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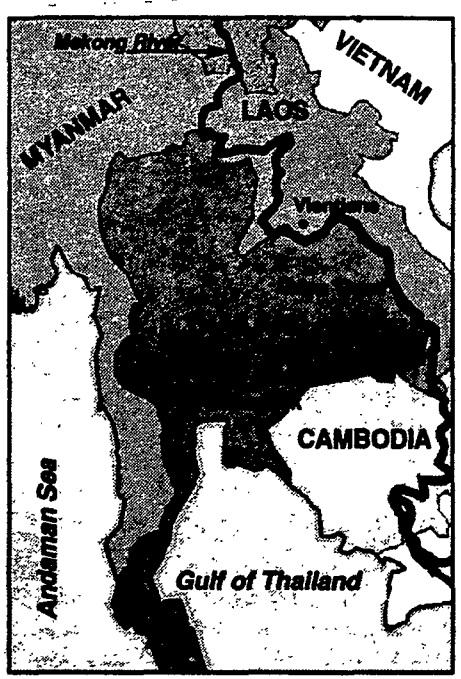
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Thailand seeks relief from floods

UDON THANI, Thailand (CNS) — Church groups have rushed aid to people trapped by flash floods and mud slides that killed some 150 and displaced more than 1,400 people in northern and north-eastern Thailand.

Six days of near-continuous rain and water from the overflowing Mekong River inundated some 30 provinces, halting transport and leaving the region virtually inaccessible, church officials reported Aug. 20 to UCA News, an Asian church news agency based in Thailand.

Bishop George Yod Phimphisan of Udon Thani, whose diocese was badly affected, said that "everything was closed down," and that the first few days, "Udon was practically cut off from the rest of the world" while the airport remained closed and roads were inaccessible.

Several religious congregations have sent money or relief aid for flood victims. The Sacred Heart Sisters sent 10 nuns with 100 packages of dry goods to be delivered, said Bishop Phimphisan, who accompanied them.

During the first few days, parishioners cooked food to distribute to people who had nothing to eat.

"We sent out more than 1,000 food packs a day," the bishop said.

Relief work became more difficult when officials pumped flood water from the city so that Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra could visit, he said.

"The surrounding villages became flooded. The water could not be drained into the Mekong because the river is overflowing," Bishop Phimphisan said, adding that church aid workers took several boat

rides to deliver dry goods to victims.

"The area looked like a big lake. The people had no way to get out of the village except by boat, and most of them never had any boat. This will probably go on for a few more weeks," the bishop said.

He said his diocese was saving some of the dry foodstuff for later when news of the flood disappears from the media.

Chaijal Koin of the Thai bishops' Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees said the situation was very bad and that all of the country's 10 dioceses had set up offices to raise funds and provide relief supplies. International Caritas agencies also have been contacted, she added.


Catholic schools in the Bangkok Archdiocese already have mobilized students to raise funds and gather supplies.




Catholic Courier

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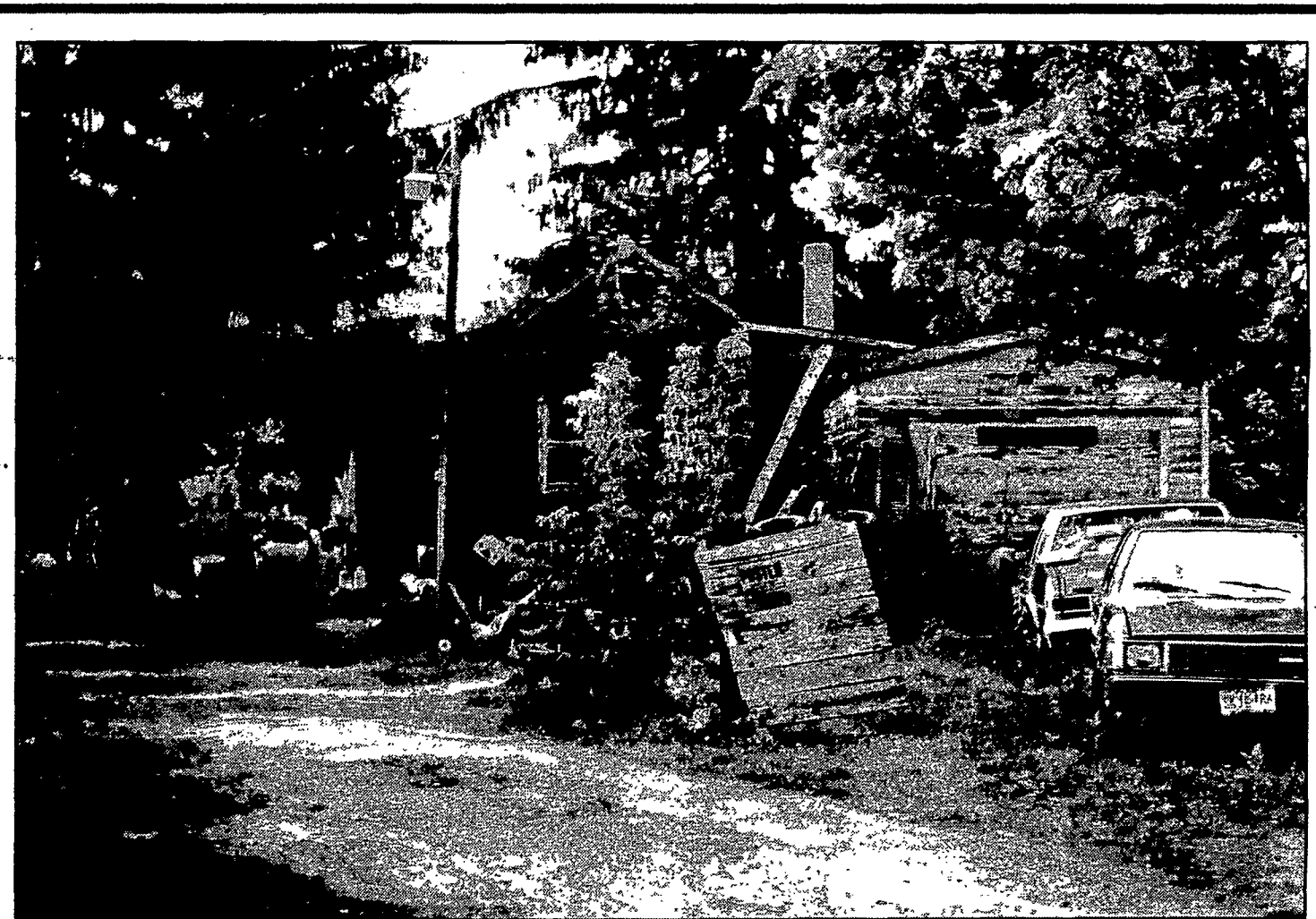


Renovations near a peak in diocese
Parishes expanding for changing times — Page 5



Seminary grad changes course
Joins Catholics after much thought — Page 8

Church, mission team in Cayuga
Two churches enjoy benefits of both — Page 10



This home in Alpine off State Route 224 is typical of many in Schuyler County.

Rural poor: A hidden community

The southern part of Seneca Lake, flanked by numerous wineries and handsome cottages, is a popular area for tourists. Yet many who travel Routes 14 and 414 may be completely unaware of the extreme poverty that lurks close by.

Just a couple of miles off the main highways, roads are unpaved and deserted. Aging homes, some with considerable junk in their yards, are not uncommon. Many are small mobile homes on open acres of land.

Its reputation for tourism notwithstanding, Schuyler County is one of the most impoverished counties in New York. Sarah Conley, director of Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier — Schuyler County, said the county is among the least densely populated in the state and has a per capi-

ta income 43 percent below the upstate New York level.

One of Schuyler's rural poor is Karen Husner, 43. She lives in a well-kept mobile home, in a heavily wooded area a few miles northeast of Watkins Glen. Husner works at a chicken farm near Ithaca for less than \$7 per hour, and her husband, Richard, works for a construction company. Their combined annual salary is \$22,000 and they owe a considerable back sum on their electric bill.

Husner grew up with her grandfather in a one-bedroom mobile home near Elmira, and got married at age 16. She and her husband have three children, ages 21 to 26, who are also in various stages of poverty. Their fourth grandchild is due to be born soon.

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