

# DIOCESAN NEWS

## Report notes homeless afflicted by host of ills

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

A federal report that the homeless often suffer from far more problems than simply having no regular place to sleep each night rings true with social service providers in the Diocese of Rochester.

The report, released Dec. 8 by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, found that many homeless people suffer from a variety of problems including a history of childhood sexual abuse, mental illness, a lack of education, and extreme poverty.

The report was based on 1996 interviews with more than 4,000 homeless people nationwide as well as almost 12,000 representatives of homeless service providers.

Susan Bennett, director of homeless and housing services for Catholic Family Center in Rochester, said the report

painted a fairly accurate picture of what afflicts the homeless people her agency serves. She added that the public should know that not every homeless person fits the stereotype of a poorly educated or alcoholic person.

"We've had everybody from Ph.D.'s to no education walk through our doors," she said. Bennett oversees Women's Place, a shelter for women and children, and Francis Hospitality Center for men, both in Rochester.

The HUD report noted the following statistics on homeless people:

- **Troubled childhoods** - Twenty-five percent of the homeless reported childhood physical or sexual abuse; 33 percent said they ran away from home; 27 percent said they had lived in foster care, a group home or other institutions as a child.

- **Poverty** - Single homeless people reported a mean monthly income of \$348; homeless families reported a mean

monthly income of \$475.

- **Health and disability problems** - Forty-six percent of the homeless had such chronic health problems as arthritis or cancer; 39 percent had mental health problems; 38 percent had alcohol problems; 26 percent had drug problems; and 55 percent had no medical insurance.

- **Low educational levels** - Thirty-eight percent of homeless people had less than a high school diploma, compared with 18 percent of the overall population.

Bennett particularly noted that more and more homeless people suffer from mental illness, a phenomenon she attributed, in part, to cuts in government-funded services for the mentally ill and de-institutionalization of patients.

"Rather than serving people through the mental health system, we're serving them through the homeless system," she said.

The HUD report also received kudos from Peggy Fastic, assistant director of Community Action Agency in Auburn, a local organization that works with homeless people and is funded, in part, by area Catholic parishes. In addition to finding the report an accurate take on homelessness, Fastic, a parishioner at Holy Family Church in Auburn, said she hoped Catholics would begin to press their legislators for more action on homelessness.

In particular, Fastic said she hoped that more homilies would be given on homelessness and its causes, and that Catholics would press for an increased minimum wage since low wages impoverish people.

"I'd like to see (Catholics) get involved with contacting their representatives and letting them know that this is not right in a country so rich," she said of homelessness.

## Year 2000 'glitch' brings about waiver of New Year's obligation

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

Even those who don't drink too much egg nog or champagne might struggle this year to keep their Mass schedules and holy-day obligations straight.

According to Joan Workmaster, diocesan director of liturgy, deviations from the norm come into play because New Year's Day falls on a Saturday.

For instance, she said, there will be no required church attendance on Jan. 1, 2000, even though New Year's Day is normally a holy day of obligation. Workmaster explained that the obligation does not apply when New Year's Day falls on a Saturday or Monday - or a Sunday, when worshipers get a "two-for-one" on obligations, so to speak.

This waiving of obligation will reoccur on the following New Year's Day as well: Jan. 1, 2001, falls on a Monday.

Christmas, also on a Saturday, remains a holy day of obligation.

Despite the absence of a New Year's Day obligation this year, Workmaster noted that parishes are encouraged to hold special Masses on Friday, Dec. 31, and Saturday, Jan. 1, if worshipers would like to acknowledge the new year anyway. In fact, she noted, numerous parishes are planning Dec. 31 late-night Masses or prayer services to usher in the Jubilee Year 2000. However, she recommends that these New Year's Day schedules be smaller than the normal holy-day schedule.

Workmaster added that the Rochester

Diocese is encouraging parishes not to hold their regularly scheduled Saturday-evening liturgies on Dec. 25 and Jan. 1 to serve as anticipatory Masses for Sunday.

"First, we don't think anyone would come. Also, there are so many Masses already," Workmaster said, adding that the Mass schedules on the actual Sundays should remain intact.

Workmaster noted that whenever a holiday falls near a Sunday, the volume of Masses on consecutive days can pile up quickly. This reality requires ongoing scrutiny, she said, due to the declining number of available priests to preside over liturgies. She said that parishioners should not be surprised to find increasingly limited holiday Mass options in the upcoming years.

"For so long, these holiday Masses were products of convenience for the people - rather than, are the churches full and do all these Masses serve the presider and assembly in the best way possible," Workmaster remarked. "A priest needs to be able to preside well, and faithfully."

Some parishes have already eliminated midnight Christmas Mass, she noted.

This New Year's, another potential curve ball with the holiday Mass schedule is the Y2K bug. However, Workmaster said she doesn't think that parishes should alter their schedules for fear of an electrical glitch. Besides, she remarked, liturgies wouldn't necessarily grind to a halt even if such a problem did pop up.

"It depends on how bright the sunlight is inside the church," Workmaster joked.



Mike Mergen/Photo Intern

### ...the glory of the Lord

Sacred Heart Cathedral presented a Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols Dec. 12. The service, which traditionally takes place on Gaudete Sunday, the third Sunday of Advent, tells the story of the birth of Jesus with a series of readings and songs. The cathedral choir, above, along with Father Thomas Mull, at left, joined in dedicating the service to the memory of Bishop Dennis Hickey.

## Obituary

### Sister Mary Patrice Messner, SSJ; 85

Sister Mary Patrice Messner, SSJ, died Nov. 25, 1999, at the St. Joseph Convent Infirmary. She was 85.

Sister Mary Patrice entered the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1931 from St. Monica's Parish, Rochester. She earned her baccalaureate degree from Nazareth College and her master's from the University of Rochester. She also attended education courses at St. Louis University and New York University.

Sister Mary Patrice taught in diocesan schools for 24 years and was supervisor of schools in which the Sisters of St. Joseph taught, for nine years.

She opened Christ the King School in 1957. She was a member of the central administration of the SSJ congregation from 1966 to 1975, and directed retreats at the SSJ Spirituality Center from 1975 to 1990. She retired to the motherhouse

in 1990 and moved to the infirmary in 1995.

Her funeral liturgy was celebrated in the motherhouse chapel Nov. 29. Sister Mary Patrice is survived by her sister, Harriet Dean of Pelham, Ala., and cousins and her congregational sisters.

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