

DIOCESAN NEWS

Visa denials crush youths' plans for summer

By Kathleen Schwar
Assistant editor

The youth group at St. Catherine of Siena Church planned to bring 19 teens from the Dominican Republic to Ithaca this summer. They would attend English classes, go ice skating, picnic in state parks, hike and spend a day at Niagara Falls. Then they'd attend the Diocesan Youth Convention Aug. 3-5 before flying home.

They never came. The youths were too poor and couldn't prove that they would return to their own country, which lies between Haiti and Puerto Rico.

"It's one of those things," said Janice Regan, youth ministry coordinator. "You get your hopes up. We had been planning for them to come for a year. We had planned day-to-day activities. It went out the window quickly."

It was a learning process for everybody, according to Regan and Gabriela Jaramillo, diocesan Hispanic ministry director. Jaramillo simultaneously was attempting to arrange for Father Rogelio Cruz, his interpreter and four youths from his Cristo Rey ministries near the capital of Santo Domingo to visit Rochester. Father Cruz, who led the Aug. 6-10 Santa Mision, and his interpreter were allowed to come. But again, the youths were too poor to prove they had something to return to, she said. "It's sort of the way the world works, versus the way the body of Christ works," Jaramillo said.

St. Catherine of Siena has a sister parish relationship with San Antonio De Padua in Monte Plata in the Dominican Republic, and sends the parish \$1,000 a month to help feed children in day care. A year ago in February, St. Catherine's had sent 11 youths and two adults to the Dominican Republic, where they made friends and set up a computer lab. Last fall, Father Loren-



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer
Father Rogelio Cruz of the Dominican Republic speaks outside Corpus Christi Church, Rochester, Aug. 9 during the annual Spanish Mission.

zo Vargas of Monte Plato visited the Ithaca parish, and helped arrange for the 19 teens — selected by lottery from the 150 youths in the parish — to visit this summer. Everything was going according to plan.

Regan said the organizers in New York were caught off guard when the tourist visas were denied, and took quite a while to comprehend why.

"That was kind of an eye opener," she said. "I don't think people even to this point get it. It's the United States government saying they can't come."

Regan said the Dominican youths had taken a bus to the U.S. consulate in Santo Domingo on June 27, each with \$75 for a visa application. They were denied visas and told to return with their parents for more information on their assets.

St. Catherine's pastor, Father Ron Gaesser, and Father Vargas had gone along, and had attempted a group interview with em-

bassy officials, which wasn't allowed.

The Ithaca parish was "still in a positive mood," Regan said. She and others gathered information on the diocesan convention; letters from Michael Theisen, diocesan youth ministry coordinator and a lawyer Regan contacted; parish bulletins and newsletters; and a *Catholic Courier* article about the youth group. Father Gaesser took the papers to the Dominican Republic. N.Y. Rep. Maurice Hinchey also wrote to the consulate.

But eventually, Regan said, it became clear the youth would not have what the consulate wanted — property deeds, bank statements, or proof that they were attending college — assets that would compel them to return to their homeland.

The rejection of visas, Regan said, is directly related to the large numbers of Dominicans who stay in the United States illegally.

"The stuff we (United States) were asking for makes sense in the United States, but not down there," Regan said. Neither could many produce letters even from their parents, she explained.

"Probably 70 to 80 percent live with an aunt or grandmother, not with parents," she said, explaining that the parents may have abandoned the children or had to move to another town to earn a living.

"They are very poor," she said. "But spiritually they are much richer than we are."

Father Rogelio Cruz was invited to Rochester because of his success in serving such youths through his Cristo Rey ministries, according to Jaramillo. A whole urban downtown is his mission field, she said, and he has 5,000 kids in a summer program and more than 300 volunteers. Numerous projects help keep the children off the streets and develop leadership formation, she said.

"So he's an example of how to do min-

istry in an urban setting with few resources," Jaramillo said. "With what we are facing right now, with all the crime, the poverty, drugs and high rates of pregnancy, we thought he would be good in helping not only the pastoral leaders but also the lay people, those people who are active and not active in the church."

The teens were going to take part in a retreat, teach other kids to dance and learn about each other's cultures.

"It's a real shame," said Mercy Sister Janet Korn, also involved in the attempts to clear the visas. "It is difficult to build mutual relationships that way ... And as Christians, we are about building relationships."

The diocesan advocates haven't given up, however. They learned that a "J" visa, one of numerous visas, may be attainable for the youths. The church must set up a program and have it approved, which can take nine months, and then can bring in Dominicans for that program.

Appointments

Bishop Matthew H. Clark has announced the following appointments, effective Sept. 11.

Father Robert Ring, to pastor of Our Lady of the Lakes Catholic Community (St. Andrew, Dundee; St. Januarius, Our Lady of the Grapes Shrine, Naples, St. Mary, Rushville, St. Michael, Penn Yan, St. Patrick, Prattburg, and St. Theresa, Stanley), from pastor of St. Margaret Mary Parish, Apalachin.

Father William Darling, to pastor of St. Christopher's Parish, North Chili, from pastor of St. Salome's Parish, Irondequoit.

Hispanic official urges sharing of stories, faith traditions

By Kathleen Schwar
Assistant editor

ROCHESTER — The night before speaking at diocesan Leadership Days, Ron Cruz' introduction to Rochester was the annual Santa Mision hispanic retreat, held at Corpus Christi Church this year.

Only a few hours after stepping off a plane into the sultry 92 degrees of a lingering heat wave, he stood on the church's hot parking lot to conduct the mission.

But attending Santa Mision was important, said Cruz, executive director of the Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington, D.C. By speaking at the event, he was able to share a broader perspective of church.

Such missions are themselves important because they provide "education, formation, affirmation and support for who we are" to Hispanic Catholics, who often have low educational levels, he said.

His message to nearly 200 Hispanic lay people and ministry leaders was largely the same as his message Aug. 8 to more than 300 church leaders and parishioners at Leadership Days, held at the Rochester Institute of Technology. The larger gathering's theme was "Valuing Diversity: The Inclusive Church."

His message was one similar to what he

heard Tina Turner, one of his favorite entertainers, tell an interviewer on the program "Biography" on the Arts & Entertainment cable network: Appreciate who you are, and where you came from, the old ways. That's what Turner said they do in Europe, where she is living, whereas in the United States everything has to be new.

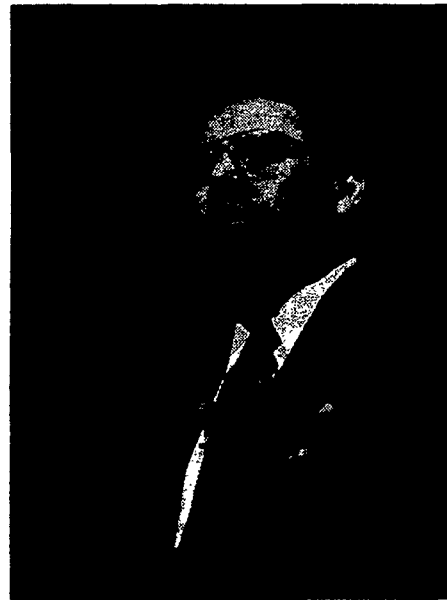
"And that's sad," Cruz remarked.

"We have a historical memory," he said, made up of personal and familial elements, but also community experience. For U.S. Hispanics, it can come from any of 22 different nations, each with its own history, political process, faith tradition and Marian devotion.

By knowing your historical memory and stories, he said, "That's how you oftentimes understand God and how God is revealed to you. ... Therefore it's important to share that historical memory, so that we will know who we are, where we are coming from. This is true for all peoples."

The Irish and Jewish peoples, for instance, know their stories, he said. Today Latino and other foreign cultural groups often act as a catalyst for people to think about their own roots.

While new arrivals to this country continue to prompt a sharing of stories, there is no comparison of their parishes and how they helped integrate immigrants into society here, he noted. National parishes for



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Hispanics aren't practical, he noted.

In general, he said, Catholics in this country have one priest for every 1,200 people, but the 25 million Hispanics have only one for every 10,000.

"Pseudo-national" parishes in which Hispanics worship generally are outside participants' neighborhoods, have priests of another nationality, and services at times that often are inconvenient, Cruz said, adding that these churches are "not necessarily a parish they would call home."

The ideal today would be for any parish community to respond to whoever lives in that community, whether Hispanic, Polish, Asian or other, Cruz said. A parish may not be able to offer Mass in a language other than English, he acknowledged, but "why not create small Christian communities of Hispanic families ... so they can pray, break bread together, read together so that when they go to Mass together, they know what it's about?"

"Is there a picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe somewhere in the parish? In

the church bazaars is there a booth for Hispanics ... selling their foods?"

Meanwhile, U.S. bishops are hoping to bring Hispanic priests here for stays of up to three years, Cruz said. Some U.S. bishops are helping educate priests from poor foreign dioceses, and hope to benefit from their services while they study here.

"We are going to start seeing more of that," he commented.

Another developing model is sending U.S. priests for "immersion" at Guadalupe Seminary in Mexico City, he said.

Cruz was born in Arizona, in a Mexican area, and Spanish is his first language. His family has lived in the Tucson area since the Gadsden Purchase of 1853.

He said Hispanic Catholics share with other Catholics a Christian identity and mission, as well as a desire for a good relationship with family, for recreation and socialization, sound health, appreciation for their work, for schooling and training, and participation in a community of faith.

When people of different backgrounds encounter one another and learn to understand each other, largely through sharing of stories, there is a conversion that leads to communion and solidarity, he said.

"The thing is you cannot have one body of Christ in the diocese if you don't have solidarity with all the people."

Andrew Siesto makes first profession of religious vows

Andrew Siesto, a member of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, celebrated his first religious profession of vows on Aug. 1 in Ss. Peter and Paul Church in Alton, Ill. He had spent a year in the novitiate at Godfrey, Ill.

The son of Gene and Regina Siesto of Irondequoit, he has a brother, Brian. The family belongs to Christ the King Parish, Irondequoit. Siesto is a 1994 graduate of Bishop Kearney High School,

and earned a degree in mathematics from Iona College in New Rochelle.

The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate is a worldwide order founded in France. Siesto will continue his studies in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, at St. Charles Scholasticate. He previously lived in Edmonton for a year in a pre-novitiate program. After three more years of study he will be ordained to the priesthood.

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