

DIOCESAN NEWS

Controversial booklets surface at Tier parishes

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

A Tioga County man's booklet and brochure campaign, warning of apocalyptic events in the year 2000, has provoked surprise and annoyance among Southern Tier Catholics.

Moreover, some pastors have charged that the writings of the man, Angelo Mazzaresse, 44, a parishioner at St. James Church in Waverly, are inconsistent with Catholic Church teaching.

Worshippers at several Tier parishes were greeted by the booklets on their car windshields after Sunday Masses on Jan. 17. The 60-page booklet, "The Era of Peace," states that the destruction of heaven and earth, followed by the coming of Jesus, are imminent.

"Jesus is coming, in fact He is almost here," Mazzaresse cautions in the book's closing comments.

Mazzaresse confirmed in a Jan. 29 telephone interview that he is also the source of what he terms "Operation Windshield." He said that he and a staff of volunteers have distributed 7,600 copies of his book — which he wrote in 1998 — over the last two months.

The campaign, he said, has covered parishes in such Southern Tier communities as Elmira, Waverly, Van Etten, Horseheads and Corning, as well as northern Pennsylvania.

"It caught us all by surprise," said Father Patrick Connor, pastor of Eastside Catholic Parish in Elmira. In his seven years as pastor, Father Connor said, Jan. 17 marked the first incident that he can recall of religious material being left on windshields during Mass.

Along with the booklet, a brochure tucked in each copy predicts the dates of apocalyptic events mentioned in the Bible. According to the brochure, the sighting of the Hale-Bopp comet on March 22, 1997, signaled the start of an Antichrist's reign as described in Revelation 13.

Mazzaresse did not identify the Antichrist, but wrote that the Antichrist's reign is to last until approximately Oct. 3, 2000. He stated the Era of Peace, as described in Matthew 24, will begin approximately Nov. 18, 2000, signaling the final sign of the second coming of Jesus Christ.

He wrote that his predictions are founded on "the writings of the prophets, the New Testament and the Fathers of the Church." Both his booklet and flyer are based on the 1899 edition of the Douay-Rheims version of the Bible.

Mazzaresse said that he feels the windshield method of distributing his literature — as opposed to handing it directly to people — will better ensure that it gets read.

"We want to get it in the hands of people," Mazzaresse said. "If people don't know Jesus is coming, and he actually is, what kind of condition are we going to find ourselves in?"

Mazzaresse said he is devoted full-time to promoting his writings. He said that Operation Windshield is "ongoing," and that he'd like to extend the campaign farther north in the Rochester Diocese.

Copies of the booklet can be obtained free of charge by writing to a post-office box in Pine City, Chemung County. However, the booklet also noted that cash donations are welcome — a factor that put Linda Stundtner, a parishioner at St. Mary Our Mother in Horseheads, on guard.

"(Asking to) send money — of course that raises people's suspicions," Stundtner said.

The fact that Mazzaresse was secretive about distributing his material on parish grounds raised the suspicions of Father Thomas Burr, pastor at St. Mary Our Mother.

"We were quite incensed. He had no permission, and that's upsetting," Father Burr said.

Father Burr said he plans to meet with other Southern Tier pastors in the next month to develop a statement saying such intrusions are considered trespassing.



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Brothers in Christ

Rev. Dwight Cook, right, pastor of Mt. Olivet Baptist Church, Rochester, greets Deacon Brian McNulty at an ecumenical service in the diocesan Pastoral Center chapel in Gates Jan. 27. Deacon McNulty presided and Rev. Cook preached at the service in celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

In addition, Father Burr wrote in the Jan. 24 church bulletin that Mazzaresse's views are "not the teaching of the Catholic Church and (are) not approved by our Bishop or any other authority in the Catholic Church."

Father Burr added that endorsements of two priests from outside the diocese, which appear in the booklet's foreword, "carry no authentic authority."

Mazzaresse replied that Father Burr paints "a negative image of the facts," saying that such people are "in the darkness."

"He's never been able to engage in much study and doesn't know what he's talking about," said Mazzaresse, who said his writings stem from his senior thesis at Christendom College in the early 1990s.

Father Burr reacted to that statement with a laugh, remarking, "His education is better than mine, is what he's saying."

The pastor charged that Christendom College, a small Catholic institution locat-

ed in Front Royal, Va., is committed to teaching "pre-Vatican II" Catholicism. Father Burr also questioned Mazzaresse's use of an 1899 Bible.

Mazzaresse resides in the town of Chemung. Father Thomas Watts, pastor of Mazzaresse's parish, St. James in Waverly, characterized Mazzaresse as a scholarly person who was interested in the priesthood at one time.

Father Watts said that Mazzaresse's material was left on windshields at St. James as well as St. Pius X Church in Van Etten, where he is also pastor, on Jan. 17. The priest said he hesitates to debate most of Mazzaresse's views since the author quotes "Scripture and church forefathers."

However, Father Watts does feel that Mazzaresse crosses the line by attaching specific dates to his predictions.

"When you start using dates and things, you're on questionable ground," Father Watts said.

Obituary

Father William M. Hart, longtime Holy Trinity Church pastor, at 76

Father William M. Hart, former pastor of Holy Trinity Church, Webster, and a longtime professor at St. Bernard's Seminary, died Jan. 29, 1999, following a long illness. He was 76.

Born July 21, 1922, to the late Joseph and Rose Hart of Immaculate Conception Parish, Rochester, Father Hart attended the parish school, then St. Andrew's and St. Bernard's Seminaries. He was ordained June 13, 1947, at Rochester's Blessed Sacrament Church by Bishop James E. Kearney.

After serving as assistant pastor at Holy Rosary Church, Rochester (1947-49), Father Hart was sent to earn a doctorate in philosophy at the Angelicum in Rome. He was a professor of philosophy at St. Bernard's Seminary beginning in 1951, and dean starting in 1961.

Retired Auxiliary Bishop Dennis W. Hickey, who served as the homilist for Father Hart's Mass of Christ the High Priest Feb. 1 at Holy Trinity Church, recalled that Father Hart's style of delivery as a teacher earned him a nickname among students.

"They called him 'Bullets,'" Bishop Hickey recalled. "The ideas came out and you



friend of Father Hart's.

"He was a very fine teacher, and all of the students spoke highly of him as a teacher," Father Calimeri recalled.

Former Rochester Bishop Fulton J. Sheen named Father Hart a special assistant in 1967. In 1968, he was appointed co-pastor at Our Lady of Victory Church, Rochester, walking back and forth between the downtown parish and the chanery, then at 50 Chestnut Plaza. Father Hart was named pastor of Holy Trinity in 1969.

Mary Ann Penlon, Holy Trinity's business manager, was Father Hart's secretary at the parish for 20 years and helped take care of him for the past few years.

"He was such a good person," she ob-

served. "He was always thankful for every little thing we did for him."

He was also dedicated to the parish. When he arrived, Penlon recalled, the parish had recently completed an addition and was struggling to pay for it.

"There were a couple of times when he took out of his own pocket to pay salaries," she said. "That's the kind of person he was."

He also enjoyed interacting with the children of the parish, she added, visiting the school sometimes twice a day.

"You wouldn't find a man who was more dedicated and more interested in his parish," said Father Calimeri. "I would have loved to have had him as a pastor."

After retiring in 1992, Father Hart resided in the parish's former convent and helped out at the parish until ill health prevented him from doing so.

In addition to his parents, Father Hart

was predeceased by a brother, Father Richard A. Hart, and a sister, Teresa Hart Knaggs. He is survived by a brother John (Gertrude) Hart; brother-in-law William Knaggs; and several nieces, grandnieces and grandnephews.

Interment was in Holy Trinity Cemetery. Memorials in Father Hart's name may be sent to the Holy Trinity School Building Fund.

- Lee Strong

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Paul, John, Stephen, Timothy

Catholic Courier (USPS 135-580) Vol. 110 No. 18, February 4, 1999

Published weekly except the last Thursday in December.

Subscription rates: single copy, 75¢; one-year subscription in U.S., \$20.00; Canada and foreign \$20.00 plus postage. Offices: 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624, 716/326-4340. Periodicals postage paid at Rochester, N.Y.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Catholic Courier, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, N.Y. 14624.