Churches help refugees adjust to life after war

By Rob Callahan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — War may have ended in Kosovo, but life in the United States is just beginning for a number of the ethnic Albanians who’ve lost their homes to the strife.

As of Monday, June 21, six Kosovan families consisting of 47 individuals have come to the Rochester area through the auspices of Catholic Family Center, according to Jim Delaney, CFC’s refugee program manager. These refugees are among the 20,000 Kosovans the United States agreed to take during the war.

In an interview at the rectory Thursday, June 17, both families told horrific tales of abuse at the hands of the Yugoslav military. Many times, family members broke into tears relating their accounts.

Speaking in German and translated by Dick Kurz, a St. John’s parishioner who co-leads one of two parish-based groups in the United States, the family related the trauma of his family’s expulsion from Kosovo.

He reported that three days after NATO warplanes bombed Yugoslavia, several Serbian police officers came to his house in a small Kosovo village. At gunpoint, the Serbs told him and his brother that they had to leave, and broke into tears relating their accounts.

When the Serbs arrived, the family didn’t know how to react, so they asked that the family be allowed to shoot themselves, Father Spilly said, adding that his mother, father and sister were temporarily living at the parish rectory, according to Father William Spilly, pastor.

The other family — the Sahitis — consists of Sahit Sahiti, his wife, Sami, their five children, and Qahil’s two cousins, brothers Qahil and Fezi. The Ilazis will be temporarily living at the parish rectory, according to Father William Spilly, pastor.

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However, Father Kevin McKenna, diocesan Vocations director, said that the community had crossed the line in Sunday’s meeting and had, in effect, communicated itself from the Catholic Church.

Sister St. Peter told the Catholic Courier that the town’s asked for Sister Henninger to completely remove herself from the New Faith Community, but to abandon such public roles as preaching.

Peters said she can anticipate how long the removal process may take, but she hopes that solution can be reached through additional discussions between Sister Henninger and congregational administrators.

“We’re praying and planning for a reconciliation,” said Sister St. Peter, who completes an 18-year term as congregation president June 27.

However, Sister Henninger said she won’t resign her involvement with the New Faith Community — even if refusing to do so means removal from the order.

“I cannot turn my back on the people I’ve worked with the past 20 years,” she said.

She added that “staying in the church, and trying to change it, doesn’t work.”

Canon 697 of the Revised Code of Canon Law states that a religious institute such as the Sisters of St. Joseph may seek to dismiss a member who has “continuously abandoned the Catholic faith.”

Canon 698 states that the superior must warn the member in writing “with an explicit threat of subsequent dismissal unless the member reform." If the member does not reform, the superior is to proceed to a second warning. "And then dismissal’s ultimate consequence is to be removed from the order by the bishop and the Diocese of Rochester,” he said. Father McKenna explained that the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester is a pontifical institute that accords with the Holy See rather than the diocese in which it serves.

Sister Henninger said she was not surprised by the June 8 letter and that she holds no animosity toward Sister St. Peter, who she caught in the middle, Sister Henninger said. “We’re not the problem. The problem is the structure in the church.”

Meanwhile, Father Callan expressed disappointment that Sister St. Peter seemingly did not defend Sister Henninger vigorously.

“I believe she dropped the ball right at this historic moment, when she could have stood up to the Vatican,” Father Callan said.

Sister Henninger, a former teacher and principal, became pastoral associate at Corpus Christi in 1977, during Father Callan’s first year as administrator. In 1986 she became coordinator of Recovery House, a program of Corpus Christi’s Dimori House. The program, which serves men recovering from drug and alcohol abuse, was closed by Corpus Christi Church after Sister Henninger was fired last December.

Sister St. Peter said she had offered to help Sister Henninger create a ministry similar to Recovery House through the Sisters of St. Joseph, but that Sister Henninger preferred operating such a ministry through the New Faith Community.

“We cannot mission her to a church that is in schism,” Sister St. Peter said.

Sister Henninger said she expects to be funded by the New Faith Community for a "ministry.

The New Faith Community has approximately 1,000 members, Sister Henninger said. Its offices are located at Rochester’s Salem United Church of Christ, where two weekend services and a Thursday service are held. The community is also using Emmanuel Baptist Church, Downtown United Presbyterian Church and Hochstein Music School for services.

The Monthly Prayer Request For Priests

The Beautiful Hands of a Priest

We read them in life’s early morning,
We find them at its close,
We need them; we have them.

When we come to this world, we are useful.
We grow as well as the land,
And the hands that make us pure as angels,
Are the beautiful hands of a priest.

And when we are tempted and waver
To pathways of storms and pain,
'Tis hand of a priest will absolve us
For once, but again and again.

The hosts on our palms are blessed
And we know what our prayers mean.

And when we are taken to the grave,
And the hands that laid our casket down,
Are the beautiful hands of a priest.

God bless them and keep them all holy.
For each of them in their grip, comes
When a poor sinner does err
And finds the hand of a priest.

The Beautiful hands of a priest
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Look for the August FRPP Calendar in the July 24th Courier.

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