St. Mary's Hospital

File photo

St. Mary's future hazy

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

The future of Rochester's only Catholic hospital appeared uncertain as the *Catholic Courier* went to press Nov. 30, with officials of the Unity Health System acknowledging plans to announce a change in sponsorship of the alliance.

Margy Riemer, Unity Health spokesperson, said Nov. 30 that the system would announce on Dec. 1 or 2 "a change in the sponsorship of Unity Health System." Unity Health, which went into effect in 1997, is an alliance of St. Mary's Hospital in Rochester and Park Ridge Hospital in Greece.

Riemer said that the announcement would address "discussions that have been going on between Unity Health and As-

▌Unity Health System
An Alliance of St. Mary's Hospital & Park Ridge Health System

cension Health."

Ascension Health, based in St. Louis, Mo., was formed earlier this year, merging the national health systems of two religious orders: the Daughters of Charity, which founded St. Mary's Hospital; and the Sisters of St. Joseph.

A speculative story in the Nov. 26 issue of the *Rochester Business Journal* hinted that Ascension might alter or withdraw its sponsorship of the hospital system as a result of ongoing financial difficulties.

Riemer said the forthcoming announcement was "not specific to Park Ridge Hospital."

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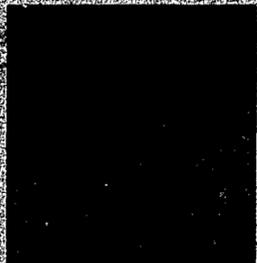
EDITOR'S NOTE: From Oct. 23 to Nov. 7 Catholic Courier staff writer Rob Cullivan toured Thailand and Cambodia as part of an international group of journalists. The trip was organized in part by the International Catholic Union of the Press. This is the second of two reports.

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Sukhum Kamisak, a 25-year-old Thai, was painting a mural on an outside wall of the Human Development Centre in Bangkok, Thailand's capital. A visitor asked what brought him there.

"I was 17 years old," he recalled, speaking through a translator. "I was separated from my family. I found a leaflet about this center. I felt good when I stayed here, because I know this center will support me."

As he continued to paint the mural — which depicted wealthy, partying people on one side of river apparently ignoring the poor children on the other side — Kamisak said he was studying art at a university. He said he had come back to help other children and teenagers at the ghetto center.

"This center helped me as a child," he said. "I want to give back to the center."

Meanwhile, upstairs at the center in a room filled with AIDS patients, Akarin, 38, was slowly dying of complications related to AIDS . Akarin's eyes lit up as he related that, yes, indeed, his family members — wife, mother, father and sister — had all come to visit. All, that is, except for his 10-year-old daughter, whom he would rather shield from his condition. A guitar sat at his feet, and when he had strength to play, he said, he liked strumming John Denver tunes.

Akarin is one of thousands of Thais who have been infected by HIV, a plague exacerbated by the prevalence of prostitution in such Thai cities as Bangkok and the resort city of Pattaya — prostitution that draws tourists from around the world looking for cheap sex.

Church centers in Bangkok and Pattaya work with small numbers of prostitutes, helping them to enhance their self-esteem and learn work skills that can give them new lives. But church officials admit their efforts are a drop in the bucket when compared to the ocean of exploitation that imprisons Thai prostitutes.

It's the downtrodden sex workers, drug addicts and poor children that concern Father Joseph H. Maier, CSSR, a U.S. native. The blunt-spoken, earthy priest runs

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Church thrives in Land of Smile