

DIOCESAN NEWS

Diocese offers brochures to help teach HIV/AIDS

By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

Although schools in New York are mandated to teach about HIV/AIDS, the church is not leaving it entirely in their hands.

The state's dioceses have adopted a series of brochures developed by the Rochester Diocese. "Talking with Your Children and Teens about HIV/AIDS: A Catholic Parent's Guide."

The series is based on the New York bishops' 1998 document, "HIV/AIDS Education: A Catholic Framework of Understanding," intended for use by Catholic schools to meet state Board of Regents mandates.

In addition to a general brochure, the diocese prepared companion brochures for ages 6-8, 9-11, 12-14, and 15-18.

"The brochures were not a requirement," noted Maribeth Mancini, director of the Diocesan Evangelization and Catechesis Department. "We've gone beyond the state mandate to provide a useful tool for parents in talking about AIDS with their children."

"We're proud of the brochures," she said. "We really hit on a creative way to spread the church's teaching on HIV/AIDS."

The brochures will be distributed to parents through parish catechetical leaders and Catholic school principals, Mancini said. Her department is encouraging this be done in gatherings with parents, so faith as well as the educational aspects may be discussed. Workshops for parish and school staffs began last spring and will also be presented Wednesday, Sept. 29 at the Pastoral Center and Thursday, Nov. 11, at St. Mary's Convent, Waterloo.

Terry Reeder, religious education director at St. Jerome's Church, East Rochester, was primary author for the brochures.

"We are not coming up against the pub-

lic schools, but complementing it (their education) from a Catholic perspective," Reeder said. "My job was one, to edit the bishops' document, and two, to see what was being taught in public school and to bring up points specific to being Catholic parents. I went around to schools, including my own children's schools. To tell the truth, what I found out, some schools were doing an excellent job and some weren't."

The state regents say public schools must stress abstinence as the most appropriate and effective premarital protection against AIDS, a result of infection with HIV.

However, Reeder said, "we absolutely as Catholics say abstinence is the only option. We do more thorough education on why there is no such thing as safe sex."

The Catholic perspective also emphasizes compassion for people with AIDS and the dignity of human beings and human sexuality.

"Sexuality teaching is not just about sex, but is about the whole human person," Reeder said.

At the same time, she noted, "When you are talking about sex education, people want and should know what their child is learning. And what Catholic parents don't want is their child being introduced beyond their developmental level."

Thus, for example, the brochure for children ages 6-8 — whose social circle is expanding, and who tend to see things concretely — states in part that children should understand that each person is a special creation of God, and all that God creates is good, that God loves all people, sick or well.

The brochures quote from the Pontifical Council for the Family's "The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality," particularly regarding the various stages of childhood and adolescence. And they suggest several activities, such as opportunities to care for a sick or hurt person, prayers and topics for discussion with children.



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Good Morning, God!

Sister Joan Sobala, SSJ, records her radio show, "Good Morning, God," at WWWG studios, Brighton, Sept. 8. The show is once again airing, at 7:30 a.m. Sundays on WWWG, 1460 AM, after a year off the air while she was on sabbatical. It focuses on nurturing faith and exploring world issues from a faith perspective. Sister Sobala, former pastoral assistant for 17 years at St. Mary's Church, Rochester, serves on the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester leadership team.

The brochures contain facts including how HIV is transmitted and not transmitted, that condoms have a 14 percent failure rate and an even higher rate for teenagers, and that the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is 450 times smaller than sperm and that condoms do not provide a fully effective barrier.

Jim Cultrara, associate director for education for the New York State Catholic Conference, said the state has required since September 1987 that HIV/AIDS curriculum be taught in grades K-12, with the content "age appropriate consistent with community values. The regents really left it up to individual schools and communities. What is appropriate for a sixth-grader in Fairport is not necessarily appropriate for a sixth-grader in the Bronx."

The conference had periodically issued curricula guides and updates to supplement the state's updates.

"Recently we decided to dispense with that particular model and instead produced our own guide, one exclusively from a Catholic perspective and that met the mandate," Cultrara said.

Diocesan educators said they needed a more "parent-friendly" form of the 1998 bishops' document, he said. "Maribeth's office was good enough to produce the brochures and we're using those as a base for other brochures in the other dioceses."

Reeder encouraged Catholic parents, however, to read the bishops' document, either in Catholic schools or their parishes.

"Sometimes Catholics have the idea that church teachings are very far removed from their everyday lives. Really, this was such a beautiful document and so usable. And Catholic sexuality education is such a beautiful gift we can give our children. It is a real way to apply our faith to our real lives," she said.

Obituary

Sister Margaret Adelaide Owen, SSJ; longtime hospital administrator

Sister Margaret Adelaide Owen, SSJ, administrator of St. Joseph's Hospital in Elmira for 31 years, died Aug. 23, 1999. She was 89 years old.

A memorial Mass will take place at 4 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 28, at St. Peter and Paul Church in Elmira. Concelebrants will be Father Joseph Brodnick, chaplain of St. Joseph's Hospital; and Father Richard Farrell, pastor of St. Mary's Church in Elmira and former St. Joseph's chaplain.

Sister Owen's funeral Mass was held Aug. 26 at the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse chapel in Rochester. Interment was at Rochester's Holy Sepulchre Cemetery.

Sister Owen entered the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1933 out of Sacred Heart Parish in Rochester. She earned her R.N. degree from St. Mary's Hospital in Rochester, and her bachelor's in nursing education from Catholic University of America.

She taught at the former St. Joseph's Hospital School of Nursing from 1935 to 1942. She began more than three decades as the hospital's administrator in 1942.

Sister Owen founded the St. Joseph's Women's Auxiliary in 1954, a move that greatly increased the hospital's volunteer support. She was named a fellow in the American College of Hospital Administra-

tors in 1959. She began the Southern Tier Alcohol Rehabilitation Services (STARS) in 1964, and later launched what became a renowned physical rehabilitation program.

At the time of her 1973 retirement, Sister Owen became president of the hospital's board of directors. She remained in that position until 1986, and stayed on as a board member from 1986 to 1990.

Sister Owen received an honorary degree from Nazareth College in 1981, and also served on the college's board of trustees. In addition, Sister Owen belonged to the General Council of the Sisters of St. Joseph and was board member of the Good

Samaritan Hospital in Selma, Ala.

"She was a wonderful administrator, role model and true friend," said Sister Marie Michael Miller, SSJ, who serves as administrator of the skilled nursing facility at St. Joseph's. Sister Miller, who will be a eucharistic minister at the Sept. 28 Mass, had known Sister Owen since she began working at St. Joseph's in the early 1950s.

Sister Owen is survived by a niece, a nephew, grandnieces and grandnephews.

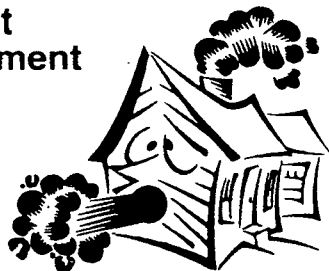
Contributions in her memory may be made to the St. Joseph Convent Infirmary, 4095 East Ave., Rochester, NY 14618-3798.

- Mike Latona

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