

DIOCESAN NEWS

Organization uses friendship to heal mental illness

By Rob Cullivan
Staff Writer

ROCHESTER — Sometimes helping someone in need is as easy as going to the mall or seeing a movie.

Just ask Lisa Ragucci, a parishioner at St. Anne Church, and a volunteer with Compeer. The not-for-profit organization matches volunteers with children and adults receiving mental health treatment who need supportive friendship.

Ragucci learned about Compeer through a fellow parishioner who was a volunteer, and decided to offer her services to the program. Through it she met Helen, who asked that only her first name be published, referred to Compeer through a therapist who had treated her for depression. Although Helen had friends, she said her therapist thought it would be a good idea for her to have a new companion.

The two women share a love for the movies, shopping, museums and restaurant lunches, Ragucci said. Since November, every two or three weeks, they've been getting together for a couple of hours.

"She's just another friend as far as I'm concerned," Helen said of Ragucci.

Ragucci added that volunteering for

Compeer has enriched her own life.

"What I've gotten out of it is a greater appreciation for what I consider important in life — giving back and being there for your friends."

Compeer currently has a waiting list of more than 300 children and adults who could use a friend, according to Suzanne M. Pearson, the program's special projects/volunteer coordinator. Volunteers receive five hours of free training and are asked to commit to seeing a client for at least one year. Compeer also offers volunteers the opportunity to be a "Friend For A Day," attending a one-time event where clients are present.

Since 1996, she added, Compeer has been promoting "Faith In Action," an outreach to religious congregations. Their members' spiritual belief in service to others make them ideal volunteers, she said. The program began with initial support from Church of the Good Shepherd, Henrietta; Church of the Transfiguration, Pittsford; and St. Mary's Church, downtown, she said, adding that she herself attends St. Charles Borromeo Church, Greece.

So far, parishioners from 16 Catholic churches in the city and its suburbs have served as Compeer volunteers, she said, adding that Compeer has recruited faith-based volunteers through formal presentations, bulletin announcements, coffee hours and word-of-mouth.

In an effort to further publicize its Faith In Action program, on May 10, Compeer hosted its first clergy/faith community leader roundtable discussion at the program's offices in the Monroe Square building on Monroe Avenue. Presenters included Dr. Cedric Alexander, a Rochester psychologist who facilitates support groups at Zion Hill Missionary Baptist Church in the city.

Alexander stressed that clergy can do a great service for those who suffer mental illness and emotional problems and their families by simply addressing the issue

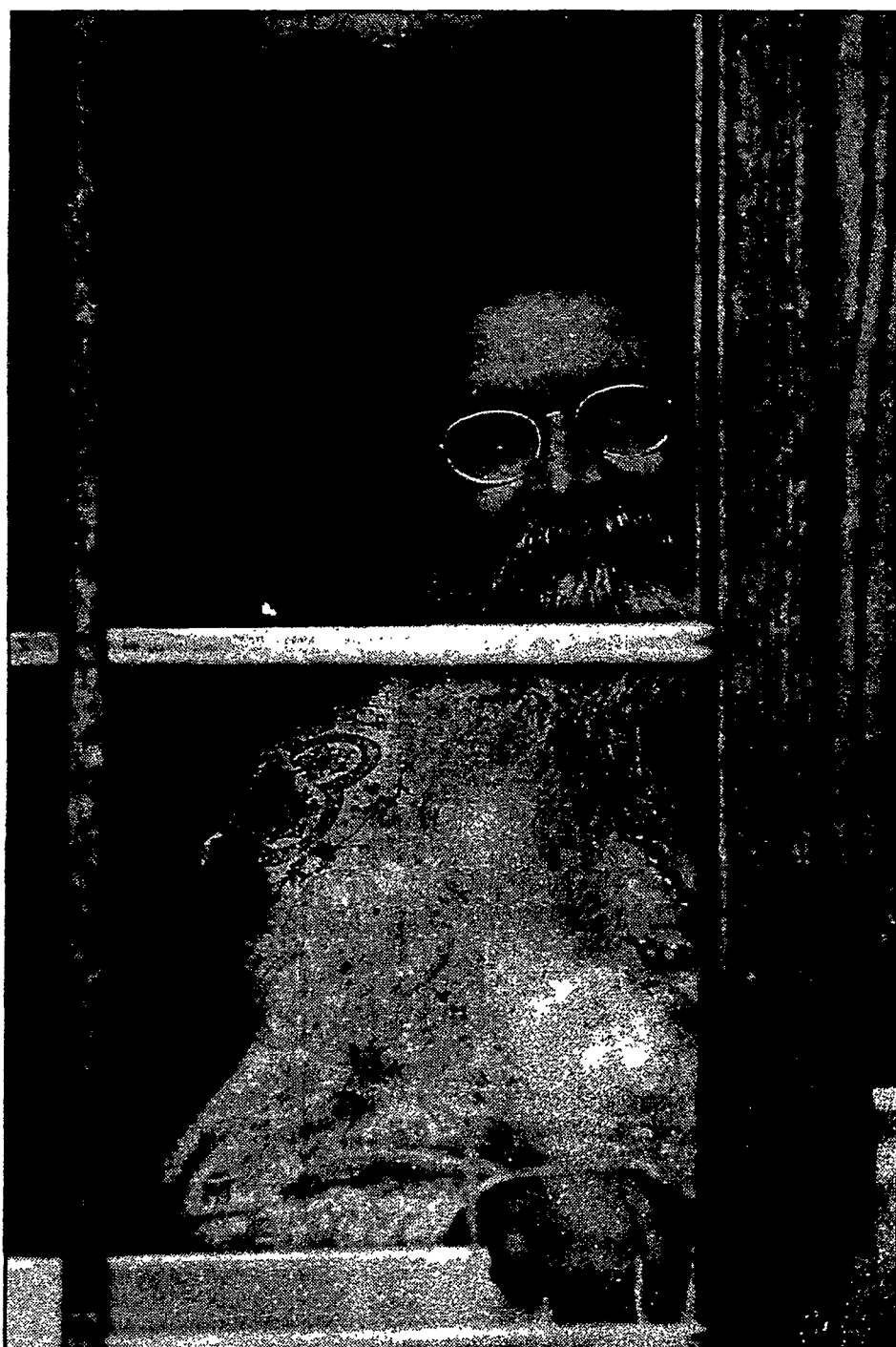
from the pulpit. There's still a stigma attached to mental illness, he said, and many people are unaware that their problems could be alleviated through therapy and/or drug treatment.

"We all experience some pathology whether it's short-term or long-term over the course of our lives...," he said. "(But) if spiritual leaders aren't comfortable to talk about it, then congregations aren't comfortable enough to talk about it."

For information on Compeer's Faith In Action program, contact Suzanne M. Pearson at 716/546-8280, or TTY 546-7959.



Gate to Paradise



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Father Mark Melone, former pastor of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker Greek Melkite Catholic Church, waits to welcome Bishop John Elya and the congregation into the new St. Nicholas Church, on Spencerport Road in Gates, for its dedication May 21. During the ceremony, the church symbolized Paradise, and Father Melone, the angel who guards the gates of Paradise. The bishop came into the church carrying relics of martyrs to be placed on the altar. The parish had been holding liturgies at the former St. Jude's Church until the new structure was completed.

City church to serve as set for film

ROCHESTER — Pop star John Mellencamp plans to go to confession in St. Michael's Church the first week of June. The scandal, however, is that a phony priest will be hearing it.

Mellencamp will be filming scenes in the church for a movie tentatively titled "After Image," and the priest hearing his confession will be an actor.

The ornate church will be the site of filming June 1, 2, 3, 6 and 7, according to Angelo Mancuso, the movie's publicist. The movie's filming here has been well-publicized because it features Mellencamp, author of such Top 40 hits as "Jack and Diane" and "Pink Houses," and Louise Fletcher, who played Nurse Ratchett in "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest."

Mellencamp plays a crime scene photographer weary of the violent world he records, so he takes a leave of absence to live with his aunt (Fletcher) in Rochester. He also falls in love with a woman, played by actress Terrylene, and the pair experience psychic visions of a serial killer played by Michael Zelniker. The film is directed by its

writer, Robert Manganelli, a 1983 graduate of the Rochester Institute of Technology.

Two St. Michael's parishioners, Frank Beretta and Joe Morganti, have also landed parts as police detectives in the film.

The film is slated to be released at the Sundance Film Festival in Colorado in January 2001, Mancuso said.

St. Michael's got into the picture, so to speak, through the efforts of Robert L. Manieri, a parishioner who helps organize the parish's Sunday 7 p.m. Masses. Manieri met Mary Therese Friel, who was Miss USA 1979, and her husband, Kent, at one of the Masses, and the three began discussing ways to promote St. Michael's. Friel suggested St. Michael's join the Monroe County-funded Rochester/Finger Lakes Film & Video Office, which promotes moviemaking in the area. Manieri used the office's resources to contact "After Image" producers, who visited and "fell in love" with St. Michael's.

"It's like a mini-St. Patrick's Cathedral of New York here in Rochester," Friel said.

—Rob Cullivan

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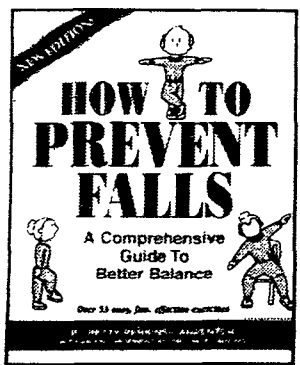
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