

DIOCESAN NEWS

Sr. LeValley, SSJ, set to lead ecumenical group

By Rob Cullivan
Staff Writer

The Rev. Richard Gilbert, parish minister at First Unitarian Church of Rochester, summed up Sister Beth LeValley, SSJ, newly elected president of the Greater Rochester Community of Churches.

"She seems to be everywhere — everywhere the good stuff is getting done," said Rev. Gilbert, who has served on several GRCC task forces.

Indeed, Sister LeValley has had a hand in founding several area projects over the past decade that help poor people gain a foothold in the economy. It's this kind of energy that led GRCC board members to elect her their president Jan. 12, according to the Rev. Linda K. Dolby, community minister for the United Methodist Church, Rochester District, and GRCC's newly elected secretary.

"I think Sister Beth is exactly the person we need for leadership in GRCC at this time," Rev. Dolby said. "She's a real go-getter, and she works collegially."

GRCC also elected to its leadership team Joseph Kenney, who is justice and peace coordinator for Rochester's Catholic Family Center, as vice president for programs; the Rev. Ron J. Helms, senior pastor for Open Arms Metropolitan Community Church in Rochester, as vice president for organization and development; and Ellen T. De Gregorio, a Rochester certified public accountant who specializes in working for not-for-profit entities, as treasurer. De Gregorio is a parishioner at Church of the Transfiguration in Pittsford.

Sister LeValley is the organization's first female executive as well as the first Catholic to head the group, which claims 95 Christian congregations as members. GRCC is supported by seven mainline denominations — including the Catholic Diocese of Rochester — and 24 religious service organizations as well. Bishop Matthew H. Clark complimented GRCC on their choice of Sister LeValley.

"I think Beth is a very committed, gifted person," he said. "I think she was chosen for her competence and commitment. I'm pleased that she's in that position, and clearly (GRCC board members) are, too."

Sister LeValley, elected to a two-year term by GRCC's 20-member board, and the other new GRCC officers will be installed at the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse in Rochester on Saturday, Feb. 19. The meeting will also serve as an opportunity for GRCC board members to clarify their goals and vision for the future, Sister LeValley said. Those goals include enhancing Christian unity, eliminating



bias and cooperating on projects of mutual concern between Christians and people of other faiths.

Founded in 1991, GRCC has been a prominent voice on such issues as fair housing, racism, economic development and interfaith and ecumenical dialogue. GRCC's next public event is an ecumenical worship service marking the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity at 4 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 23, at St. John the Evangelist Church, 549 Humboldt St., Rochester.

Sister LeValley succeeds the Rev. J. Paul Womack, who co-pastors Covenant United Methodist Church in Rochester.

As Sister LeValley sees it, her new position is a chance to unite people of differing denominations around common goals of social justice and harmony. The Rochester community is filled with socially conscious people who are eager to solve such problems as homelessness, she said.

"I keep thinking that if all this goodness can get together with all the other goodness out there that is faith-based, I think we can turn around a lot of social problems," she said.

Turning around social problems has been Sister LeValley's calling card for years. Over the past decade, she has played a leading role in such economic development projects as Progressive Neighborhood Federal Credit Union, a low-income credit union in inner-city Rochester. Among the union's projects has been helping students at area schools establish savings accounts, and assisting low-income people to buy their own homes.

Sister LeValley is also board secretary for Community Microenterprise Center Inc., in Rochester, which provides technical assistance to entrepreneurs and trains young people in business skills. And, as a founder and current treasurer of Partners Through Food Inc., Sister LeValley worked on a project that attracted a Tops Friendly Markets store to a formerly vacant building in the city's Upper Falls region.

Prior to becoming involved in ecumenical work, Sister LeValley, 58, worked in several capacities for her order, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester, including superior general of the order's leadership council for eight years in the 1980s. She also founded Daystar, an SSJ ministry for at-risk children, and currently works with her order's Justice and Peace Committee.

Sister LeValley became involved in ecumenical work in the late 1980s when she

served on a team overseeing the establishment of GRCC. Its immediate organizational precedent was Genesee Ecumenical Ministries, which existed from 1970 to 1991. GEM itself was rooted in ecumenical organizations working in the Rochester area as far back as 1919.

Working with representatives of other Christian faiths in GRCC is a fulfillment of her religious order's purpose and mission, Sister LeValley said.

"Our charism is unity, bringing together neighbor with neighbor and neighbor with God," she said.

De Gregorio said that it's this kind of optimism that made her excited to work with

Sister LeValley.

"I think the thing I like best about her is that nothing seems impossible to her," De Gregorio said. "It's just another problem to be solved."

Sister LeValley added that she wants to build more connections between area churches and the private sector on various social and economic projects.

She also said that she has no plans to slow down her hectic pace which she credits to "enthusiasm," a word, she noted, whose Greek roots bespeak being possessed by a god or rooted in him.

"If my enthusiasm is rooted in God, I'm never going to die," she said with a smile.



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

First snowfall

Nicholas Chin, 15, throws a snowball at Chris Wilkinson, 15, in front of Bishop Kearney High School, Irondequoit, on Jan. 13. Wilkinson, Chin and six other students were visiting from an all-boys Jesuit school in Australia, and had never seen snow before.

Colgate divinity school names new head

Dr. G. Thomas Halbrooks has been appointed president-elect of Colgate Rochester Divinity School/Crozer Theological Seminary. He will assume his new post July 1, when President James H. Evans Jr. steps down after 10 years.

St. Bernard's Institute shares the divinity school's campus, but has been looking for a new location.

Halbrooks has more than 20 years of administrative experience in higher education. For the past nine years he has served as dean of the faculty and professor of church history at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Richmond, Va., which he helped establish in 1991.

He had served from 1978-91 as professor of church history at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C., where he also was assistant to the dean of faculty and director of the doctor of ministry program. He earned his master of divinity from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and doctorate from Emory University, Atlanta.

Halbrooks stated that his institutional goals include "being a congregationally focused theological institution, making contact with folks in their spiritual longing, and being a school that graduates leaders with a spiritual dimension that combines piety and social justice."

Obituary

Fr. Francis Blighton; spiritual leader, parochial vicar at Greece parish

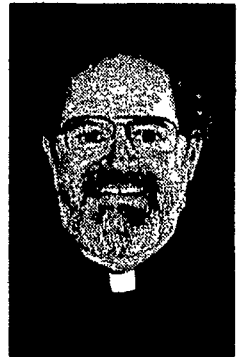
By Mike Latona
Staff Writer

Father Francis Blighton, parochial vicar at Greece's St. Charles Borromeo Church and founder/director of the Borromeo Prayer Center, died Jan. 11, 2000, at Greece's Park Ridge Hospital. Father Blighton, 54, had suffered a massive heart attack three days earlier.

Father Blighton grew up in Rochester's St. Boniface Parish. He was ordained by Bishop Joseph L. Hogan on March 29, 1974, at Rochester's Holy Redeemer Church.

Following ordination, Father Blighton assisted at St. Salome's Parish, Irondequoit (1974-77); St. Stephen's, Geneva (1977-80); St. John the Evangelist, Spencerport (1980-81); and St. Mary Our Mother, Horseheads (1981-85). He was parochial vicar at Blessed Sacrament, Rochester from 1985 to 1990.

In addition, he served as chaplain at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Gene-



va, and as associate team member of the Wellspring Renewal Program in Glens Falls. Father Blighton also helped to establish the diocesan Engaged Encounter program in the mid-1970s. He received certification in spiritual direction from the Center for Religious Development in Cambridge, Mass., in 1984.

He became parochial vicar at St. Charles Borromeo in 1991. One year later he founded the Borromeo Prayer Center, which presents numerous spiritual programs for Catholics and other religious and community organizations.

"I think Francis was one of the most spiritual people I ever knew. He was the best spiritual director in the diocese," said Father James Hewes, a close friend who was

in Father Blighton's 1974 ordination class. Father Hewes, parochial vicar at Roman Catholic Community of Geneva, served as homilist for Father Blighton's funeral Mass.

According to Father Ed Palumbos, pastor at St. Charles Borromeo, Father Blighton had suffered two other heart attacks within the last 10 years.

"He was limited in that he would tire easily," Father Palumbos said. "But the irony of the whole thing is that in the last two years he had been relatively pain-free, and had taken on more and more responsibility in the parish."

Fathers Hewes and Palumbos added that Father Blighton was well capable of becoming a pastor, but said his love for the Borromeo Prayer Center — located on the St. Charles Borromeo campus — took precedence.

"He could have done administration but he believed that his call was to be a spiritual director, first and foremost," Father Palumbos remarked. "I never met a person

quite like him. He was a man of great depth and vision who was able to see things coming around the bend a lot sooner than many of us."

Father Palumbos added that the Borromeo Prayer Center will continue operating under its administrator, Patricia Scouten. He said that only the programs that would have been chiefly administered by Father Blighton will be cancelled.

Father Blighton's funeral Mass was celebrated Jan. 15 at St. Charles Borromeo, with Bishop Matthew H. Clark presiding. Interment was at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery.

Father Blighton is survived by his brother Gerald Blighton; brother and sister-in-law Earl and Betty Blighton; and nieces and nephews.

Donations in Father Blighton's memory may be made to the Borromeo Prayer Center, 3011 Dcwey Ave., Rochester, NY, 14616; or to the Center for Religious Development, 2240 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA, 02140.