester.

### Jubilee 'resolutions'

Rochester diocesan officials have decided to focus on four primary themes:

- Letting the land lie fallow

- Restoring right relationships
- Forgiveness and reconciliation
- Eucharistic celebration.

Karen Rinefierd, of the diocesan Department of Evangelization and Catechesis, noted that this final year of preparation is "an opportunity for self-evaluation, a time to re-set our priorities, in some ways like people do on January first." It is in essence, a fresh start, she noted.

Parishes are becoming acquainted with the Jubilee, she and others noted, as word and materials get out.

St. Jerome Church, East Rochester, has a jump on the Jubilee thanks to its Social Ministry Chairwoman Ruth Putnam. Since she approached the pastoral council about it last November, she said, the council has studied jubilee themes and reflected on what the biblical theme of debt forgiveness means to the parish: For instance, what does a parish do that has no debts it can forgive, and do parishes that have surplus owe those that don't.

"A lot still is to be decided," she said. "You know we're still in the year of preparation,"

Also at her suggestion, an October faculty retreat for St. Joseph School, Penfield, where she teaches, focused on the Jubilee.

"It's a new thing," she said, adding, "I think what people will like about this (Jubilee) is that it is a different twist. Much of the talk around the millennium is very dooms-dayish. This is very positive. Very forward looking."

### Sound the trumpet

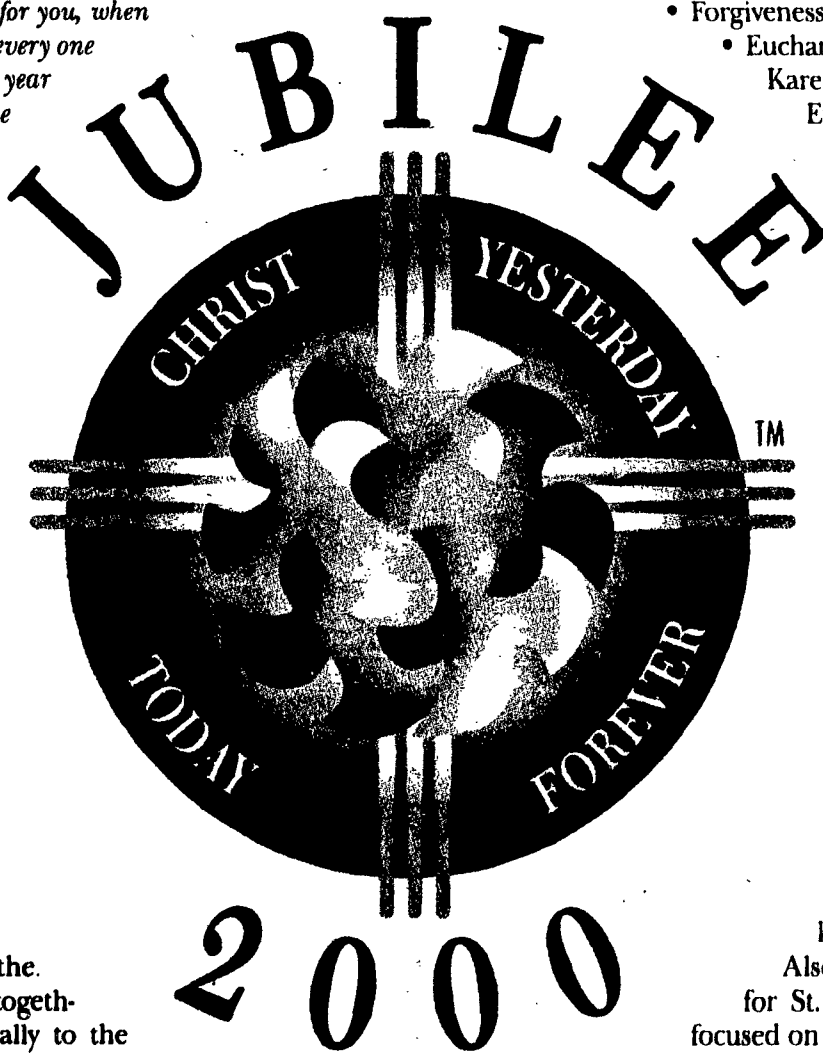
"Jubilee" is taken from the Hebrew word "yobel," or ram. A ram's horn was sounded as a trumpet to announce the sabbatical year. The jubilee year is spoken of only in Lev. 25:8-55, 27:17-21 and Numbers 36:4, according to the New Catholic Encyclopedia. References are made to it in Isaiah 61 and Luke 4. It was to be kept on every seventh Sabbath year by restoring alienated lands, freeing Hebrew slaves and abstaining from sowing and harvesting.

"While there is no indication it was carried out, there is no indication it wasn't carried out either," said Devadasan Premnath, acting dean at St. Bernard's Institute, where he teaches Hebrew Scriptures courses. One major idea behind the jubilee is liberty from the burden of debts; another is the return of landed property to the owners, he said. "I think the major reason for this institution coming into existence in Israel was primarily to return from the drastic effects subsequent to the introduction of monarchy in Israel," he said.

Before the monarchy, land tenure principles stated land ultimately belonged to Yahweh and was not a commodity to be bought and sold. Families had small plots for residence and subsistence. The plots were handed down from father to son.

But then monarchy was introduced. "That changed the entire complexion of the society," he said.

Continued on page 10



Throughout this last year of preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 proclaimed by Pope John Paul II, the Catholic Courier will provide a series of stories focusing on Jubilee themes and initiatives. This month's story introduces the overall concept of the Jubilee and themes on which the Diocese of Rochester will focus.

STORY BY KATHLEEN SCHWAR