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Young men watch couples dancing at the Mexican Fiesta in Sodus.

camps and talking with church officials about issues affecting migrants. He serves as episcopal liaison for the migrant and farm workers' apostolate at the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees.

The bishop, who makes one such pastoral visit each year, followed the Sept. 16 Mass in Brockport with another liturgy at Church of the Epiphany in Sodus Sept. 17. He also attended a Mexican fiesta for the migrant community in Sodus, and visited camps in the Buffalo Diocese. He met separately with both Bishop Matthew H. Clark and Buffalo Bishop Henry Mansell, and concluded his stay Sept. 18 at the Pastoral Center by leading a convocation of nearly 20 Catholic leaders who minister to migrants in both dioceses.

During that meeting, Bishop Yanta focused on pastoral care for migrants, as well as justice issues for families in such areas as food; clothing; housing; health care; child care; transportation; education programs; legal services; programs for domestic violence and drug/alcohol abuse; translation services; and social outlets.

Bishop Yanta said that issues affecting migrants seem more intense in this part of the country than other places he's visited as a bishops' liaison. He has also made pastoral trips to Minnesota, Ohio, Kentucky and Washington state.

"The leadership of western New York and the rest of the state, both ecclesiastical and political, had better get together and solve these problems," Bishop Yanta stated, adding that migrant workers have a significant effect on the local economy.

Many justice issues

In recent years, the diocesan Public Policy Committee has lobbied for migrant-aid legislation in the state legislature, particularly a bill known as the Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act (A9297). Also known as the "Omnibus Bill," this legislation would encompass the goals of several bills working to ensure that farmworkers would be protected against retaliation while organizing for collective bargaining; receive overtime pay when working more than 40 hours per week; obtain disability insurance; and have the right to take a day off per week without fear of getting fired. It also would expand the state sanitary code in regard to seasonal housing.

Yet Everett Hobart, a member of the diocesan Public Policy Committee, said none of these bills were passed in the 1999-2000 legislative session. He cited powerful opposition, particularly by the New York State Farm Bureau.

Despite such resistance, "I can tell you

that the effort will continue, because we just have to remove those exclusions in laws that benefit other workers (but don't apply to migrant workers)," said Scarlett Emerson, parish and community development coordinator at Catholic Charities of the Finger Lakes who also sits on the diocesan Public Policy Committee.

Meanwhile, laborers like 30-year-old Angel Santiago are making the best of their situations. Santiago lives at Martin Farms near Brockport with nine other people in an old dwelling that resembles a small Army barracks. He, his wife and two children sleep together in one big bed.

"If we had to be here the whole year, we wouldn't stay," Santiago said through an interpreter. He and his family came north from Oaxaca, Mexico, and will be moving on in a few weeks so he can get work in the orange groves of south Florida.

Actually, Santiago said he moved to Martin Farms in August because the living con-

ditions there are superior to the farm at which he had been working since April.

At the previous farm, he said, workers slept on floors and had to provide their own blankets. Though a sign warned workers not to drink the water, people did because they had no choice, he said. And the toilets were in such bad shape that people relieved themselves in the fields instead.

In addition to the barracks-like houses, Martin Farms also has trailers for its workers, and many of them are more up-to-date and comfortable. Residents of one trailer said they have worked at Martin Farms for 10 years, make less than a couple of dollars above minimum wage and receive no overtime pay.

Back at Sodom Farms, Juan Mendez and his wife, Maria, live in a trailer with their children Gabriela, 3, and Juan Manuel, 2 months. Mendez, 31, works 50 hours per week but said, through an interpreter, that

he "doesn't find it so hard." He makes \$54 for a nine-hour work day picking apples.

Compared to wages in their native land, such earnings may seem like a windfall. Diocesan officials said that migrant workers can make up to 10 times as much working here as in poor parts of Mexico.

Migrant workers can pay dearly for this opportunity, however.

Bishop Yanta said he was struck not only by the low wages paid in this diocese, but also the amount taken by "coyotes."

"The workers must pay intermediaries to get here, and have work, and get money back to their families. By the time everybody gets their piece, there's not much left," Bishop Yanta said.

Bishop Yanta said that Mexican migrants are "filled with bureaucratic obstacles" in both their homeland and in the United States. They are often smuggled across the border because the Mexican government is hesitant to issue work visas. Once here, they have to stay a step ahead of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service.

De Chateaufvieux acknowledged that most migrant workers in western New York are here illegally.

But it's a point officials are reluctant to talk about because of the dangers of the workers being deported by the INS.

Carvajal said that when he began volunteering with the Interdiocesan Hispanic Migrant Ministry, INS was arresting the workers right in the farm fields. Others said that INS officials often stake out such public places as markets and churches frequented by migrants.

During their Sept. 18 meeting with Bishop Yanta, Catholic leaders expressed frustration about the process by which migrant workers can obtain necessary documents to stay in this country.

They explained that it is too costly for the workers; that workers are too illiterate to complete the necessary paperwork; and that the Mexican and U.S. governments both create too much red tape.

Therefore, they said, migrant workers are a hidden community that tends to move from camp to camp, and stay as isolated as possible.

Dardess, for one, said he finds it hypocritical that the U.S. benefits economically from migrant workers, but also doesn't strive to protect their rights.

"There is a double standard in that," he remarked.

Bishop, officials ponder 'very different ministry'

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

Ministry to migrant workers and their families "is a very different ministry that requires a lot of love, understanding and good spirituality," Bishop John W. Yanta commented.

The bishop of Amarillo, Texas, made this remark following a Sept. 18 meeting with women and men who minister to migrants in the Rochester and Buffalo dioceses. Many who attended the meeting, conducted in Spanish and interpreted for the *Catholic Courier*, said they hope to see an increase in funding, staffing and volunteer support.

Father Jesus Flores, a native Mexican who works mostly with Wayne County migrant laborers, is the only Hispanic priest currently working in the Rochester Diocese. But Father Flores pointed out that Mexico needs priests, also, and shouldn't be counted on for exporting clergy.

Another priest who ministers to migrant workers, Father Peter Deckman, parochial vicar at Our Lady of the Lakes Catholic Community, said that his contact with migrant workers is sparse, however, because he is already responsible for six churches and a college.

Many at the meeting said they hope

for an increase of Hispanic deacons, as well as other bilingual volunteers, in migrant ministry. These people must also be willing to travel to camps, Father Robert Kreckel noted. He explained that the language barrier prevents migrants from becoming part of the local community.

"I don't know how it's possible to integrate them," said Father Kreckel, pastor at St. Mary of the Lake Parish in Ontario and a longtime supporter of migrant ministry.

Meeting participants discussed methods of helping migrant workers and their families get religious education and sacramental preparation, as well as access to Mass. Macrina Cardenas de Alarcon, director of the Interdiocesan Hispanic Migrant Ministry office in Brockport, said that migrant families place a high value on the sacraments.

"They want to receive them," she said. But Luci Romero, coordinator of migrant ministries in Wayne County, said that catechesis frequently, though unintentionally, takes a back seat in her line of work.

"Our pastoral ministry is one of immediacy. We can't program anything because we're dealing with so many necessities, dealing with basic life needs. We don't have time," Romero said.

Father Laurence Tracy, parochial vicar at Rochester's Community of Hope cluster, remarked that the Rochester Diocese doesn't have a firmly developed pastoral plan for the migrant community. However, at least one smaller-scale effort has been successful.

Everett Hobart, a volunteer with the Interdiocesan Hispanic Migrant Ministry, said after the Sept. 18 meeting that the ministry has gained significant volunteer and financial support from northwest Monroe County parishes in the last three years. Hobart credited this development to his region's pastoral plan, which calls for greater backing of the migrant ministry. Hobart said the ministry gains \$20,000 a year in donations from the area parishes, and that the Knights of Columbus at St. Mark's in Greece, in particular, have supported several initiatives for the migrants.

Bishop Yanta concluded the Sept. 18 meeting by telling participants they should maintain hope among their many challenges. Though their task may seem impossible at times, he noted that the same was once said about eliminating communism in eastern Europe.

"We all get depressed; I do too sometimes," Bishop Yanta said. "You might not be at the top of the mountain yet, but you're closer."