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Hispanics

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The anticipated closing of St. Francis of Assisi Church "doesn't reflect well on our future," he said. "Easily in that neighborhood there are over 50 percent baptized (Hispanic) Catholics."

The Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency report cited a 900-percent increase in Rochester's Hispanic population from 1960 to 1990 and an estimated 40-percent increase in Monroe County's Hispanic population from 1990 to 1997, bringing the county's estimated total to 35,000 by 1998. Only about one-fourth of Monroe County's Hispanics live outside the city.

U.S. Census figures show significant Hispanic populations within the diocese not only in Monroe County, but also in Wayne, 2,117; Ontario, 1,680; Livingston, 1,525; and Tompkins, 2,595. While the bishops' Hispanic Affairs Committee estimates that 67-71 percent of Hispanics are Catholic, other demographers use estimates as high as 84 percent.

Evolving ministry

Spanish Masses are celebrated every Sunday in the Rochester Diocese at St. Francis de Sales in Geneva; Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier and St. Michael's, Rochester; St. Francis of Assisi, Rochester, which is expected to close in June; Church of the Nativity, Brockport; and Church of the Epiphany, Sodus. Some parishes sponsor weekday Spanish Masses as well.

Father Jesus Flores, who has been interim director of the Spanish Apostolate for 18 months, is the only Hispanic priest serving in the diocese. Of the diocese's many non-Hispanic priests, 18 can say Mass in Spanish; of those, 11 can celebrate an entire Mass in Spanish, hear confessions and talk with Hispanic people, according to Cannon. Others involved in Hispanic ministry say the figures are lower, and draw a tighter line as to what degree they consider a priest fluent.

One of the diocese's longest-serving ministers to Hispanics is Sister Julia Norton, RSM, who has worked with Hispanics for more than 35 years.

"They're wonderful people to work with, and they are the future of the Catholic Church," said Sister Norton, who is among the ministerial staff at Mt. Carmel Parish. She says services for Hispanics need to be expanded. Although several priests can read and speak some Spanish, she said, that ability "doesn't celebrate a Mass."

"What if a Spanish person got up and read to you in English?" Sister Norton asked rhetorically. "First of all there would be a terrible accent, and there wouldn't be any dialogue."

Parishes need to give their Hispanic parishioners the tools they need, to respect their culture "and let them become leaders," she said.

She noted that Mt. Carmel tried combining its English and Hispanic parish councils, but returned to separate councils "to respect the culture of both groups."

In Geneva, Xochitl Palacios has worked for four years out of St. Francis de Sales Parish as the first Hispanic ministry coordinator for Yates and Ontario counties. She is excited about changes she sees in ministry to both settled and migrant Hispanic Catholics.

The Sunday Spanish Mass at St. Francis, which only a few years ago drew about 14 people, now has 60-90 people participating, she said.

"Now there is more a sense of belonging," she said. "The community is growing and, at the same time, we are reaching out to the people. ...And our migrant community is not even here yet, all of them. This is just winter."

Hispanic leaders recently elected a Round Table to help bring Hispanics of various backgrounds together and work for the benefit of the entire Hispanic community, she said. The Round Table includes



Father Paul English, CSB, gives the homily during the March 24 Commemorative Mass of Oscar Romero at Rochester's Sacred Heart Cathedral.

Mike Mergen/Photo Intern

student Martha Genao of William Smith College and parishioners Ramon Mateo and Magdalena Morales, St. Francis parishioners for 39 and 43 years, respectively.

"Things are happening," Palacios said, noting that Hispanic Catholics are assuming more leadership in ministry. In addition, she plans bilingual Masses throughout the year in the several parishes that support the ministry, to help bring communities together and promote awareness and interest. Her goals include coordinating more Hispanic events throughout the year, and establishing a continuing youth group and small Christian communities for Hispanic Catholics.

In addition to such growth in Hispanic ministry, Cannon noted that cooperation is increasing among diocesan offices and the Spanish Apostolate. The need for such collaboration was high among challenges outlined by the U.S. bishops' study.

A Mass last month that honored the memory of Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero was an example of increasing cooperation, Cannon said. It was a collaborative initiative by Suzanne Schnittman in the Consistent Life Ethic Office and Lourdes De Chateauvieux, associate director and translator in the Spanish Apostolate.

"They together collaborated, got people Anglo and Hispanic who had common ground to honor this wonderful man, and had a bilingual service," Cannon noted. Father Flores presided, assisted by four priests who have been involved in Hispanic ministry. Basilian Father Paul English provided a bilingual homily.

"I can give you a lot of examples of this evolution," Cannon said, referring to increasing cooperative efforts among departments. She noted that De Chateauvieux translates materials for the Department of Evangelization and Catechesis, for the Tribunal and for Catholic Charities workshops. Several offices also have turned to the Spanish Apostolate for help in understanding cultural dynamics and in designing liturgy that reflects diversity. The Office of Liturgy has cultivated its own relationship with Hispanic musicians and liturgists throughout the diocese, Cannon said.

"It becomes a consciousness that grows and grows," Cannon said, noting that the diocesan Women's Commission is includ-

ing Hispanic resources in its efforts to increase awareness of domestic violence.

Good news, bad news

Despite such headway, Father Tracy commented, "Hispanic ministry is always good news-bad news."

"Churches have provided for them but in second-class ways. It is good that the church provided for them, but it wasn't always equitable. We're not past it yet."

The Spanish Apostolate, begun in 1967, once had a staff of four full-time people, Father Tracy said, but now has only a part-time associate director also serving as part-time translator, a secretary shared with other offices and no permanent director since Brother Luis Ruberte, H.Ch., left two years ago.

The church will lose an important presence when St. Francis of Assisi closes in June, the priest added. And even if Hispanic parishioners are welcomed elsewhere, "There's a big difference between (a parish where) the majority is Spanish parishioners and where they come in as second-class citizens which is a minority. They will go from having a parish to 'You can use our church' kind of things."

Meanwhile proselytism by other religious groups is a concern among Hispanic church leaders, as well as a major concern among U.S. Catholic dioceses, according to the bishops' study. Sister Norton noted that other denominations have been proselytizing among Hispanic Catholics for a couple of decades.

"You can see the effect now," she said.

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