

# DIOCESAN NEWS

## Rochester promises action on problem sites

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Interfaith Action, a federation of 14 area churches, battled to save city neighborhoods from dilapidated buildings and sexually oriented businesses on two fronts recently.

Federation members pressed their causes with various city officials at public meetings March 16, in St. Monica's Church on the city's west side as well as in Rochester City Council chambers downtown. The meetings yielded three measures supported by Interfaith Action:

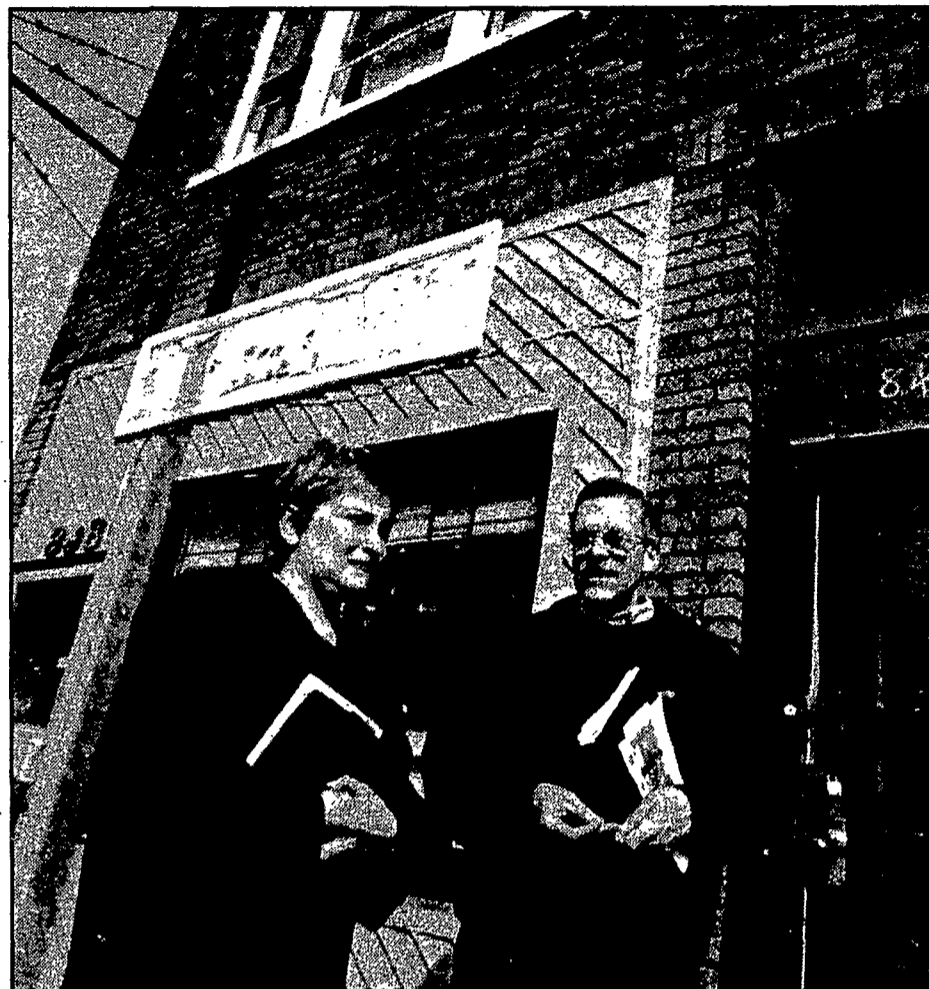
- Passage of a law that penalizes landlords and tenants of problem properties.
  - An announcement that the city will demolish three west side problem buildings.
  - A pledge by city council members to look into whether the city can legally pass a short-term moratorium on applications by sexually oriented businesses. This came on the heels of a case whereby the city's special permit law for such businesses was deemed unconstitutional in a federal court.
- At St. Monica's, 160 people attended a meeting with Glenn King who administers the Sector 4 and Sector 5 office of the city's Neighborhood Empowerment Team program, or NET. NET officials serve as liaisons between city hall and city residents.

Interfaith Action members — who have met with King before — brought information to the meeting about nine neglected buildings on the city's west side, according to John and Jo Ann DeMott. The DeMotts are St. Monica's parishioners who serve as team members for the parish with Interfaith Action.

The DeMotts pointed out that the buildings — four of which are owned by the city — are in shabby condition and degrade the surrounding neighborhood.

"They provide a convenient operating base for criminal activity," John DeMott said, citing anecdotal evidence from neighbors Interfaith Action surveyed.

The neighbors complained that the buildings attract drug dealers and others who break in and use them for various activities. One such building, a former storefront and apartment complex, is located right across from St. Monica's school at 838-840 W. Genesee St., DeMott said. He added that a man was shot to death outside



Greg Francis/Staff photographer  
**Jo Ann and John DeMott, both parishioners of St. Monica Church and team members for the parish with Interfaith Action, walk past a city-owned building at 838-840 W. Genesee St., Rochester, where an apparent drug-related murder occurred just before Christmas.**

the building in an apparent drug-related dispute just before last Christmas.

Sister Mary Marvin, RSM, principal of St. Monica's, supports Interfaith Action's efforts to have the city either tear down or rehabilitate the buildings. Her students are aware of what goes on in the buildings, she said, and their presence works against the values St. Monica's is trying to teach.

"If you don't have pride in your neighborhood, then you don't have pride in yourself," she said. She pointed to the building across the street, adding, "How does that build up your pride if that's all you see?"

In a phone interview March 17, King said he completely agreed with Interfaith

Action's call for demolition or rehabilitation of the nine buildings. The city has already contracted with private contractors to have three of the buildings — including the one across from St. Monica's — demolished before the end of the year, he said. He added that the city is also looking into the situation with the other buildings, of which two have been foreclosed.

King added that he will continue to meet with Interfaith Action members about the buildings, and speak at a public meeting again on the subject within three months.

Meanwhile, Interfaith Action members showed up at a city council meeting March 17 to show their support for a new law

passed unanimously that night. According to several reports, the law targets landlords and tenants of properties that are a nuisance to police and neighbors. The law — also approved by the Monroe County Legislature last year — sets up the "Pro-Active Property Management Program."

Under current city law, landlords and tenants can accumulate points for violating housing codes and nuisance laws. Under the new program passed March 17, a landlord and tenant will be asked to attend a Rochester Housing Council course if they accumulate the maximum number of points. If a landlord refuses, Monroe County will pull his or her ability to accept welfare rental vouchers. Tenants who refuse to attend the course will be disqualified from receiving vouchers.

James Patrick-Maxwell, president of Interfaith Action, and a parishioner at Holy Rosary Church, said the federation welcomed the new program.

"We have some very good landlords, and we have some poor landlords," Patrick-Maxwell said. "It's always been my bone of contention that the poor landlords never come and look at their property. Finally, we can get at them."

Patrick-Maxwell said he hoped the new law would encourage landlords to more carefully screen their tenants and be more diligent in property upkeep.

Finally, City Council President Lois J. Giess and Robert J. Stevenson, council member from the city's northwest district, announced at the March 16 meeting that they had asked the city's corporation counsel to examine the legal issues surrounding declaring a six-month moratorium on applications from sexually oriented businesses. In a phone interview, Stevenson said the council could possibly pass a moratorium that would last from July to December of this year. He added that the city needs to look at its zoning laws and reconsider how adult businesses are zoned.

Patrick-Maxwell said Interfaith Action supported the moratorium on sexually oriented businesses. He added that the federation may also suggest other ways the city can regulate such businesses. For example, he said, the city could change its zoning laws to increase the distance between adult businesses and schools so that children are never exposed to such places.

## Sister Janice Morgan, SSJ, elected head of St. Joseph sisters

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

Sister Janice Morgan, SSJ, was elected as president of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester at the order's General Chapter March 22.

Sister Morgan will replace Sister Rosemary St. Peter, who has served two four-year terms, and could not run again under the rules of the order.

Sister Morgan, currently her order's vice president, was one of five order sisters elected to administrative positions out of a field of 11 candidates on the first ballot.

Along with Sister Morgan, Sister Joan Sobala, former pastoral assistant at St. Mary's Church, Rochester, was elected vice president. Meanwhile, Sister Margaret Brennan was re-elected to a second term as a councilor, and Sisters Judith Greene and Clare Brown were elected as councilors as well. In addition to Sister Brennan, Sisters Sheila Walsh and Sharon Bailey are currently serving as the order's councilors.

Sisters Walsh and Bailey will step down from their positions when all five newly elected sisters are installed in their offices on June 27. The newly elected administrative team will begin working in their positions July 1, Sister Morgan told the *Catholic Courier* March 23.

Ballots were cast for the new team by 110 delegates attending the chapter meeting, which took place March 19-22. Chapter meetings take place every four years at the



Sr. Janice Morgan

order's motherhouse on East Avenue in Pittsford. This year's meeting drew more than 300 sisters out of the Rochester chapter's 420 members, Sister Morgan said. The order has sisters working in the Diocese of Rochester, Alabama and Brazil.

Sister Morgan outlined her goals over the next four years for the *Courier*, noting they grew out of discussions among her order's members in the past several years.

For example, she said, as part of a strategic planning process for the year 2002, her order wants to sell off about 55 acres of the 130.7-acre estate on which the motherhouse sits. Currently, the order is talking to neighboring Nazareth College about a deal, she said. Meanwhile, Oak Hill Country Club and Irondequoit Country Club have also discussed buying smaller parcels of

land, she said, though she stressed that no land sale deals have been finalized.

Selling the land is part of an overall process by which the Sisters of St. Joseph are focusing on what the order needs to sustain itself, she noted.

"We don't need to be land-rich," Sister Morgan said. "We need to share it with others."

She added that the order wants to renovate and expand its infirmary, currently home to 80 sisters and seven diocesan priests. Sister Morgan said her order would like to build recreation rooms and other facilities for the infirmary residents, and possibly create closed-in outdoor areas where infirmary residents could walk freely.

In addition to examining the use of the order's land, the Sisters of St. Joseph are facing other questions, Sister Morgan said. For example, she noted, the average age of a member now is about 65, and the order is looking at ways of increasing vocations among those who might not traditionally

consider taking permanent vows as religious. One possibility is inviting more people to become lay associates, she said.

Other areas the congregation will focus on in the next few years, she said, were the following:

- Bridging the gap between rich and poor people.
- Examining injustice in the prison system where many sisters work as chaplains.
- Helping sisters deal with changes in the church.

"Personally, I feel humbled and privileged to assume the role of Congregational President for the Sisters of St. Joseph," Sister Morgan concluded in a press statement she issued after her election. "Together with all God's people we are committed to the hard work of change so that we will be able to walk into the next millennium, full of hope knowing that with our God all things are possible."

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